

Coaching: Helping Unlock Your Own Potential

By Susan B. Silverman

As Bill Gates says—everybody needs a coach. In fact, the need and demand for it have increased during the pandemic.

Coaching Process

Coaching involves the belief that the client has the answers to their own problems within them. The coach is not a subject matter expert, but rather focuses on helping clients unlock their own potential. In coaching, clients find their own solutions by answering in-depth, individualized questions posed by their coach. The questions help clients identify different perspectives and solutions to an issue.

Through this process, the coach helps their clients discover and clarify their goals, formulate an action plan, and hold their clients accountable for following through with their plan. Coaching helps clients dramatically improve their outlook on work and life and unlocks their potential.

There are many types of professional coaching specialties, including career coaching that focuses on the client's career; leadership coaching, which concentrates on the client gaining or improving leadership skills; and life coaching, which centers around the client creating a more fulfilled life.

Coaching Lawyers during the Pandemic

Before the pandemic, attorneys sought coaching on topics such as career development, time management, business development, effective communication, and leadership. However, during the pandemic, coaching has revolved more around time management and issues such as work and family boundaries, fear, anxiety, and stress.

Coaching can help reduce attorneys' work-related stress and enhance well-being. The pandemic has exacerbated the already-existing stresses of practicing law caused by internal and external pressures and demands made by supervisors, colleagues, and clients. There also are internal challenges to practicing law, such as achieving billable hours, community service, pressure to bring in business, management issues, managing



work-life balance, communicating effectively, and navigating the firm culture. These types of demands can cause stress, anxiety, short tempers, distraction, and irritability. Stress can lead to a decrease in productivity and an increase in the feeling a lack of control over work. These stressors became even more pronounced during the pandemic.

Benefits of Coaching

Coaching recognizes that while it is not always possible to avoid stress, it is possible to change and manage your feelings, perspective, and responses to stress. Studies have shown that coaching can help reduce attorneys' work-related stress and enhance their well-being. It has been suggested that well-being increases because of the supportive relationship between a coach and client in which the client can confidentially discuss personal and professional issues, set personal goals, and purposefully work towards them.

Coaching can be a stress reduction tool by helping a client reframe stress, manage their demands, and their reflexive reactions. Additionally, coaching can help clients increase self-awareness, discover fresh perspectives, and practice new reactions to reduce their stress.

By working with a coach knowledgeable about emotional intelligence, clients can discover strategies to manage their stress and reactions by applying their emotional intelligence. This will increase their resilience and psychological wellbeing. Psychological wellbeing is interconnected to mental, physical, and social well-being. Research has

shown that stressful situations such as what we are experiencing during the pandemic can narrow thinking, limit perspective, and increase reactionary behavior. This happens because of the brain's automatic response to the pandemic: the brain perceives Covid-19 as a threat, which causes the brain to generate negative emotions such as fear. As a result, we become more defensive, aggressive, problem-focused, and forgetful of the bigger picture (for example, people panic-buying goods like toilet paper, fearing a shortage in the future). In this situation, people feel overly worried and problem-focused.

In contrast, when the brain perceives something as a good event, such as feeling valued, positive emotions result and we become more solution-focused and empowered. Working with a coach knowledgeable about emotional intelligence can help people become aware of their positive and negative emotions and how to best respond to them for their psychological well-being.

No matter what type of coaching you choose, coaching can help any attorney personally and professionally. ■



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