

Should a Life Coach Have a Life First?

By SPENCER MORGAN *New York Times*
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ON a recent winter evening, Jeannine Yoder, a life coach, was at her Upper West Side apartment, hosting a monthly MasterMind, an industry term for a group session done via conference call. Ms. Yoder began her coaching business, theRSVPrev.com — which is centered on the “life-empowerment” mantra Restore, Simplify, Verify, Power — last year to help finance an acting career, only to find coaching taking center stage. She quickly built a stable of 18 clients (including Amanda Perna, a contestant on “Project Runway”) who each pay her \$125 for the weekly hourlong sessions.

Among the clients that night were a 52-year-old tantric-[yoga](#) instructor and a 41-year-old [vegan](#) nutritionist. Coach Yoder, meanwhile, is 27.

“I feel such a strong energy, fearfulness, anxiousness, frustration,” she said into a headset over the telephone. “I want you all to know that you are all infinitely talented and capable of achieving goals beyond your wildest imagination.”

The practice of life coaching is nothing new. Janet Harvey, 52, the incoming president of the International Coach Federation, one of the largest bodies vying to standardize accreditation, with over 19,000 members, traces it to the Human Potential Movement of the early 1970s and the teachings of Werner Erhard, whose “est Training” self-motivation workshops became wildly popular in the ’70s and early ’80s. But the face of the profession is becoming increasingly fresh, with some clients receiving motivational guidance from coaches young enough to be their children.

Ms. Harvey said that her program had experienced a large increase in young coaches, which she defined as ranging from ages 25 to 35.

At Columbia, Terrence E. Maltbia, the director of the university’s Coaching Certification Program, is reporting a similar trend.

“We’ve seen consistent growth in demand since 2007, across the board, but especially among younger people,” said Dr. Maltbia, who is developing a master’s program in leadership coaching as a joint initiative of the Teachers College’s Center for Educational Outreach and Innovation and the Executive Education unit of the Columbia Business School.

More than 30 American universities have introduced coaching programs, including Harvard, Yale, Duke, New York University, Georgetown, the University of California at Berkeley, Penn State, the University of Texas at Dallas and George Washington.

The vocation is catching on internationally as well. "I just came back from Royal Roads University in Victoria, British Columbia, where I was training a cohort of students who were attending the Graduate Certificate in Executive Coaching Program," said Alison Hendren, 59, an author and life coach who has been teaching for over a decade. "While I was there I was talking with one of my colleagues, and she said to me, 'Gosh, they just get younger every day, don't they?'"

The universities are playing catch-up to scores of online training and accreditation programs that have flourished over the last five years, and increasingly advocate coaching over the phone or the Web, which perhaps blurs any skepticism of a younger person that might occur during a flesh-and-blood meeting.

Last February, Chanie Messinger, 20, a psychology major at Brooklyn College, decided to augment her workload by enrolling in an online Torah-based professional life coach degree program she discovered while flipping through The Jewish Press on the bus ride home to Borough Park, where she lives with her mother. She has since built a base of 10 clients, including a 48-year-old woman who, until recently, was living in denial of the fact that she has diabetes.

"It was a very difficult breakthrough for her, she was crying," Ms. Messinger, who charges from \$25 to \$75 an hour, recalled of a recent session with the client. "I just made her aware of more options, like maybe you can try Splenda."

Ms. Messinger said she had recently completed the 80 hours of live coaching required by the Refuah Institute, which is based in Israel, with an office in Brooklyn. She has also invested in a profile on Noomii.com (meant to conjure "new me"), a centralized online coach directory where coaches pay as little as \$19 to advertise their services, in the hope that potential clients find their bios, fees and picture most suitable to their own needs.

Other recent profiles include Anamaria Nino-Murcia, 30, who lives in the Bay Area and trained at Stanford; and Mindy Amita Aisling, 32, of Port Angeles, Wash., who has a certificate from the Institute for Professional Excellence in Coaching (iPEC) in Seattle. “The majority of people in my class were my age or younger,” Ms. Aisling said.

Since Noomii.com went online two years ago, the company, based in Vancouver, has seen a 10 percent increase in both client leads and new coaches accessing their services every month, according to a founder, Kurt Shuster. Mr. Shuster, 37, said that though coaches under 35 still represent a small fraction, he has observed that their number is growing. “The younger generation is qualitatively different,” he added, “using Skype and software products to help them coach.”

Indeed, coaching other coaches on how to use social media is a developing “alcove within a niche” (another industry phrase). Avian Morales, 22, a crisis intervention officer at the University of Hartford, put his coaching site, resolutionrevolution.org, online a week before New Year’s with the help of Marcelle Allen, 29, proprietor of yoursocialmediaconciierge.com and a coach.

Hugo Cory, 44, an established coach who charges \$400 an hour and has offices on Park Avenue in Manhattan, said the generation born in the 1970s and later was raised to have more emotional sensitivity than its forebears. “I see only positive in these younger coaches,” Mr. Cory said. “If they are not meant to be a coach then they will not have many clients.”

And Ms. Harvey of ICF said there is nothing wrong with having a young life coach; they are only charged with helping clients to hear themselves and to hold themselves accountable to articulated goals, she said.

“The cornerstone principle of coaching is you and I are already whole, resourceful, capable and creative,” said Ms. Harvey, who runs Invite Change, a Seattle-based coach training firm. “Coaching is strictly peer to peer, expert to expert.” And it is “distinct from other disciplines such as consulting, mentoring or counseling.”

Still, Ms. Harvey voiced some concern about the opportunities for easy accreditation online. “Buyer beware,” she said.

In the new generation of fast-tracked life coaches, Sean Stewart, 35, is practically geriatric. After arriving at what Tony Robbins would call one of life’s crossroads, Mr.

Stewart, a struggling screenwriter, decided to try the Master Coach University's Quickstart, a six-month life coach training program that costs \$449 and is conducted entirely online, over the phone and on Skype.

Mr. Stewart selected Quickstart because it advocates coaching after just 30 days of training. After completing the course, he made cold calls to acquaintances, looking for clients, though they have thus far been skeptical (one called him "a fraud"). But Mr. Stewart is undaunted.

"The fact is, most people don't want a coach," he theorized of his lack of success, following with a classic Robbinsian "re-frame": "What people do want, however, is a solution to their pressing problems."

Perhaps the best hope for Mr. Stewart is to continue to "niche-down," an industry phrase for specializing within genres like weight loss, until he finds his place as Fred Melchior has. A coach based in Newark, Del., Mr. Melchior said he has a full roster of 20 clients — and a growing list of people in line to fill any future vacancies — who pay up to \$160 for his pep talks on sexual performance.

Now in his second year in the profession, a typical day for Coach Fred, as he is known, includes four or five client sessions and ends with a MasterMind. He is 25.

This article has been revised to reflect the following correction:

Correction: January 28, 2012

An earlier version of this article misspelled the surname of Fred Melchior as Melchior.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/01/29/fashion/should-a-life-coach-have-a-life-first.html?hpw>