

Coaching When You Need It the Most

By Ed Evarts, Practice Leader, Evarts Coaching

Susan Smith* was recently promoted to Senior Director, Clinical Operations, at a global pharmaceutical company. Like so many of her colleagues, Susan's workdays are fast-paced and chock-full of meetings, project work, conference calls, hallway conversations, emails, and phone messages. Deadlines that seem months away are suddenly upon her as she struggles to stay on top of her workload. She worries about not meeting her own expectations as well as not meeting the expectations of her boss.

I began working with Susan to help her build her leadership skills and increase her influence and impact in her organization. Our engagement included classic coaching activities such as 1:1 meetings; a 360 feedback process where data was collected from a number of her bosses, peers, and colleagues; and a selection of articles that we debriefed as our engagement unfolded. As time passed, Susan made progress on her goals. However, a few months into our relationship it became clear that something was missing. What we created to fill "what was missing" would change the very nature of our coaching relationship and help Susan in ways that neither Susan nor I could imagine.

Many of you work with a professional coach. Perhaps you are a small business owner seeking ways to expand your market and you are working with a business coach. Maybe you are looking to become more physically fit and you are working with a health coach. You might be in the midst of a career transition and you are working with a career coach.

In fact, more of your friends and colleagues are either working with a coach or have worked with a coach than you realize. According to the 2013 International Coach Federation (ICF) Annual Report, coaching is a \$2 billion industry with over 20,000 member coaches globally. Coaches represent all walks of life and provide an endless array of services. Some services are broad such as life coaching, leadership coaching, and career coaching. Some services are nuanced such as ADHD coaching, grief coaching, and weight-loss coaching. Whatever your situation, coaching continues to be a sought after investment to help you achieve your goals.

ICF defines a coach's role as a person with the responsibility to discover, clarify, and align with what you want to achieve; encourage your self-discovery; elicit solutions and strategies from you; and hold you responsible and accountable.

These responsibilities come in many shapes and sizes, requiring you and your coach to be flexible and creative. After all, helping you achieve your goals does not follow a fixed path. If achievement of goals followed a fixed path, goals would be easy to achieve and no one would need a coach! Yet our experience shows us that every individual situation is different and every path followed is unlike the path of anyone else.

As Susan and I worked together on her unique path, it became clear that her needs entreated us to reconfigure our current coaching strategies and tactics. Susan realized that while she benefitted from our structured 1:1 coaching conversations, what she really hungered for was coaching when she needed it the most: in-the-moment. While many of the plans that Susan, her boss, and I designed for her were helping Susan, she found herself struggling most at the point of application.

After a discussion that required us both to be flexible and creative, we piloted a new activity that would allow Susan to contact me when she felt she needed in-the-moment coaching versus waiting until our next scheduled coaching session. It was important that we pilot the activity as neither of us was sure if the existence of this new activity or the frequency of her outreaches would satisfy the needs of the progress she was working so hard to achieve.

What we found experientially was that the ability for Susan to contact me "at the moment she needed it the most" proved to be very helpful in clarifying her goals, setting direction, and identifying desired outcomes. Our conversations turned out to be infrequent and lasted anywhere from ten to twenty minutes. Most importantly, these short, focused, in-the-moment conversations were exactly what Susan needed in order to make the progress she hoped with her goals and aspirations.

Not all coaching needs to follow a structured schedule or last for ninety-minutes. Laser Coaching is a term used to describe quick (lasting about twenty minutes) and focused (usually a single topic) coaching for clients who benefit from this form of interaction. These sessions can be scheduled for individuals for whom time is a premium or in-the-moment for clients whose needs are emergent.

The ICF New England Chapter conducted its own pilot of short and focused coaching sessions at the 2012 Massachusetts Conference for Women. Hundreds of registrants signed up in advance to be coached in-the-moment by credentialed ICF members. Like Susan, these individuals either had a situation from life and work on which they needed some coaching or they heard something during the conference that sparked a new idea and direction. In-the-moment coaching was the perfect way to clarify their situation or bring their new idea to life. The pilot was successful and ICF New England coaches were invited back to the 2013 conference and will be on hand again at the 2014 conference.

As a member of NEHRA, you have a chance to experience in- the-moment coaching at the 2014 NEHRA Conference on October 8th and October 9th, 2014. Credentialed members of the ICF New England Chapter will be available to create a new way of thinking about a current challenge you are experiencing or transition information you heard at the NEHRA conference to action. Whatever your need, you will benefit by taking a few minutes of your day to focus on you and experience coaching when you need it the most.

* an actual client whose name has been changed for this article

About the Author

Ed Evarts is the Practice Leader at Evarts Coaching (www.evartscoaching.com), an organization focused on coaching mid- to senior- level leaders and their teams in business environments. With over twenty-five years of innovative leadership and management experience, Ed possesses the ability to build awareness, create action, and deliver results. Known for his business acumen, his ability to resolve complex human relations issues, and his enthusiastic, accessible and responsive style, Ed partners with managers, leaders and business teams to explore clarity and communication, and traverse conflict and change. You can reach Ed at ed@evartscoaching.com or 617-549-1391.