

# **COACHING VS COUNSELING**

## **WHAT IS BEST FOR YOU?**

by Daphna Levy

When an individual needs help with personal issues, they may seek counseling or therapy. Couples needing relationship help, may seek a marriage counselor or a couple therapist.

Counselors and therapists are trained in the field of mental health and their approach is a mental-health approach.

Coaching, on the other hand, takes an entirely different approach. It is strictly practical and focuses on the tools and skills needed to *resolve* the issues at hand.

In order to determine which would best serve your needs, you should know the difference between counseling/therapy and coaching.

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### **FEELINGS VS ACTION**

In counseling you will be asked again and again how you *feel* and what you *think*, with the hope of achieving a deeper understanding of your issues. The issues themselves may or may not improve. Thoughts and feelings vary daily, even hourly, depending on life events, mood, stress levels, sleep patterns, physical health and more. For that reason, such discussions could go on for weeks, months and even years.

The Coaching approach is different. Your thoughts and feelings *are* important, as they help your coach understand your issues and suggest solutions. However, listening to you is only the beginning. Next comes, “What are you going to *do* about it?” It is your coach’s job to help you find solutions and devise a plan of action to improve your situation.

In other words, “understanding” alone is considered useless in coaching, unless it is accompanied by results in real life.

So, while counseling stresses *thoughts* and *feelings*, coaching stresses *actions* and *outcomes*.

## **COPING VS CHANGING**

Counseling or Therapy focus on “coping mechanisms.” The effort is to help you *cope* with your challenges, accept them and learn to live with them. (You’ll hear talk about “managing,” never about “curing,” depression, anxiety and other unwanted conditions.)

Coaching takes the opposite approach. Here the goal is to help you figure out ways to *change* the situations that make you unhappy, frustrated or unfulfilled. Rather than *adapt* to them, you get help to *change* them.

This is a proactive approach and demands action. It also requires that your Coach give you the tools you need to overcome your challenges, and those tools stay with you for life. Your coach’s goal is to “teach you how to fish,” not “give you fish.”

So, while counseling aims at *coping*, coaching seeks *change*.

## **“PATIENT” VS “CLIENT”**

In counseling or therapy, you are the “patient.” Counselors are psychologists or psychiatrists trained to treat mental disorders (illnesses). In an effort to understand your issues, you may be diagnosed with a disorder and prescribed mood-altering drugs.

In coaching there is a “Coach” and a “Client.” Their relationship is very much like that of an athletic trainer and his or her client. Here you exercise your “personality muscles” and improve your ability to overcome challenges. You are directed to look at your life and environment and, in doing so, find solutions to your issues, utilize your potential and realize your goals.

## **SHOULD I USE MY INSURANCE?**

Health insurance provides coverage when one is ill – either physically or mentally. For that reason, before your health insurance pays for counseling, a mental health professional must diagnose you with a disorder. This is a psychiatric diagnosis that stays on your medical records.

Many people object to having a psychiatric diagnosis on their records, as such may prevent them from getting certain jobs or could be used against them in custody battles and other situations.

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## **WHAT IS BEST FOR YOU?**

What is right for you depends on your personality, your goals and what you wish to address. Knowing the difference between counseling/therapy and coaching could help you make the right decision.

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