**DISTURBING COACHING TRENDS**Jan Newcomb

I’ve noticed some disturbing trends in the coaching community. This article is intended to stimulate discussion about trends developing in the coaching community and encourage Peer Resources Network members to discuss any that you have seen. Here are five I have identified:

**Organizations Marketing Products and Services to Coaches**Numerous individuals and organizations are attempting to make money from coaches (or aspiring coaches) by advertising ways to help coaches make money. I receive numerous email solicitations on a regular basis promising “the answer” to getting lots of clients and making lots of money as a coach. These solicitations contain statements such as:

*Accelerate your income  
Are coaches your clients?  
Mega thousands  
Reliable, consistent streams of income  
Effortless marketing  
A suite of credentials for business coaches  
Hefty six-figure income  
Client base expansion*

Did I miss something—or is this the wrong focus? I always thought coaches were supposed to help others become more effective. Even the coaching organizations seem to be guilty of a distorted mindset. If organizations were emphasizing products and services designed to help coaches become better coaches that would make sense to me. However, there seem to be way too many pitches that appear to be designed to capitalize on coaches and their need for income. Does this begin to create a profession rapidly saturated by inexperienced folks looking to get rich quick?

**A Plethora of Organizations Attempting to be “The” Authority on Coaching**Many new organizations have emerged since I became a coach. There are coach training companies, professional coaching organizations, and university coach training programs everywhere. Each organization attempts to convince us that they are the best or ultimate authority in the field and they have *the* certification you must obtain!

I have also noticed how many of these organizations appear to be self-defining and self-reporting. I rarely see surveys that ask the customer how well the coaching experience is going. Most ask coaches what they think about coaching and its benefits. A big question here is: How is success defined and by whom?

**Certification and Accreditation of Coaches**This one is a particular concern of mine. In the nearly ten years I have been a coach, I have never had an executive ask me about certification (and I did attend a certified coaching school), accreditation (I passed on this expense), or even my education (advanced degree and many certificates).

Clients do want to know about my experience and whether I understand them and their current challenges. They generally want to know three things: Can you help me? How much will it cost? How long will it take?

The only people who ask me about certification and accreditation are human resource professionals and other coaches. They are most often *not* the person being coached. Do they really believe that passing an exam or obtaining a certificate proves you are a good coach—especially without substantial life and/or business experience? Since coaching is an art, not a science, it does not follow a script or a manual, nor does expertise instantly arrive once a certificate is obtained. Good coaching relies heavily on experience and a good match between a coach and the person being coached. Isn’t someone who has “walked the same road” in a more credible position than an inexperienced person with a certificate that can be purchased by nearly anyone willing to spend the time and money?

**Psychologists Attempting to Define Requirements and Standards for the Coaching Field**There is no question that many of the skills required to be a good coach overlap with skills required to be a good therapist such as active listening, empathy, reframing communication, exploring possibilities, and such. But the roles of therapist and coach are quite different. Therapists work with people with various mental health issues and for the most part are focused on diagnosing and healing past mental/emotional pain or injury. A coach partners with generally healthy people and focuses on assisting them to move forward from the present to a better future of their choice. Certainly it would be helpful for a coach to know what “red flags” to look for, so they can make referrals to therapists when appropriate. However, coaches are not subject to the same legal requirements that a licensed therapist is, nor should they be.

We are not therapists. After watching lawyers take over the mediation field and manage to convince people (falsely) that legal credentials are necessary to be an effective mediator, I am concerned about watching therapists trying to influence the coaching field. Are certain credentials and/or accreditation really the best measure of quality and who is actually qualified to design and evaluate them?

**Younger and Younger Coaches with Minimal Experience**During my coach training one of the founders of the school said, 'you really should be 40+ to have enough life experience to call yourself a coach.' I see more and more people in their 20’s calling themselves life coaches. Am I the only one wondering if someone with so little life experience can really be an effective life coach?  And can a coach without significant business experience coach a C-level executive effectively? No matter how good their intentions, could you really trust them with your business?

My concerns are rooted in a very strong bias about the role of professional organizations and professional individuals as well. I believe the primary focus should be on the customer and a coach’s ability to help that customer become more effective. It seems to me that a coach’s success should flow naturally from their ability to provide useful products and services to their customers. I say let the market be the deciding factor—if you are a good coach, your reputation and work speaks for itself and clients will continue to appear.  What do you think?

**About the author**  
Jan works as a strategic partner with individuals and organizations seeking to improve their effectiveness. She is a licensed provider of the Benziger Thinking Styles Assessment ([BTSA](http://www.focusedcoach.com/default.asp?id=1163)) and co-author of [*Adapt! How to Survive and Thrive in the Changing World of Work*](http://www.focusedcoach.com/default.asp?id=3573)*.*

Her clients range from business owners to students beginning their careers, and mid-career professionals or retirees repackaging their experience to create the "next chapter" in their lives. She particularly enjoys working with leaders and emerging leaders, and she is a member of the [Peer Resources Network](http://www.peer.ca/PRN.html). She can be contacted at [www.focusedcoach.com](http://www.focusedcoach.com) or jasnet714 @ aol.com

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