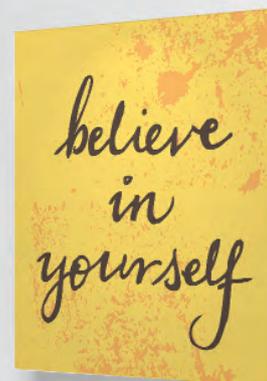


# Coaching Advocacy

*Do you make the grade?*

In recent years, there has been a proliferation of courses and training seminars designed to train people in “life coaching.” Those who think they may benefit from the services of a coach may have wondered: What is life coaching? How does it differ from psychotherapy? And how can I tell if a prospective life coach is competent? For those considering entering the field, the dilemma is: Am I a good candidate for life coaching; would I make an ideal one?

Binah speaks to the professionals and explores the issues.



## Life Coaching Defined

“The basic premise is that coaching is a way of helping people become most effective, reach their goals, and achieve maximum success,” explains Professor Joshua Ritchie, MD, founder and dean of the Refuah Institute, which provides Torah-based coach training on campus or via distance learning.

“A coach is trained *not* to give advice or tell the client what to do. Rather, a coach helps the clients find *within themselves* the resources, strength, and tools they need to achieve their goals and find fulfillment.”

Says Professor Ritchie, “My models for coaching are my *rebbeim*. They were ‘coaches’ par excellence. They didn’t rush to find solutions for those who sought their counsel; they let the person work it through. I personally had ‘*shimush*’ (hands-on training) in coaching through having the unique privilege of sitting in on thousands of hours of private

consultations with the previous Amshinover Rebbe, Harav Yerachmiel Yehuda Meir, zt”l, the grandfather of the present-day Amshinover Rebbe.

“From 1968, until his *petirah* in 1976, I visited the Rebbe on a daily basis, and I listened and watched as he literally ‘coached’ those coming to him for advice and guidance. I saw and heard him prodding them, pushing them, encouraging them to grow and develop. The field of coaching is really discovering the age-old Torah way.”

## Coaching vs. Psychotherapy

“People need empowerment and guidance, and coaching can provide that in a remarkable way,” says Professor Ritchie. He is careful to emphasize that coaching is designed for those who are emotionally healthy; unlike therapy, it is not designed to heal illness and correct psychological dysfunction. “Coaching is intended to be short, very focused

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*We help draw out their potential to overcome their issues and struggles,”*

and specific goal-oriented. It is not meant to drag on for years, as psychotherapy sometimes does.”

“I chose to go into life coaching because the philosophy of coaching appealed to me. Since coaching is client-based and not as directive as therapy, the focus of our sessions is where the client is up to. We view our clients as resourceful and whole, and help them get in touch with themselves. We help draw out their potential to overcome their issues and struggles,” says Mrs. Chanie Berger, AAPC, CMCC, Certified Life Coach, a Refuah Institute graduate and faculty member.

“The way I see it,” says Mr. Duvie Kessner, director of referrals at Relief Resources, a mental health referral agency for the *frum* community, “the difference between coaching and therapy is basic. People whose lives are generally okay for them, but they wish to be more successful, would seek a coach to help them achieve more. Those going for therapy are going because there are knots, they are stuck on something. They need help untying the knots and redoing the entire fabric.

“In therapy it’s ‘I have a problem. I can’t sleep. I have anger issues. I am depressed. I suffer from anxiety.’ Then it’s ‘How can we identify the source of your problems and how do we work to heal them?’ With coaching, the client is being asked, ‘What are your dreams, your aspirations?’ And then, ‘How can we get there?’”

Dr. David J. Lieberman points out that at times, therapy and coaching can dovetail. An example of this would be a situation where a client is struggling with ADHD. She might

be under the care of a psychiatrist who will be prescribing medication to control the condition, and working with a therapist for CBT (cognitive behavioral therapy). However, the client might be interested in also working with a life coach who can hold her hand on a regular basis for help in managing day-to-day living. “Each professional plays his or her own role in working with the client to maximize his quality of life,” he says.

## *The Coach’s Credentials*

While there are certification agencies, there is no government regulation over life coaching. “Anyone can call himself a life coach, just as anyone can claim to be a ‘financial advisor,’” says Professor Ritchie. “There are ‘coaches’ who are untrained, and even among those who are trained, there is good training and poor training.” Therefore, before choosing a life coach, one must be sure to carefully ascertain the training and supervision history of any particular candidate.

“I’ve been asked if I’ve ever come across a situation where someone was harmed rather than helped by life coaching,” says Dr. Lieberman. “I don’t know about harmed, but certainly lots of people got lousy advice. If you are considering going to a coach, make sure to choose someone you like and trust, someone who is known to be competent and well trained, because you will be allowing this person to guide your life’s choices. That is no small matter.

“I recall a situation from years back. A coach was advising a young man in a difficult home situation and was helpful to some degree, but then the coach’s own stuff got in the way and the outcome was not productive, to say the least. What happened was that the coach got too involved, the client



## *Have I Counseled Well?*

A yeshivah student was graduating eighth grade, and his parents could not decide which high school he should attend. Someone suggested to the father that he discuss the matter with Harav Avraham Pam, zt”l. The man approached Rav Pam one morning in Mesivta Torah Vodaath, and though this was their first encounter, Rav Pam graciously invited the man to come to his home to discuss the matter. At the meeting, the man explained his son’s needs, and after some discussion, Rav Pam said that a particular high school which the man had mentioned was best suited for the boy.

