

## Chapter 1

# Introducing Your Coaching Journey

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### *In This Chapter*

- ▶ Introducing your coaching journey
  - ▶ Measuring success
  - ▶ Planning for setbacks
  - ▶ Identifying your milestone rewards
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**P**reparing for coaching helps you to enjoy the process of achieving your goals. Getting ready for coaching is partly about getting into the right mindset and feeling confident about your promise to yourself to achieve a certain goal. But it's also about getting the little things right and understanding some of the stages you go through on your journey to achieving your goal.

## *Getting Ready for Your Coaching Session*

If you decide to work with a professional coach, your coach will discuss with you at the outset how to get the most out of your sessions. If you're self-coaching, you can benefit from setting up some ground rules for yourself to help you get into a good coaching pattern. Here are some general guidelines to consider:

- ✓ **Schedule your coaching time in your diary or calendar and treat it as a priority.** You may be guilty of putting your own needs last – don't! You'll be better prepared to face the emergencies of your life if you give yourself the calm space of coaching. (Okay, at times you really will have to cancel the session because of unforeseen events, but thinking of your coaching as a major priority in your life helps you to challenge yourself when you're tempted to sacrifice the coaching time for something else.)

- ✔ **Ensure you have a quiet physical space for your coaching session.** If you have a telephone session with a professional coach, you need to know that you won't be disturbed and that nothing will distract you. You may want to have some soft, calming music playing very low in the background and light a candle to create a special atmosphere.
- ✔ **Take a few moments to review your goals from the last session and the actions you've completed or attempted.** You usually discuss these early in the session with a coach, but reflecting quietly to yourself beforehand makes this part of the coaching more focused and gets you into the right frame of mind. If you're self-coaching, you can close your eyes and review your goals for a few moments.
- ✔ **Keep a journal between your coaching sessions to keep track of your progress.** You can use your journal to make notes of what you discuss during coaching or to complete exercises and record answers to powerful questions.
- ✔ **Complete your assignments between sessions.** Many professional coaches like to suggest ideas for 'homework' between sessions. This may be as simple as reflecting on an idea or new belief, or it may involve a specific exercise or piece of research to help you move closer to your goals. If you're self-coaching, you may want to complete some of the activities in this book, or have a stockpile of inspiring resources to dip into to keep your motivation high.
- ✔ **Spend a few moments after the session drawing your thoughts together and refining your actions.** If you're working with a professional coach you can drop him an email confirming the actions you agreed, and if you're self-coaching, send the email to yourself! Simply confirming your commitments in this way is a fantastic way to make them feel real and significant.

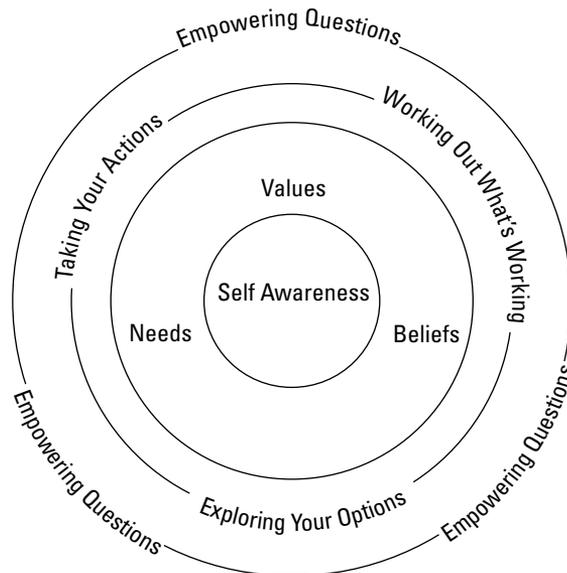
## *Beginning Your Coaching Journey*

You may be quite familiar with concepts of personal development, having read other books, attended programmes, or worked through your own goals. Or maybe this is the first time you've had much exposure to the idea of personal development. But the great thing about coaching is that you enter into the process at the level you're currently at. Coaching works as a mechanism for harnessing everything you have learnt about yourself so far and all the great self-development ideas that other people have found to work.

