

Chapter 1

Introducing Life Coaching

In This Chapter

- ▶ Knowing why coaching works
- ▶ Meeting your inner coach
- ▶ Coming to terms with change
- ▶ Working out your current life priorities

People talk lots of hokum about life coaching. Life coaching television programmes, magazines, and newspaper columns range in quality from the powerful and inspirational through to the downright misleading and dangerous. True life coaching isn't about some guru telling you how you should live. Yes, you may be tempted to bask in the comfort of an 'expert' who can fix your life, your fashion sense, your body flaws, and your emotional angst. But these fixes are too often like an elegant sticking plaster. Changes don't last, unless a real change has come from deep within you. True life coaching enables you to call on your very own inner guru, any time, any place, with or without the support of another human being.

This chapter explains how coaching can work its magic for you and how it can help you manage the changes in your life, not just right now, but through all of the shifting priorities of your journey.

A Brief Definition of Life Coaching

Here's my definition of life coaching:

A purposeful conversation that inspires you to create the life you want.

You have conversations all the time (unless you're a hermit in a cave). Your conversations are either chit-chat to pass the time and get along with people, or purposeful talks where you clarify

thought processes, resolve problems, reach agreements, and commit to actions.

Life coaching uses dialogue as well to move you along in the right direction. When you engage in a purposeful conversation with your coach – who is either a skilled professional, or simply that part of *you* that already *is* your coach – you cut through all the chit-chat and get to the root of everything. You may discuss the following topics, for example:

- ✔ Why you act in the way that you do.
- ✔ Which beliefs about yourself stop you from taking certain actions.
- ✔ What your options really are.
- ✔ How you can best go about getting the right results for you.
- ✔ How you can maintain your motivation.

Coaching conversations leave you refreshed, inspired, and ready for action.

Life coaching can help you form the questions that lead to answers that are right for you, which is a lot better than taking someone else's answers. Many books claim that they can guide you to The Magic Formula for Happiness, Success, and Fulfilment in life, but this book is a little different. Here, I guide you to the source of your *own* magic formula. The answers aren't 'out there' – you already have them all and life coaching shows you how and where to find them.

What Life Coaching Is Not

In its purest form, life coaching is a technique that uses powerful questions to facilitate you in finding your own answers. It does, however, draw on, and can work alongside, many other similar approaches. This section explores the distinctions between coaching and its close relations.

Here are some of the things that life coaching is *not*:

- ✔ **Coaching is not counselling or therapy.** Counselling and therapy typically start from the perspective that something needs fixing. While many therapies are firmly rooted in present action and forward motion, their focus is more towards understanding what went wrong and achieving acceptance with that in order to move forward. With coaching, the bias is towards

working from the perspective that you are fundamentally whole, healthy, and strong enough to deal with the challenges of coaching.

✔ **Coaching is not mentoring.** Working with a mentor is a great way of developing yourself. You find someone who is further ahead on the road than you are in some important respect – skills, knowledge, awareness – and model yourself on the best that you see in them. A mentor freely passes on wisdom and you then choose whether or not to accept it. A mentor may also coach you to draw on your own inner resources – but the function of mentoring tends to focus on building your capability in an informal way.

One of the outcomes you may get from self-coaching is that you decide to find yourself a mentor to model. This may be someone you work with who can pass on their wisdom in a very specific work context. Or it could be a person who you respect for their overall attitude to life – maybe someone who excels at building strong positive relationships, or who always exudes an air of calm and balance. You can actively work with a mentor or simply observe a strong role model rising to life's challenges so you can adapt your own style to theirs.

✔ **Coaching is not giving advice.** A coach does not give you advice. A coach may discuss and suggest options for you, but essentially coaching facilitates your own thought processes. In this book I offer you practical principles, which act like coaching to prompt you to let the voice of your own inner coach speak out. When you coach yourself, you listen to your inner coach but you don't lecture yourself.

A *nondirective* coach is someone who steers away from intervening, mentoring, and giving advice. When you coach yourself, always give yourself the space to work things out calmly and objectively, based on what you really want and need.