Towards the end of the following school year, the man returned to Torah Vodaath to see Rav Pam. After being reminded of their meeting a year earlier, Rav Pam asked, a bit anxiously, “So was my eitzah good? Was your son matzliach?”

“Yes!” the man replied. “That is exactly why I have come, to thank the Rosh Yeshivah for his wonderful eitzah. My son is doing very well.”

Rav Pam was overjoyed. He said, “On Yom Kippur, we say the viduy many times. When I pound my chest and say ‘Ya’atznu Ra’ (we have given evil counsel), I have in mind the many times that I have counseled people. Who knows if I advised them correctly? So when I meet someone whom I advised and I am told that ya’atzti tov (I gave good counsel), it gives me great pleasure.”

(From “Rav Pam: The Life and Ideals of Rabbi Avraham Yaakov Hakohen Pam,” by Rabbi Shimon Finkelman, Artscroll Publications)

became much too dependent and relinquished all decision-making to the coach. I don’t know how much training the coach got; it is possible that there wasn’t sufficient training and therefore the coach not only allowed but facilitated this unhealthy dependence.

“The fact is that you’re going to a coach. That implies that you ‘need’ something. It is easy then to fall into the trap of relying on the coach and giving over all decision-making. It is important therefore to check carefully

into the training and supervision of the coach to be sure that the coach would know how to work with you so that this doesn’t happen.”

“A real therapist in the real world is ideally supposed to be in ongoing supervision,” cautions Mr. Kessner. “Supervision is essential in making a good therapist, and Relief Resources looks for that, making it part of the prerequisites of someone we will refer to. There are various levels of supervision, including reviewing cases, as well as supervision for the



therapist's own well-being. I would call this the 'therapist's therapy,' and it's crucial. This is because they are dealing with so much 'stuff'; for their own good they need to have someone to bounce things back on.

"Supervision is also needed to make sure they aren't becoming biased by bringing their own experiences into the therapy room. Coaching is not regulated and therefore doesn't carry this level of mandatory supervision. People seeking a coach need to be aware of this and make their choices carefully."

Rabbi Dr. Abraham J. Twerski is wary of just anyone calling himself a coach. "My basic training was three years, and that was just the beginning. Unless it's an area of specific expertise, I'm afraid of people going out and calling themselves coaches without proper training," he says.

But, he concedes, "There is something called intuition, an intuitive therapist, a person who has the gift of great intuition. My father had enormous intuition, and without any training at all, he did great therapy. There are exceptional exceptions."

He continues to caution, "I've seen people harmed by incompetent therapists. In every field there can be bad advice. Even if one goes to a Rav for advice, he should choose a Rav who knows him, and whose qualifications and experience make him the right person to help. One has to be very careful. Counseling and giving advice has to be done very responsibly." In the last few moments of the Steipler Gaon's life, he wept, saying, "I am worried whether I might have given someone incorrect advice."

## A Good Candidate, or Not?

"We carefully screen all applicants — we ask for references and to speak with the applicant's Rav," says Professor Ritchie. "If someone doesn't seem suitable in any way, we do not accept him. The candidate has to be both emotionally intelligent and emotionally stable."

"Usually those that apply are good candidates and if it turns out that someone really isn't, they don't make it through the course; at some point, they drop out. The training is intense and is followed by testing, working under supervision, ongoing consultation and finally, an oral exam with the dean (myself).

"By the time they are trained and certified by us, they have

undergone rigorous training, practice, observation and guidance. In addition, they can avail themselves of ongoing training and peer support from the Institute for as long as they wish. Will everyone be a fabulous coach? No, they're humans. But our students have established stellar names for themselves and are *baruch Hashem* very successful.

"One who is considering entering the field would do well to ask themselves: 'What are my intentions in becoming a coach?' Your answer is a good gauge if you are suited for the role or not. If your intention is to be able to benefit others, to encourage others to grow, to help others become the best they can be, then you know you are on the right track. If it is to just 'make *parnassah*,' then that is a red flag. Yes, coaching is a form of *parnassah*, but the motivation has to be for the right reasons or you won't be able to do it right. In fact, there are some people who go into coaching not for *parnassah* per se at all, but to help them be more effective within their existing positions, such as *chinuch*, *kiruv*, *askanus*, etc."

Dr. Lieberman echoes this. "Don't go into it if you're doing it for the money. You need to have a passion for it, a passion for helping people, for assisting them in reaching their goals and improving their lives. If you go into it just for the money, you will easily burn out," he says.

Furthermore, he adds, "I do not like to paint with a broad brush; this does not refer just to coaches, but to those considering entering the field of psychotherapy as well. If you're trying to work through your own stuff, *don't do it*. If you have your own issues that need addressing, don't go into it. Your own struggles can interfere with your ability to be an effective therapist or coach and can sometimes cause one to do more harm than good.

"Now of course, there is no one who has a perfect life. So obviously things don't have to be absolutely perfect. But someone whose own life has gone vastly astray is not a good candidate for helping others in this way.

"When it comes to seeking professional help, certainly knowledge, schooling and education play an important role," Dr. Lieberman explains. "However, it isn't training alone that will make a good therapist, or coach for that matter. There is much more than that. Empathy, caring, a passion for helping people, excellent listening skills are just some of the necessary tools that a good professional has. These are not things that can be taught, but are innately part of the person." **B**