## Seeing the big picture

Your coaching journey isn't a straight line. Take a look at Figure 1-1. Central to life coaching is building your self-awareness. This begins with seeing how and why you behave in certain ways and how you can adapt and change that behaviour to improve your life. Moving to the second ring, you then begin to think about what makes you uniquely you – your beliefs, needs, and values.

Armed with a clear idea of yourself, you can enter into the journey at one of the three stages of the third cycle. Perhaps you begin by noticing the results that you have achieved in your life so far; by working out what's working. Maybe you then move on to exploring your options. Then you're ready to take action, which leads you back into noticing your results, and so the cycle continues. All of this activity is surrounded by the outer ring – the skill of asking yourself searching and empowering questions that assist you in the journey and feed back into your self-awareness.



**Figure 1-1:**  
The life  
coaching  
circle.

## *Packing your survival kit*

To begin your journey, you need a kit bag of qualities to develop and hone along the way. These qualities will sustain you on your journey and help you navigate the twists and turns of the road. Your particular kit bag will be stuffed full of self-awareness, positive self belief, motivation, and an impressive array of powerful questions to help you reach your destination.

### *Stocking up on empowering questions*

Coaching takes you back to the habit you developed as a child of questioning everything around you. As an adult you may be out of the habit of questioning and exploring, because you get into the habit of thinking that your questions should be intelligent and sensible – no one wants to look stupid. And you find that you get by in the world even though you sense that you don't know quite enough about some stuff. Life coaching helps you to recapture your child-like curiosity so that you can get to what's really going on for you. Stock up on questions to empower you, such as 'What will happen if I don't make this change in my life?' And check out Chapter 6 for how to frame the questions that will prove to be powerful navigation aids for you.

### *Choosing your beliefs*

You have helpful beliefs about yourself but also destructive beliefs. For example, I think of myself as good with words but tend to hold a belief about myself that I'm hopeless with numbers. The positive belief gave me the confidence to write this book – great outcome! – but the negative belief causes me to procrastinate on doing my accounts – disastrous outcome! Life coaching helps you to increase the power of your positive beliefs and minimise or reject the negative, limiting ones, breaking free of any self-doubt that stops you from getting what you want in life. I talk more about beliefs in Chapter 3.

### *Building your motivation*

Values, as well as beliefs, are in the second inner ring of the coaching circle (refer to Figure 1-1). The values you hold about what is important to you, and, to a great extent, the needs you have, drive you forward. You create this motivation inside you as you seek to shape your world. Understanding how your values and needs work for you is a powerful tool to propel you forward.

### *Becoming self-aware*

At the centre of the coaching circles is *self-awareness*, an understanding about yourself and how you respond to your world. The more self-aware you become, the more you're able to understand others, which helps you in many ways. You work more effectively with colleagues, and your personal life benefits too, because you have a better idea of how people tick.

Achieving the highest level of self-awareness is the most beneficial outcome of all personal development, and coaching is the very best medium to achieve this. Through self-awareness you can begin to change aspects of your behaviour that don't serve you well, you can identify what it is that truly makes you happy, you can become realistic about what you're not prepared to sacrifice, and you can ultimately achieve inner peace and harmony with who you are and what your place in the world is. Chapter 3 has more about understanding yourself, your preferences, and your attitudes.



A client of mine said to me at the outset of a coaching programme that her goal was to work out a way of balancing the demands of her career and family life, or to accept that she needed to make a small sacrifice somewhere and to be happy with that decision. Sometimes you have to recognise that you can't always have your cake and eat it, and be at peace with your decision, and this too is a form of self-awareness.

## *The stages of your journey*

Kit bag packed? Good. Time to take the first steps. This section provides an overview of the stopping off points of your journey. Remember that the journey is circular. In general though, you start by thinking about what you want to change, move onto considering your options and choices, and then you take your actions.

### *Working out what's working*

During coaching you spend time thinking about what's working well in your life, as well as what's wrong. Shifting the focus in this way still allows you to see what you don't want, but puts you in a more powerful frame of mind to take action. Do more of what you do well and enjoy, and you discover that many other things fall into place. You still encourage yourself to change and adopt new behaviours, but your focus is on identifying positive new habits, not condemning yourself for old, bad ones.

