

Seven Reasons Why Lawyers Hire a Coach! Or, Why would I do that?

Many lawyers are hiring their own personal coach for one-on-one business and personal support because they like the idea of creating their own plan to reach their goals. A coach takes a different approach from a consultant. A consultant tells the client what to do to improve the situation and lawyers like most people do not like to be told what to do. A coach works with the client to draw out the client's own ideas and inclinations to help design a plan based on what they are willing to do in the future to improve their situation. Coaching as defined by the International Coach Federation is different than athletic coaching although there are some similarities.

The use of coaches for professional development is growing in use in North America, Europe, Japan, and Australia. Coaching uses a style of conversation that acts as a catalyst to encourage action based on increased self-awareness. The coach uses mindful listening and other appropriate skills, to create a synergy so the client reaches solutions exponentially greater than they would on their own.

The International Coach Federation is a non-profit, professional organization of personal and business coaches created to build, support, and preserve the integrity of the Coaching Profession. Visit their web site for more information on coaching and coach referrals: www.coachfederation.com. For information on coaches devoted to working with lawyers, visit www.renaissancelawyer.com or www.lawyercoaches.com.

The coaching philosophy is based on the key premise that the person being coached actually has the answers but needs a safe forum to discuss them or a sounding board to test them. The person being coached rather than the coach is responsible for their motivation and to change their performance or actions. The coach's role is not to tell the lawyer what to do, but to work with them to find their own solution to their unique problem. By coaching rather than advising, you increase the likelihood that the individual being coached will carry out the agreed actions.

While coaching conversations are not privileged, they are confidential. In these conversations, a coach is loyal only to their lawyer client and only has the client's agenda in mind. That results in the client feeling supported in whatever paths

they want to take to achieve their goals. Even when the law firm has hired the coach for the lawyer, the lawyer client knows they can address any issue even the issue that this is not the right firm for them. The coach enters an agreement with the law firm, which sets out terms of confidentiality, scope and reporting issues.

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These examples are based on true coaching stories but the details are combined or altered to protect confidentiality. In all cases, the lawyer thinks coaching is the method that will work for them to achieve their practice, professional, and life goals.

Reason #1: To improve their marketing skills and implementation

Marie hired her coach because she wanted to improve her marketing skills. She trusted her intuition that this was the way for her to achieve her partnership goals. She uses her weekly coaching calls to check in on how she is doing in developing the practice she wants. She brainstorms new ideas. She gets an opportunity to put her week in perspective and confirm she has made progress on her goals. That concern is common with all coaching clients, not just lawyers – they don't believe they are doing enough to achieve their goals. So they get an opportunity to notice and relish their accomplishments. That in itself is very satisfying for the coaching client: Realizing they are actually making progress toward their goal.

Through weekly coaching conversations that are reflective and probing Marie comes up with ways that will enhance her marketing efforts. Work with a coach has given her the support, motivation and ideas to take on marketing activities that she had not attempted before. Part of what has resulted in her working with a coach is her willingness to spend time on developing her practice not just the work of her practice. She has learned even a little amount of time on the activities she is comfortable with can result in positive returns to her practice.

Reason #2: To have a confidential forum to discuss practice issues

Drew hired a coach to help him build his solo practice. Drew insisted that he could not do any marketing. He was just not comfortable with the idea of selling himself. One of the benefits he received from working with his coach was that he noticed he was already doing a number of key marketing activities, but that he had been using a different definition of marketing. Meanwhile, he was developing relationships with his clients and other lawyers that resulted in more work for him.

As it turned out, he is using the coach to explore ideas in a safe, comfortable arena that allows him to express his anxiety and then put into perspective what is actually going on. The coaching has reassured him that he is on the right track. His conversations with the coach help him come up with ideas to grow his practice and let him look at what worries him in the context of making his practice better.

Wayne used his coaching calls to reassure himself he is a good lawyer. One of his coach's roles was to remind him of the successes he had achieved in his practice when he was in the thicket of a difficult case that did not seem to be going well. Although the end result of this difficult case was better than he ever imagined it could be. He used his coaching sessions to strategize the moves he would make in the case – to his significant success. His coach was a trusted sounding board.

Alex uses his coach as a weekly means to check in on his practice, to keep him on track, and to act as a confidential sounding board. Keeping on track means keeping his billable hours at the level he wants them, engaging in continuous marketing activities, reducing non-billable hours and including time for personal matters.

Reason #3: To work smarter not harder.