See Chapter 2 for more guidance on choosing the right professional coach for you, which is a great way to experience how non-directive coaching works before trying it out for yourself.

Living Your Ideal Life

John Lennon wrote, 'Life is what happens when you are making other plans.' I bet you often feel that you're so busy doing all the things you have to do that you never get a chance to enjoy the fruits of your labours – or simply 'be'.

Your happiness in life hinges on maintaining a delicate balance:

- ✔ **Doing the tasks and filling the roles you have to fulfil each day.** These tasks are things that maintain you and keep your life running smoothly, such as your job, shopping, mowing the lawn, and loading the dishwasher. The ‘doing’ category also includes the big things you do and achieve, such as running a marathon or honing a skill.
- ✔ **Having the things you enjoy in your life.** These ‘things’ may be material possessions, such as a house, a fancy car, or a pair of designer shoes. Or they can be intangibles like security, peace of mind, and love.
- ✔ **Being content and enjoying your experiences from all that you do and have.** ‘Being’ means having a sense of who you are – a feeling of being comfortable in your own skin. You often sense that you are ‘simply being’ in those quiet (and maybe rare) moments with yourself when you feel that you are the right person, in the right place, at just the right time.

When these three aspects of your life are in tune with each other, your life feels just right.

Life coaching doesn’t turn your life into a super-charged roller-coaster of an experience – unless that’s what you really want. It does help you to work out your unique gifts and your true priorities and it does support you in eliminating anything blocking you from doing, having, and being what you want. And life coaching provides that sprinkling of magic action dust that can transform your current life into something even better than your wildest dreams, because those dreams are rooted in your ideal reality.

Getting ready for change

Perhaps you picked this book off the shelf because you’re totally fed up with where you are in your life. Or you may have a nagging feeling that more potential for happiness and fulfilment is out there for you. Obviously you’re ready for change – after all, you don’t want your life to stay exactly the same, so that means change, right?



Maybe. Think carefully. The results you get from coaching depend to a large part on where you are in terms of readiness and willingness to change, and although you may feel that you want to change, you may not be quite ready to do so.

Most New Year's resolutions fail because the goals you set aren't always linked into your state of readiness. Unless you've done the work to seriously consider your options, and prepared the ground for action, your laudable resolution to lose 20 pounds, or give up smoking, or find the man/woman of your dreams is likely to lose momentum well before the end of January. If that's the case, nothing is wrong with you, you just haven't geared yourself up to sustain your promise to yourself.

Here are the stages you need to work through for any change to be effective:

- 1. Drag yourself out of the Bogs of Denial.** If you bought this book you're probably not in denial about an aspect of your life that you want to change. Through coaching you may find that you're stubbornly resisting change in another aspect of your life. Denial is a tough phase, not least because its existence is hard to recognise in yourself. You need to look for the clues in your communication with other people. Do you get defensive when people say that you smoke or drink too much, or are working too hard? If you do, you may be in some state of denial. You can stay in denial just as long as it takes for you to see the need for change, but this book, and especially Chapter 5, can help you get out of the bogs quicker.
- 2. Take a good look around the Plateau of Contemplation.** After you climb out of the Bogs of Denial, you can't just rush into making changes; although many people do, if they get a sharp enough shock about the behaviour or thing that needs to change. Usually, you want to play around with the *idea* of change. You may start admitting, even if only to yourself, that perhaps you're a bit of a workaholic and promise yourself to address your work/life balance sometime sooner or later. You look around at your options and possible choices and you weigh up your desire to change against the things that are keeping you stuck. Reading this book can really help you take strides along the Plateau of Contemplation. After you communicate your intent to some trusted people, you're ready for the next stage. Read Chapter 9 for more about contemplating your options.
- 3. Assemble the Kit Bag of Preparation.** Consider your plan of action. How can you go about making changes in your life? What tools do you need? Who can support you? You don't need to stay too long at this stage – all planning and no action get a similar result to all action and no planning,

and that's not the result you want! But the preparation needs to be right for you, whether that be emptying the house of all forms of chocolate temptation if you decide you want to lose weight, or drawing up a full-blown, all-singing, all-dancing project plan complete with bells and whistles. The coaching approach of exploring your options is invaluable here to ensure that you can check off the items you need for your change. Chapter 10 has more planning suggestions for you.