### *Exploring your options*

On your life coaching journey you encourage yourself to experiment and try new approaches to reaching your goals. Acting in the same way as you always do generally results in the same outcomes, so flexibility, creativity, and imagination become your new friends as you step outside your comfort zone a little and try new options.

### *Taking your actions*

Having identified what you want more of or a specific goal, and explored ways of achieving that, you can begin to take actions that move you, one small and significant step at a time, towards your goals.

## Marking Your Progress

Coaching often produces results that are hard to measure because they are qualitative (measuring quality) rather than quantitative (measuring quantity). If your goal is to get a promotion, you know you're there when you're holding the new contract. But what if you take a year to get there? You can always find ways to mark your progress so that you can look back at any stage and see how far you've come, which particularly helps you when the going gets tough.

As you change and develop you set ever higher standards for yourself, so sometimes it's easy to forget where you started from. Have you ever been involved in a house renovation project? The work can get more frustrating as you get closer to completion and you have to look at the photos of digging the foundations and clearing all the dirt and rubble to get a sense of the transformation.

### *Using milestone goals to celebrate success*

When you set yourself a significant goal you probably won't be able to achieve it overnight. Start thinking early on about how you'll celebrate success along the way. Getting fit, working towards a promotion, tackling an unhealthy habit – all these goals produce benefits for you during the journey as well as when you reach your destination, so why not celebrate these milestone benefits? Your milestones are individual to the task you set yourself. They may be tangible, such as going down one dress size (even though your ultimate goal is three sizes smaller!), or completing a great CV to submit for a new job. Your milestone goals can be process goals – maintaining your commitment to staying alcohol- or cigarette-free for a month.



Attaching rewards to milestone goals helps you to keep a focus on the here and now, not just the future, which bolsters your commitment.

What is a reward for you? Naturally, achieving your goal is a great reward, but perhaps you set a long-term goal. Waiting months or even years to breathe a sigh of relief and congratulate yourself for a job well done isn't really the best way to sustain your motivation. Instead, you can set milestone goals that you link to smaller rewards to sustain your enthusiasm.

Choose milestone rewards that don't go against your ultimate goal. If you want to lose weight, allowing yourself to binge on your favourite food every time the scales show a loss is likely to be detrimental. Aim for rewards that are healthy and nurturing for you. They needn't be expensive either, although

you can push the boat out a bit when the milestone you achieve is especially significant. Here are some examples:

- ✔ A couple of hours with a good novel.
- ✔ A long, relaxing bubble bath.
- ✔ A round of golf.
- ✔ Watching your favourite sports on television.
- ✔ An evening at the theatre or cinema.
- ✔ Buying yourself something special that you've had your eye on for ages.
- ✔ A weekend away with a friend or loved one.
- ✔ Something you haven't done before that will get the adrenalin going and energise you such as a helicopter ride, trip in a hot-air balloon, or a day spent go-carting.

Think about the treats that you tend to put off because other responsibilities come first. A reward feels more like a treat when it's something you don't do every day or don't always make time for.



Why not introduce an element of surprise to your rewards? Ask a friend or partner to hold your list for you and choose items off it at random for you at the appropriate milestone. Or write out each reward on a separate card, and post it in a box that acts as your Rewards Bank. Every time you decide to celebrate a milestone achievement, take out a card at random and treat yourself.

## *Giving yourself a pat on the back*

One of the simplest ways of marking your progress is simply to notice when you move forward and take a few seconds to give yourself a pat on the back. A former boss of mine is one of the happiest people I know and his secret is that he makes a point of looking out for small things that he's proud of during the day and mentally saying to himself, 'Well done!'

Most people are unused to paying themselves compliments and you may have to do battle with your inner critic. But try it – anything from finding a parking spot in a crowded high street to pulling off a brilliant presentation to a client deserves a quiet acknowledgement to yourself that you have added to the smooth running of your day. As patting yourself on the back becomes a habit, you find it easier to take those few moments of reflection to celebrate the small and significant steps you make towards the big goals in your life.

## Paying it forward

You may have read the book or seen the film *Pay It Forward*, in which a young boy transforms the world through an idea he generates during a school project, to pay forward three good deeds for every one that you receive.

