



Selecting & Working With The Right Career Coach

Neil Love

What a Career Coach Can Do

Working with a career coach is a smart idea. Whether you want help with a job search, career change or moving into a new role, a good career coach can help you reach your goals faster and more successfully than by going it alone.

You can get a lot of advice from friends and colleagues but few of them are really experienced and skilled at all the elements of career transitions. Without a coach you can end up spending a lot of your time thrashing about and fatiguing due to lack of progress.

The best time to begin using a career coach is before you need one. Laying out a career strategy and path is the proactive way to move forward deliberately.

Even before upgrading your resume you need to get focused on what you are going after and how to “outcompete”. A career coach can do that. Most resume writers cannot or do not do that.

Most career issues brew for a long time before boiling over. So it’s best not to wait until you are in full crisis mode before seeking help.

HOW TO SELECT THE RIGHT CAREER COACH

Here are three key things to look for:

- They know your world
- They have a clear coaching process
- You sense they will be supportive and direct

Below are many other things to consider to be sure you choose the right coach for you.

Define the problem you want to solve. The first thing you need to do is ask yourself: “Why do I need a coach?” If you’re not clear, take out a piece of paper and write down every question that comes to mind about your career situation. And write down anything that is slowing you down or causing a problem. Once you fully understand your situation and needs, you can identify the best type of coach for the job situation.

Check for role experience. A coach should have experience in the role they are coaching. Or at least coached several people in your role or a similar role. They will know the environment you are working in, the players in your work and the challenges in your role. Since they know your world, they are more efficient to communicate with. And they can more quickly draw out of you your unique strengths and experience.

Look for situation expertise. If you're interested in changing careers, you'll want to work with a coach who's experienced in career reinvention. If you have gaps or diversions in your career history, you need a coach that can help you overcome these challenges and move forward to get interviews. If you plan to stay in your field but need assistance navigating the job search, you'll want to find someone skilled at resume writing, finding work through social media and other job-hunting techniques. If you are unhappy with your current job situation, you want a coach who can help you move up or sideways in your current company or find new opportunities in other companies. If you have little time for job hunting, you will want a coach that can provide "hands on" help in finding job leads and applying effectively.

Check out the coach's website. This should give you some insights into the coach's areas of expertise. Skim any articles or blog posts he or she has written. Look for testimonials of past clients. Does the website look professional? Is it well laid out and well written?

Explore the past career path of a potential coach. Many so-called career coaches are more life coaches, who focus on esoteric life choices and generic communication skills. They lack practical real world work experience working in companies and at your level. Find out as much as you can about their career path, both in the coaching field and in the regular work world. It's even better if they have been through career transitions themselves and know firsthand what you are going through.

Interview a few manager coaches to find one you'll hire. This is a big decision so talk to several coaches and make notes about what you liked about their style and process and what you did not like.

Get a demo. Some coaches offer a free introductory call. I offer a complementary 20 minute call to discuss your goals, what is getting in the way and how I could help you knock down barriers and accelerate progress.

Ask the right questions. Don't be bashful about questioning potential coaches on their level of expertise for your particular needs.

These are some good questions to ask:

- What benefits and value add do you provide?
- How would you describe your coaching style?
- What is your coaching process?
- What should I expect from our work together?

- How are you different than other coaches?
- What is your fee structure?
- Have you worked with people like me?
- Can you share some of your successes?

Find out about fees and deliverables. Coaches charge in a variety of ways: by the hour, by the task or by the package. I like to charge by the deliverable, what you get that is tangible and concrete. Ask a lot of questions and be sure the coach is clear about what you'll get for your money and how and when you pay. Cheap is not what you want. Don't buy on price. Buy on value received. How will the coach's services and tools accelerate your progress, enable more efficient use of your time, avoid costly missteps on your part, speed up your learning and give you access to best practices?

Get a written partnering agreement. If your coaching support involves more than one session, get clear on what is provided. This is a business relationship, so treat it like one with a formal agreement that defines the duties and accountability of each party. You need to understand your responsibilities and those of the coach. Verbal agreements may raise expectations to high and leave both the client and the coach susceptible to misunderstandings later.

GETTING THE MOST OUT OF YOUR COACHING INVESTMENT

Keep these things in mind when working with the coach you carefully selected.

Prepare for every session. Coaching sessions typically last about 45 - 60 minutes, so do what you can to maximize every minute. Before each meeting, organize your thoughts and write down key questions or topics you want covered at the meeting.

It's helpful to send your coach a brief pre-meeting status update that details your progress since the last session, along with a list of questions or issues you want to discuss at the upcoming meeting. This will help your coach focus on high priority issues and give him or her a chance to prepare to be more productive for you.

Speak up. Like any partnership, it's important to maintain an honest and open line of communication with your career coach. If you're not totally satisfied with something the coach has said or done (or *not* done), say something. Be honest, but kind, with your feedback and give your coach the opportunity to change. Also let your coach know about any personal challenges that could have a direct impact on your career plans (e.g., an impending divorce or bankruptcy). The sooner you share that information, the easier it will be for you two to craft a realistic action plan.

Understand the limitation of career assessments. A career change involves a process of assessment, reflection, research and testing options — as well as hard work and patience — before you gain real and lasting clarity. As part of the process, many career coaches use one or more assessments, such as personality tests, interest inventories, etc., to help clients identify their strengths, interests, values, passions and best work options. These can be most helpful for people early in their careers. For more senior people I uncover their interests and passions through good dialogue.

Enlist the coach in all your challenges. Just know that you are going to hit plateaus and go into valleys. These will be frustrating. Let your coach aid you in keeping your sights on your vision and appreciate what you have done and accomplished so far.

Be accountable. Finally, understand that while your coach is a key partner in this process, But you must assume responsibility for your own success. The amount of energy and time you invest consistently, will ensure you make better, faster progress. Just like on the football field, your coach is there to offer guidance, strategies, practice drills and accountability. You have to lead yourself.

Best of good fortune to you.

Neil Love
Career Success Coach

Small portions of the content of this article were excerpted from these articles:

“8 Tips For Hiring And Using A Career Coach”

By Nancy Collamer,

A career coach for people moving into retirement and author of

[Second-Act Careers: 50+ Ways to Profit From Your Passions During Semi-Retirement.](#)

Her website is: MyLifestyleCareer.com;

“How To Connect With A Career Coach”

By Kerry Hannon

Author of [Great Jobs for Everyone 50+: Finding Work That Keeps You Happy and Healthy ...](#)

Her website is: www.kerryhannon.com.