Michael hired a coach so he could improve the income stream from his practice. He achieved more than a 70% increase in gross income within 12 months. He then needed to deal with the real issue in his practice, which was how to reduce the hours he was spending at the office. He had been spending too many hours every day handling the administrative details of his small firm's practice. He has now

learned to say “no” to handling administrative matters that he can delegate, so that he spends more time on his billable work and can leave at a reasonable time of the day.

Roxanne hired her coach to improve her marketing skills, but as these developed she began working on her delegation and management skills. Within a year her marketing efforts had resulted in such an increase in the work that she needed more help. Now she is working on the skills that will make her more effective in dealing with the increased workload. She is learning to turn the work around faster, to trust the associates will get the work done (because she is giving clear instructions and willing to train). She is letting go of having to do everything her self, and she is learning how to be more effective in asking for what she wants from her staff, other associates, and partners.

Reason #4: To decide whether to make changes to their practice or to leave the law.

Mary has been practicing for 20 years and wants to do something other than practice law, but knew she needed a plan before she could leave. After she hired a coach to help her focus her values and desires for the future, she realized there were aspects of her practice that she enjoyed and she began changing the focus of her practice. She now works only with clients whose legal matters interest her.

Many lawyers who hire a coach to consider leaving the practice of law but end up deciding to change how they practice rather than leave law entirely. They realize there are aspects of their practice they like and they choose to work towards creating a practice full of the enjoyable aspects.

There are also lawyers like Alice who was clear that it was time for a change, but did not have the courage to take up the unusual career she really wanted. She decided that working with a coach would give her perspective, insight, and support in coming up with the plan and the means to stay on track with her plan. She is no longer practicing law and is happy with her new career.

Ruth took time out from law to raise her children. She felt it was time to re-enter the work force but she did not want to practice law nor did she know what she

wanted to do. Working with a coach, she decided to follow her dream to be a writer. She came up with a long-term plan to achieve that dream and believes her life was profoundly changed for the better. Today she is a published author.

Reason #5: To determine how their values fit into their practice and tame Internal Gremlins

John was intrigued with the idea of a law practice in alignment with his values. He worked with a coach to examine his values: What were they and how did they fit into his practice? The result was more comfort and contentment with his practice.

John then had to deal with the guilt he had regarding the freedom he created in his practice. He had plenty of time for golf, other personal activities, and travel. He learned to manage the voice in his head that made him feel guilty (the gremlin). He was able to make choices different than those the internal voice was demanding.

Reason #6: To become more focused in their practice.

Margaret hired her coach as a support system to keep her focused. She had a tendency to get busy working on so many aspects of her practice that none received enough attention and so they all suffered. With the help of her weekly check-in with her coach she is more focused, effective, and on track to generating more money.

Margaret spent time noticing the priorities she was adopting when she was saying “yes” to something that caused her, by default, to say “no” to something that would be more beneficial to her practice. She also changed her negative beliefs around clients and money to positive beliefs that moved her forward toward her financial goals.

Wes also wanted to be more focused. His practice had generated adequate rewards for 30 years, yet he wanted more. His conversations with his coach resulted his earning more money, feeling more comfortable with his practice, and enjoying more quality time with his family, and just plain having more fun.

Reason #7: To improve professional development skills or handle a particular project

Martin wanted to develop a practice area that he was naturally good at and liked, but he felt he needed to improve his skills in that area. He became clearer on his direction and the way to improve his skills as a result of working with his coach. He also became more confident in his abilities because he noticed how well he performed in certain areas of his practice. He built on those aspects that were working well. That included trusting his gut as well as his knowledge in making outstanding decisions for his clients and his practice.

Ross wanted to improve his practice. He was aware that his clients and partners were not happy with him even though he was extremely service-oriented. Working with his coach he realized that his desire to please was the cause of his problem. He was promising more than he could deliver. He was agreeing to things that he would not have the time, in his busy practice, to deliver. Now he delivers on his promises in a satisfactory manner as a result of coaching.

Mathew hired his coach to prepare for a job interview. He finished the coaching session saying “I’ve never been happier to write a check for a service. The coaching fee was the best investment I could make.”.

Amy hired her coach to get unstuck on a significant matter that was holding her back from developing her practice. Within three coaching sessions (a quarter of the time she allocated) she was unstuck and progressing toward getting the matter resolved.

There are many other reasons lawyers hire coaches including, to prepare for retirement, to get off a derailment path, and to implement strategic plans. Lawyers notice that some area of their practice or life is not how they want it to be. They don’t feel they have all the answers on how to make the necessary changes, or if they do have answers they are not following through, and they believe it will be more productive and easier if they work with someone. Especially if that someone is trained in ways that can help them get beyond their limitations.

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