Recent research on happiness suggests that a key factor in personal wellbeing is helping to make other people happy – one reason why volunteers report great personal satisfaction despite putting in time and effort for no pay. I'm not suggesting that you should spend all your time in the service of others (unless that's what

you want), but in preparing for coaching think about not only ways in which you can get support but also how you can start looking beyond yourself. Small daily random acts of kindness not only benefit the recipient but have a way of coming back to the giver in spades. A key element of coaching is finding new and better ways to exist in your daily life, and adopting this subtle change in your approach can produce amazingly powerful shifts in how you perceive things. See [www.helpothers.org](http://www.helpothers.org) for inspiration.

## *Anticipating setbacks and relapses*

Take a long view and accept that you experience setbacks when attempting change. Gridlock and deadlock aren't disastrous when you think through in advance the keys to unlocking them. Seven helpful guidelines to bear in mind when you anticipate the challenges ahead are:

- ✔ **Remember that change requires effort and can cost more than you think.** Shaping the life you want is worth the investment so think about the resources, especially of your time, that you are putting into your change programme. Trying to take short-cuts may result in longer periods where you stay stuck.
- ✔ **Choose the methods that are right for you, not the latest 'get rich and happy quick' theory.** And if something you try doesn't work, be prepared to reflect on the reasons and try something different.
- ✔ **Realise that willpower is over-rated!** Almost no one can sustain strong willpower in the face of temptation. So avoid actions, no matter how small, that may jeopardise your goals, such as keeping tempting foods in the house when you're working to lose weight (even if you tell yourself that the biscuits are for unexpected visitors!).
- ✔ **Accept that you almost certainly don't make it first time every time.** If you're training for a race you expect to reach your best time after preparation, practice, and experimentation – not on the first day of your training programme. Of course, you easily achieve some goals at your first attempt, and you feel exhilarated at your 'hole-in-one', but they may be the exception.

- ✔ **Expect the unexpected.** The journey to change isn't a straight line. You may encounter surprises, go back on yourself, zigzag around, lose your way in the dark corners, and suddenly find you're back in the same spot – but armed with a lot more knowledge and maybe a level up from where you started out.
- ✔ **Don't forget that your emotional state matters.** Sometimes you need to retreat and recuperate because you feel somewhat battered by events. Perhaps the struggle has got you down a bit, or maybe an upsetting life event has thrown you off course emotionally. Whatever the reason, you must anticipate that you need to let yourself off the hook at times and take care of your emotional state to gather strength for the next phase of the journey.
- ✔ **Stay curious!** Lapses do not mean that you've failed; they simply indicate that some reflection and adjustment are needed. Stay open to the lessons you can learn from your relapses and you begin to develop a helpful curiosity that allows you to step beyond gridlock and deadlock and move to the next stage.

## *Keeping a record*

As you work through activities in this book you may find that the simple act of writing down your thoughts and reflections really helps to clarify your understanding of your goals. Consider starting a coaching diary or journal to record your progress. Your journal can take many forms. Some clients push the boat out with leather-bound, handmade journals and write with an expensive pen. Others prefer a simple ring binder. Still others carry around a small notebook to jot down ideas and reflections as they go about their day, while the technology lovers tend to deploy their PDAs or laptops.

Writing in your journal enables you to:

- ✔ Capture your reflections on what you learn from your coaching sessions, helping you to build up a bigger picture over time and make connections between your thoughts, feelings, actions, and behaviours. You'll see trends developing that aren't always obvious until you write them down!
- ✔ Track your goals and results so that you can look back on what you have achieved. This alone can be a significant motivator in your journey.
- ✔ 'Write out' inner critic attacks. Sometimes just seeing the nonsense that your inner critic comes up with in black and white on the page is enough to break the spell and restore your confidence in yourself.

A record of your progress need not be expressed only in words. Many people get more meaning from pictures and images. Consider collages, scrapbooks, or drawings that represent the stages of your journey. If you have a room of your own you can even create your own timeline on one wall, representing the stages you go through. Or why not invest in a flip-chart pad and get creative on a large scale?

You can also use objects to remind yourself of goals and reflections.