4. **Climb the Mountain of Action.** You're all prepared and you're ready to go! You're firing on all cylinders and you feel like an unstoppable force. You appreciate all the benefits of having worked through the first three stages now, because your strength, will, and resolve increase with every step towards your goal. Take note of what happens along the way, and expect a few sidesteps, too, in order to move forward. Check out Part III and IV to see how the actions you take can affect different areas of your life.
5. **Claim the Flag of Consolidation.** Your life change only becomes embedded when you work out how to maintain it over time. Perhaps you'll fall back into an earlier stage of change (such as back into contemplation) from time to time – that's a normal part of consolidation. Think of this relapse as a way of fully integrating your changes into your life for the long term. Coaching is wonderful at maintaining and renewing your promise to yourself to change, not simply when doing so is easy.

Presenting the passport for your coaching journey

You already have everything you need to get started on the process of changing your life. The gifts that you may discover on your coaching journey are ones that you already have, although you may not yet recognise them. These gifts fall into three main areas:



- ✔ **You are unique and no one but you is so well equipped to create the life you want.** Consider what you need to live a whole and full life.
You have to put yourself first, without being selfish, in order to be of service to anyone else.
- ✔ **You are infinitely resourceful.** You're capable of more than you often achieve. Allow yourself to take control of your life, and you get even better results.

✔ **You have choices and freedom.** Even at times when you feel a little trapped by circumstances, you can take responsibility for your own attitude towards those barriers. You can trust your senses and tap into what helps you make the right choices in the future.

Chapter 19 can inspire you with more life coaching beliefs.

Choosing Life Coaching for Long-term Results

Plenty of places offer life coaching answers. You can attend a training course and come away with practical options. You can read a great book and be inspired. You can talk to wise friends and get guidance. You can find a role model and kickstart your motivation. These options are highly effective in their own way, but they do have drawbacks. In order for any or all of these strategies really to work, you have to do two things.

A brief history of life coaching

Coaching has been around for a long, long time. Certainly Plato's *Dialogues* from fourth-century BC Greece have many elements of what we think of as coaching – challenging assumptions, exploring ideas, making sense of the real world.

Modern coaching owes much to the American sports coach. Think of the baseball coach cheering on his team, dispensing advice and motivation.

Coaching in business has become increasingly popular over the last decade. A business coach works in much the same way as a sports coach – encouraging performance and outcomes, and building skills and talent.

Whole life coaching emerged more recently and is now gaining popularity in the business world as well as with private individuals. If you're also a manager you may find that the ideas in this book are ones you can bring into the workplace surprisingly easily. Many organisations recognise that if their staff are happy, then business productivity goes up. Senior people in companies sometimes work with a coach who not only supports them to achieve business excellence but also takes a whole life perspective on areas like work/life balance and personal fulfilment.

My Web site guides you through the different kinds of professional coaches that you may come across if you decide you want to work with a professional coach: www.reachforstarfish.com.

1. First, you have to make those options, inspiration, guidance, and motivation your own.
2. Then you have to commit to carrying out the plan of action, even when your motivation wavers.

Be honest now. How many times have you made a commitment to change and found that, sooner or later, the resolve that you had at the start has deserted you, or that the methods you have chosen seem too hard? That wavering point is where coaching steps in to strengthen your resolve.

Life coaching generates in abundance all the inspiration, motivation, guidance, and practical options that you need. At the end of a coaching conversation or activity (either with a professional coach or simply with yourself) you come away with an action plan that you are genuinely excited about and can't wait to start. Life coaching constantly supports you in finding the right solutions for you as you eliminate limiting beliefs about what is possible in your world.

Tuning In to Your Inner Coach

You can move your life forward with the help of your very own inner coach. You may know this inner coach already, but I'm guessing that you don't yet give it the respect it deserves. And the reason you don't is because you've spent far too long listening to the whining voice of your inner critic. Well, it's time to make a change and let your inner coach come out to play! You can start by understanding more about these two aspects of yourself.

