

# DISTINCTIONS BETWEEN COACHING AND THERAPY

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Therapy and Professional Coaching have several aspects in common. To an outside observer, they may look similar. Both professions are based on an on-going, confidential, one-to one relationship between the therapist or Coach and their client. Clients come to therapy or Coaching wanting change, and both professions assume that significant change will only occur over time. Within therapy or Coaching

relationship, regular sessions are scheduled, during which conversations occur. Other similarities of practice exist.

However, therapy and Coaching are radically different in the *context* of the relationship, *condition* of the client, and *content* of the sessions. In the outline below, we have attempted to define some of the major distinctions between therapy and Coaching.

In reviewing our outline, keep in mind that these are distinctions *between* the disciplines, not a complete model of either. Also, we refer here to one-on one therapy or Coaching, rather than group processes. Finally, generalizations are always necessary in a comparison of this sort, but we believe these distinctions to represent the norm in both professions.

### COACHING

### THERAPY

#### Models or Paradigms

Sports training and coaching  
 Business skills training and performance development coaching  
 Personal growth seminars  
 Self-mastery disciplines and practices

Medicine and healing

#### Works with people who are

Eager to move to a higher level of functioning  
 Seeking focus, strategy, and motivation  
 Asking *how to* questions  
 Designing their future, learning new skills, and seeking more balance in their lives

Psychologically dysfunctional in a quantifiable way  
 Seeking self-understanding  
 Asking *why* questions  
 Dealing with old issues, emotional pain, or traumas; seeking resolution and healing

#### Approach

Begins with the premise that the client is whole  
 Refers individuals with prolonged depression, severe anxiety, phobias, harmful addictions, and destructive or abusive behavior patterns to mental health professionals  
 Primary focus on actions and the future  
 Oriented toward solving problems through action  
 Works mainly with the conscious mind  
 Assists the client in identifying, prioritizing, and implementing choices  
 Helps client learn new skills and tools for personal growth and mastery  
 Listens to feelings as clues for how to get the client into action and leads the client to an action step  
 Typically directs the client to return to action

Begins with the premise that the client needs healing  
 Treats individuals with prolonged depression, severe anxiety, phobias, harmful addictions, and destructive or abusive behavior patterns, as well as other conditions  
 Primary focus on feelings and history  
 Oriented toward exploring the psychic roots of problems  
 Works to bring the unconscious into consciousness  
 Assists the client in untangling unconscious conflicts which interfere with choice  
 Helps client resolve old pain and terminate old coping mechanisms  
 Listens for feelings as symptoms of underlying dysfunction and follows the client on any valid exploration of their feelings  
 Often directs the client to go deeper into feelings

### **Approach (cont.)**

Helps client get clear on their own values and align their actions to them	Helps client correct cognitive disorders in order to change their behavior
Encourages and requests proactive behavior	Counsels on becoming less reactive
Give advice only in areas of expertise and with client permission	Usually does not give advice

### **Process**

Focused on learning and developing potential	Focused on healing and restoring function
Main tools include accountability, inquiry, requesting, goal-setting, and strategic planning	Main tools include listening, reflecting, confrontation and interpretation
Other tools depend on Coach's training and expertise, e.g. NLP, money management, or professional organizing	Other tools depend on therapist's training, e.g. EMDR, sand tray, or hypnosis
Deals mainly with external issues; looks for external solutions too internal blocks	Deals mainly with internal issues; looks for internal resolution

### **Relationship & Structure**

Alliance designed jointly by Coach and client	Nature of alliance largely designed by therapist
Discourages transference as inappropriate	Encourages transference as a way of objectifying issues to be explored
Sessions may be in person or by telephone	Sessions conducted face-to-face
Sometimes deductible as a business expense	Often reimbursed or deductible as a medical expense

While this list of distinctions does not paint a complete picture of either therapy or Coaching, our aim is to continue clarifying the respective roles of the two professions. We consider this outline to be a work-in-progress, and welcome your comments and contributions!