## *Assessing the Benefits and Challenges of Coaching*

One of the most surprising things about life coaching is that you don't have to know at the outset exactly what it is that you want to fix or improve in your life for the magic to work. Having a specific goal in mind (such as getting fit) or at least an area of your life that you want to improve (such as your relationships) does help the coaching process. But you can also use coaching to help you identify that vague, nagging feeling of dissatisfaction that you have and what needs to change in your life to restore your vim and vigour. In fact, sometimes having too fixed a goal in mind distracts you from enjoying the many benefits of the process. I've (Jeni) found that many clients who had a very clear objective about change in a specific area of their life, later identified that what they thought was the problem or goal either wasn't at all, or was secondary to something else. So if you're worried that you don't have a clear enough idea of what's wrong or could be better – relax! Whole life coaching is the perfect medium for exploring what's really going on.

Because coaching has a wonderful way of giving you many more goodies than you set out to acquire, keeping a completely open mind helps you appreciate those goodies when they pop up. Life coaching shows you how connected your life really is. Maybe you have a specific goal to use coaching to improve your assertiveness at work, but you'll almost certainly discover that, as a result, you find new ways of improving your personal relationships too. Or, in taking a close look at the 'problem' you have getting fit and healthy, you may discover fresh resources of motivation that result in better work performance and perhaps even a promotion.

You can use the ideas in this section to help you to get a feel for some of the main benefits of coaching so that you can begin your journey with a sense of what you want to achieve, and equally, so that you can prepare for some of the consequences of the process. It helps you work out the best way for you to go about coaching, and prepares you for the commitment you're about to make to yourself and your life.

All coaching gets results but not all coaching results look the same. You get more out of the process if you have the right expectations about what you want to achieve. Your coaching results may be very tangible and visible – a new job, or a trimmer waistline. Or your results may be reflected in changes in the way you think and behave that make you happier in your daily life. The biggest benefit of coaching is that it brings more self-awareness and makes you at peace with your life choices. Think about the following benefits of coaching and decide which are priorities for you.



The act of reaching for your goals creates a great deal of the enjoyment in your life.

## *Attaining goals*

Coaching is a very effective mechanism to support you as you identify and attain your goals. Perhaps you're aiming for a specific outcome or outcomes from coaching, such as wanting to:

- ✓ Change your job or embark on a new career
- ✓ Establish your own business
- ✓ Improve a personal relationship
- ✓ Get fit and healthy
- ✓ Become a non-smoker
- ✓ Increase your personal wealth
- ✓ Become more self-confident

The list could go on and on. You can tackle anything tangible that you want to change or improve in your life through coaching. If you have a long list of goals, decide how they stack up on your priority scale, because you can't achieve everything all at once. Coaching can help you decide on these priorities too – and what you think is the compelling issue may turn out to be rather less critical after you've turned the spotlight on it through coaching.



Think about some broad outcomes that you hope to achieve through coaching:

- ✓ What goals do I want to focus on?
- ✓ How do I feel about my whole life balance?
- ✓ Do I have a sense of purpose, and if not, is this a key area for me?
- ✓ How do my thought and behaviour patterns get in my way?
- ✓ How often do I question myself and my actions without being self-critical?
- ✓ How focused am I on enjoying the present moment in my life?

When you have some answers, even though they may not yet be very specific, ask yourself which of these areas are the most compelling for you. What benefits may you get if you choose to focus on these areas? What challenges do you think lie ahead?

## *Growing through self-awareness*

All coaching offers you the possibility of growing through becoming more self-aware. Think of yourself as an onion with many, many layers to uncover (not a very flattering image, we know!). As you peel back the layers you reveal more of your true self, until you get to the fullest understanding of who you are and what you're capable of. Some people describe this as a feeling of 'coming home to themselves'. This understanding is like spending a long time away travelling, soaking up new experiences, and finally arriving home richer for your travels. Home is still the same, yet you see it with new eyes because of all the things you have seen, done, and learnt.

Throughout this book you discover how coaching allows you to reflect and take new meanings from the things that are most important to you.