Introducing your split personality!

Your inner critic loves to talk, warning you of all the terrible consequences of everything you do. Your inner critic speaks from your past, and selectively recalls only those things that went wrong – when you failed an exam, when you didn't get the date with the love of your life, and when you were made redundant. So your inner critic tries to make your present and your future safe and problem-free by wrapping you in cotton wool and persuading you to take as little action in the present as possible so you don't trip up. And yet all the negative conversations you have with your inner critic make you feel miserable and stifled in that cotton wool instead of all warm and cosy. And that's not the worst. Your inner critic is quite prepared to use nasty tactics to hold you back from living out your dangerous dreams for yourself. It distorts and stretches reality so that it focuses only on what you think you *can't* do or be. Your

inner critic is not afraid to speak its mind and tell you you're not good enough, you're too fat, or too stupid.

The good news is that you also have an inner coach, cheering you on to have a go and celebrating your progress. The inner coach speaks from your future. That version of you who knows how it all turns out and is bursting to tell you that everything is going to be just fine! Yes, you had some hard challenges along the way and even periods when you felt deeply unhappy or frustrated. But your inner coach looks back along your life and sees a great deal more to celebrate – lots of fun and growth and love and happiness. Even what you thought were catastrophes turned out to be blessings in disguise. For example, getting made redundant resulted in a total career change where you discovered your true calling. And how lucky that the love of your life didn't agree to that date, because you then went on to meet the *real* love of your life, someone who you didn't, at that time, find remotely interesting!

The job of your inner coach is to encourage you to create a great future by taking positive action in your present. Your inner coach wants to tell you that you can trust yourself, because as long as you take positive action, everything will be okay. You can work out how to deal with any false steps along the way and, instead of feeling miserable and stifled wrapped up in all that cotton wool, you can feel energised and free, breathing in the fresh air and looking forward to your next adventure.

You may not hear the voice of your inner coach very often because that of your inner critic is so strident and ever-present. And when you do hear your inner coach, your inner critic is quick to slap down the wisdom, labelling the viewpoint as 'unrealistic' or even 'self-indulgent'.



Inner critics are fantastic at their jobs and convince us that worry, cynicism, and doubt are the only real things to be guided by, and that optimism and self-belief are delusions. But both voices come from you and both perspectives have value, in the right proportions. Sometimes your inner critic points out something useful that you really need to take account of. (Inner critics do often start with a grain of truth to lure you into a dialogue where they can really go for the full guilt trip.)

You may not even know that your inner coach has a voice you can trust – you may simply let your inner critic run on autopilot so that the inner coach never gets a chance to fly the plane. You can get far better results in your life if you switch their roles so that your inner coach is the captain of the plane and your inner critic has a turn only in support and under strict supervision!

Giving yourself the gift of your own good opinion

Your inner coach – just like a professional coach if you decide to work with one – supports you in the following ways:

- ✔ Encourages you to set challenging and inspiring goals for your life that are in tune with your values
- ✔ Believes you can do it!
- ✔ Expects the best from you and knows you can meet that expectation
- ✔ Explores options with you
- ✔ Helps to generate action steps that work for you
- ✔ Keeps you moving forwards
- ✔ Celebrates your accomplishments along the way
- ✔ Delights in the positive results you get for yourself

Your inner critic, on the other hand, seeks to do the opposite of all that and delights in the times when you indulge in self-sabotage, keeping you stuck in loops that go nowhere.

Who would you rather listen to?

Turning up the volume on the voice of your inner coach

The first step in engaging with your inner coach is letting its voice come through loud and clear amid all the white noise created by your inner critic. Try this activity:



1. **Set aside 15 minutes in a place where you won't be disturbed.** Let your thoughts wander freely for a few moments, maybe bringing your attention to something you have experienced recently, perhaps a project at work or an exchange with a friend or loved one.
2. **Start to listen to the voices that come through.** Can you hear the voice of your inner critic? What does it sound like? What does it say? How often does it use negative language? Do you hear a lot of 'should', 'ought', or 'must'? Is it taunting, mocking, strident, bitchy, sarcastic? Or is it sorrowful, fed-up, depressed, dejected? Or something else entirely?