Coaching is a combination of getting the results you want and taking steps to get those results. Sometimes the goals in themselves may turn out to have limited power to make you happy. Have you ever worked really hard to achieve something and then found that the reward at the end was somehow not as satisfying as you'd hoped? Often the *challenge* of attaining your goals makes you really come alive, as you stretch yourself and your abilities. The joy you experience as you cross each finishing line is more likely to be lasting if you've been fully engaged in everything leading up to that moment. Coaching can become addictive, because the process of setting and reaching for your goals in a way that's meaningful to you gives you the most benefits as you begin to see and experience all that you're capable of. The great results then become a wonderful bonus!



Finding a meaningful way to achieve your goal is especially important if your goal is to 'give up' a bad habit. The successful non-smoker who makes a determined plan to focus on being a new, healthy version of themselves and use the savings from their old habit to fund a gym membership will enjoy the challenge and stick with the goal. Someone who doesn't replace smoking with a positive distraction mopes around thinking about how much pleasure they're giving up. Being realistic in your coaching journey means knowing that you need a massive effort to get to your goal, as well as appreciating the pleasure of the process that gets you there.

This book focuses on getting your expectations of coaching right, and prepares you for the ups and downs of the road to your new self.

Not all the results of coaching feel positive at the time. Like any process of self-development, you need to prepare yourself for hard work and effort, and perhaps some frustration and disappointment along the way. Perhaps you have to let go of something that has acted as a comfort blanket for you, and maybe you also face up to some tough facts about yourself and your choices to date. Don't think that these challenges are depressing – there's way more on the positive side to make your life coaching journey all worthwhile. Knowing in advance that a few thorns lie in the bed of roses helps to keep you grounded.

## *Making a Promise to Yourself*

You may be wondering if you'll be able to maintain the commitment to your goals that you feel right now. You've probably experienced the disappointment of setbacks before and know how hard it feels to maintain motivation long after the mood in which you first made your commitment has gone. Why are things different for you now?

For the things that are really important to you, think in terms of making a serious promise to yourself about the changes you want to make. This is different to a simple commitment, which you can measure in milestones and outcomes. The promise you make to yourself in coaching may involve allowing yourself to learn and grow from the process, to persist despite setbacks, to be honest with yourself about what is truly important, and to stop beating yourself up when you get it wrong. Within this promise you make commitments that you aim to fulfil. But the big picture of your promise is to commit to making the changes and choices that are best for you and that move you forward.

## *Checking out your current life conditions*

Are your current life conditions right for you to begin your coaching journey? Coaching can be challenging and you should only begin if you're already feeling pretty strong and capable. Everyone suffers from low self-esteem and a lack of confidence at times, but if your current emotional state is very negative, or even depressed, you may want to consider a different kind of help, such as counselling, to get you to the point where you're ready for coaching.

Perhaps a lot is going on in your life at the moment and you're under an unusual amount of pressure. You may be tempted to look on coaching as the answer to your prayers, but if your life balance is so out of kilter that you can't make time for coaching and find that you cancel appointments – with yourself or your coach – then it's time to ask yourself some hard questions.

Ask yourself if you're ready for coaching now. Maybe you want to take a session with a coach to discuss and decide this. A half-hearted commitment can be worse than no commitment at all, and you needn't feel bad if your current life conditions don't allow you to be whole-hearted about coaching yet. You may simply have to go with the flow of what's happening in the here and now for a while. Think about what other support mechanisms are around for you, read this book to get you into the right frame of mind, and make a promise that when the time is right for you, you will take the first step.

## *Framing your coaching promise*

You can make a real commitment to coaching by framing your own coaching promise. Think about the traits that, in your heart of hearts, you know have most held you back in seeing through commitments in the past. Now take yourself back to the feeling you had when you last made a solemn promise. What was it that gave you the conviction that you would see that promise through? How can you access that feeling of conviction again?

Here are some examples of coaching promises that you can make:

- ✓ I promise to take responsibility for discovering the solutions that are right for me and that allow me to be the best I can be in my life.
- ✓ I promise to be open and honest with myself and trust that as long as I am taking positive action, I am making progress.
- ✓ I promise to commit to developing my awareness of myself so that I can replace habits and behaviours that are destructive with ones that are creative and productive.
- ✓ I promise never to accept second best for myself.
- ✓ I promise to seek to learn from all my experiences and actions.

What is your promise?