3. **Now imagine a voice that is the opposite.** How does it sound? What does it say? Is it a voice you know and love or one that is delightfully fresh to you? If you turn up the volume on this voice, how do you feel? Does your inner critic complain? If so, let it fade away and fizzle out all by itself and keep turning up the volume on the voice of your inner coach. What new insights does it offer you? What feelings does it produce for you?
4. **Practise this activity frequently.** Fifteen minutes a day over a period of time can soon have you tuning in at will to what your inner coach has to say.



When Jo came to coaching, she found that writing in her journal most effectively helped her to recapture the voice of her inner coach. It also did the trick for taming her inner critic. Whenever she felt an inner critic attack coming on, she stopped and found a few moments to write out what she was feeling. The crazy, spiteful words of her inner critic often seemed ridiculous written out on the page in black and white. Within 5 or 10 minutes of doing this she found herself starting to write down the wisdom coming from her inner coach. She said that for her, writing out the dialogue in her head acted almost like a meditation and she was always able to get back into the swing of things feeling refreshed and energised.

Having a coaching conversation

If you choose to work with a professional coach, the coaching conversations will have certain characteristics. You can incorporate these characteristics into your own self-coaching. Here's what makes a coaching conversation so uniquely purposeful:

- ✔ The focus is on knowing what you want to get out of the conversation itself. Your inner coach encourages you to set a goal for the session itself, for example, 'By the end of this time I've set aside with myself, I want to have clarified and fully understood my limiting belief about my ability to close a sale.'
- ✔ Your inner coach asks you many powerful questions that get you thinking deeply about what's going on and what's important. Some of these questions may be ones you've never considered before or dared to ask yourself.
- ✔ A fair amount of clarification occurs during the conversation. Communication can be a slippery beast and a good coach never assumes too much. Your inner coach listens out for the voice of the inner critic and notes those times when you lapse into 'shoulds, coulds, and woulds' because that's a sign that

you don't really *want* to do something but think you really *ought* to!

- ✔ The coaching conversation involves a strong call to action, but this doesn't always mean that you identify a full-blown plan. The action may be that you need to explore more options, do some more research, or even reflect more on the issue in hand. But the call to action from your inner coach ensures that you move yourself and your thinking forward.
- ✔ The focus is fully on your current agenda, within the context of your whole life. If you decide that your burning priority in life is perfecting your golf swing, then that will be the focus until you choose to move to another aspect of your life. But because coaching tends to highlight the connections – or lack of them – in your whole life, you're likely to change your agenda fairly frequently for yourself when other priorities take over.

Identifying Your Current Priorities for Coaching

Knowing where to start with applying coaching techniques to the elements of your life may seem hard. Sometimes you get a clear sense that one particular area, your work or career for example, is the one that requires the most attention. At other times you have the general feeling that all areas of your life need a good overhaul or boost of momentum.

This section enables you to really home in on the area of your life in which coaching can provide the biggest and most immediate benefits. You can keep coming back to this section to take a rain check every so often, because one thing's for sure – your priorities change over time, and that's just as it should be.

Dividing up your life into handy compartments may seem simplistic. Your life is full of connections and consequences, so you don't really move attention from your career to finance issues to relationships throughout your day, even if your diary indicates that you're at work from 8 a.m. until 6 p.m., with a lunch appointment with your accountant, and an evening spent with your family. All areas of your life intrude on and complement each other. However, when applying coaching techniques dividing these distinct areas of your life into separate compartments is helpful so that you can be very specific about the changes you want to make and the actions you need to take. You can then think about the impact the changes may have on other areas of your life.



Working out what’s really important to you (your core values in life) gives you a great entry point into coaching, because doing so can highlight common themes or specific areas of your life that are out of kilter. Read Chapter 6 for more about identifying your core values.

The following activity helps you to identify your compelling current priority for life coaching if you haven’t identified one yet.



- 1. In Table 1-1, mark in column A how important each factor is to you.** Three ticks indicate that the factor is very important to you, two ticks mean that it is moderately important to you, and one tick means that it’s not very important to you.

Table 1-1 Identifying Areas for Coaching

	<i>A. How important is this to me?</i>	<i>B. How satisfied am I with this right now?</i>
Career and work		
I enjoy my work and get satisfaction from it		
I receive appropriate recognition for my work		
I have enough opportunities to develop myself in my work		
Money and wealth		
I am financially secure		
I have enough money to live the kind of lifestyle that I want		
I am creating wealth for my future		
People and relationships		
I enjoy loving family relationships		
I have close and supportive friendships		
I have access to beneficial networks and communities		

(continued)

Table 1-1 (continued)

	<i>A. How important is this to me?</i>	<i>B. How satisfied am I with this right now?</i>
Health and wellbeing		
I take care of my health to prevent illness		
I am fit, strong, flexible, and energetic		
I am emotionally and mentally resilient		
Learning and growing		
I have enough fun and leisure in my life		
I am constantly learning and developing myself		
I have a sense of purpose and meaning in my life		

- 2. Consider what areas, if any, have appeared as priorities for you.** You may be surprised that one or two areas don't warrant three or even two ticks. Or maybe everything has three ticks for you, but you have a sense that some ticks carry more importance for you than others. Don't worry; that's natural. But have a sense of what, when push comes to shove, are the factors that most sustain you.
- 3. Consider each statement in the light of your current level of satisfaction.** Mark three ticks in column B if you're very satisfied, two ticks if you're moderately satisfied, and one tick if you're not very satisfied.
- 4. Look at your results and see how many three-tick matches you have.** Well done if you have a total of six ticks in some areas (the combined ticks in the two columns) – this shows that you're getting high satisfaction from an area of your life that is very important to you.

Are you getting a high level of satisfaction from an area that is quite low in importance to you? That's okay – but perhaps you can consider whether you can shift the balance a little so that your higher-priority areas get some more attention. Or maybe this highlights that something great is going on in your life that you've begun to take for granted.

Look out for the areas that only get one or two ticks on a satisfaction level. These are your more urgent priority areas of focus as you apply coaching techniques to your life.

You can find lots more practical help in Part III, which looks closely at the different life areas. If the activity has got you thinking about how unbalanced your life is, hop straight to Chapter 15. Chapter 16 can help you if the activity highlighted a big area of change that feels a little scary.



Pinpointing priorities

Lauren completed Table 1-1 with some surprising results. She felt that her working life was the priority area for her to address, so she was expecting the importance/satisfaction gaps to be pretty big. Surprisingly, only one area had a real shortfall – her sense of recognition for her efforts. Lauren found that recognition was highly important to her at work and she was very dissatisfied with that aspect, even though she scored three ticks each for enjoying work and her potential for skills development. Before she analysed work in this way she would have said that she was generally very unhappy with all aspects of her work. Lauren's feeling of not being recognised was affecting her positive feelings about the other aspects. Not feeling recognised at work was linked to some of her own negative beliefs about herself – 'Unless people tell me so every single day, I don't feel that I'm doing a good enough job.'

Coaching helped Lauren accept that external feedback may always be erratic and may not always relate to how good a job she was doing. The internal recognition she could give to herself was within her control and, with coaching, began to feel more satisfying. As a result she was able to ask for feedback more openly because she felt surer in herself.

Lauren had allocated two ticks to 'family' and this took her aback. She'd always thought of herself as *very* family oriented. Over the years, family had become less important to her than friends and even than her wider networks. Lauren was getting high satisfaction from the connections she had with her parents and siblings and she began to wonder if she wanted to address this lowering in importance. Her family was very good at making time for her and yet she'd reduced the time she gave back to her parents and siblings. Lauren found that this issue had become one of the most compelling for her to address.

Lauren's priority order for these actions turned out to be as follows:

- ✓ Examining and working on changing her negative beliefs about herself at work.
- ✓ Improving the quality of her communication with her family.
- ✓ Getting recognition at work through feedback.

