

PART I

DECIDING WHETHER TO FIRE YOUR THERAPIST

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CHAPTER 1

Why Therapy Might Not Be Working

It's really not that complicated. Most people want a better and more meaningful life. And they want results. Wherever I go, I hear something along the lines of the following when I'm introduced: "Wow, you're a doctor and a coach! I've been looking for a coach but never knew where to turn." More than ever before, people are seeking alternative forms of help. They're not seeking it because they're abnormal or because they have any type of clinical mental malady. Instead, they want fresh and effective guidance about everything from relationships to careers to spiritual issues.

Just about every day, I encounter someone who confirms my belief about this universal and wide-ranging need for practical life guidance. For instance, I'm in a cab and the driver reveals he is an unemployed Ph.D. in chemistry wishing he had a great career; I'm on an airplane speaking to an executive who is frustrated

that he is getting mediocre results in both his marriage and at work; I'm buying a shirt and the salesperson expresses frustration not only because she is not using her master's degree but also because she longs for a spiritual connection to give her life more meaning.

In short, you, like most people, want something more. You don't want someone to tell you what to do per se, but someone to facilitate the design of your master plan and then help you make choices and implement changes. As much as you might like to do all this on your own, you can benefit from a coach, mentor, teacher, or adviser who both motivates you and serves as an accountability figure. This relationship helps you maintain your progress.

We are entering a groundbreaking era of coaching and other change modalities. In the past, coaching tended to be defined narrowly. It was primarily a vehicle for people having trouble with jobs or hoping to enhance sports performance. In recent years, however, the concept of a life coach or an executive coach has emerged and become something of a trend. We're seeing more and more people turn to coaches to help them with a wide range of issues. Coaching methods are expanding and becoming more sophisticated in response. Coaches are learning how to help people achieve peak performance, raise confidence, define the next phase of their career, manage money better, improve their relationships, make more friends, manage their weight and achieve wellness, date more effectively, manage bad habits and even addictions, develop their religious or spiritual sides, design retirement, or search for a more meaningful existence.

Kayla is a good example of someone who probably would have gone it alone in the past, but today recognizes the value of coaching. A junior at an excellent midwestern college, Kayla was feeling pressure from both her school adviser and her parents to choose a major. Kayla was open to this, but had no idea what she truly wanted to choose. To help her select a major, she engaged the services of a coach who was recommended by one of her roommates. The coach encouraged her to begin thinking about what she truly was interested in studying. He provided her

with different scenarios to consider; he helped her organize her thinking about different majors and career possibilities. By asking Kayla questions and helping her understand what her responses implied, they were able to narrow the possibilities to three. Of these she finally selected the one she truly wanted: sociology.

Why couldn't Kayla figure this out for herself? This is an important question. The answer is that people are often socialized by their culture, parents, and peers to stop paying attention to what they really want. So a coach will often sift through this interference from others and free the client to discover her true desires. By providing Kayla with a process to analyze her options and by offering objective counsel about those options, the coach was able to help Kayla make a decision.

People like Kayla are normal. Their lives are a work in progress, a work that can be changed in accordance with their hopes and dreams. There is a reason why coaching has been embraced by athletes and the corporate world. Now the public at large can capitalize on coaching techniques and tools to improve just about every aspect of their lives.

Coaching Meets an Emerging Need

The world is smaller: globalization is the rage, whether we like it or not. Due to ever-expanding technologies such as the Internet, overnight global mail, world cell phones, and video conferencing, geographic distance does not seem to matter anymore. Everybody wants a piece of the pie. Resources are scarce. Competition is fierce. Success is harder to come by. The American Dream or what I call the World Dream is harder to attain. There is tremendous concern over terrorism and destruction of the environment. Whether a newly graduating college student, a thirtysomething unhappy with his career choice, or a senior citizen embarking on retirement, most people are hungry for help. Their uncertainty, anxiety, or ambition prompts them to seek assistance.

Normal people, however, often are unsure about where to seek help. Some are willing to try therapy but discover that after

a while, it's not meeting their needs, for they don't have a symptom of mental illness for which traditional therapy is equipped to handle. Or they take an effective medication for an isolated mental health symptom, are now symptom-free, and now want coaching to address their life plan. Others avoid therapy completely because of the attached stigma that seeking help is only for those with mental illness. For many years, friends and family would often react to the news of someone being in therapy with a comment such as "What, are you crazy?" Ironically, insurance companies who sometimes pay for mental health services will often turn someone down for a health care or disability plan if they have a "mental health history."

The fact is that Freud and his later disciples would see a normal person working toward life-optimizing goals during one session and then would see an individual with severe mental illness during the next session. I don't believe this "mixed" approach is viable. Different skills and services are needed for normal people versus those with serious mental illness. Unfortunately, many people aren't aware of this distinction. As a result, they are often disappointed with the results of therapy and uncertain if coaching is right for them.

Noah was very bright and in his early thirties. He was also very shy, which made him uneasy when meeting women and dating. He enlisted the help of a therapist, who diagnosed him as having a low-grade depression. In the sessions Noah was asked to discuss his feelings of depression, but Noah said he wasn't depressed and that he was simply shy. The therapist disagreed. Still, Noah continued with the therapy, assuming his therapist would be able to find a way to free him from his debilitating shyness and help him achieve his goal of dating. The therapist, however, was not focused on this goal, at least not as an end in and of itself. He wanted to help Noah dig down deeper and discover the root causes of his shyness. And so Noah and his therapist spent ten sessions digging, and though Noah found the process enlightening and believed the therapist was smart and sincere, he wasn't any closer to his goal of having an easier time relating to women. While he found it interesting to explore the somewhat strained

relationship he had with his mother while growing up, this exploration didn't suddenly release him from his shyness. Finally, Noah had enough and stopped going to the therapist.

Two months later, Noah began seeing a coach who specialized in dating issues. The coach helped raise Noah's confidence by referring him to a public speaking course. As his confidence grew at speaking, the coach began to work on his dating skills. He asked Noah to concentrate on meeting women in grocery stores, the gym, and on the Internet and asking them to coffee or a meal. This actually went well and Noah found he had at least one date every weekend. It was a very practical, methodical approach, and it was exactly what Noah needed to overcome his shyness and start meeting women.

Of course, it's not always this simple. Coaching clients can have complex problems that require intervention in many different areas of their lives, and it can take time to achieve their goals. Nonetheless, it's a viable option for normal people, one that has become a highly effective, sophisticated discipline. To understand how this is so, we first need to place normal on a continuum and look at who on that continuum will benefit from coaching.

Coaching Is for Normal People

Please forgive my use of the term "normal." It is a handy word to describe people who don't have serious mental illness, but it is also subject to misinterpretation. All people have issues in their lives that cause discomfort or frustration. At certain points these issues may cause them to feel or act in ways that result in some decrease in normal functioning. They may avoid a certain person; they may lose a job because of their anxiety; they may feel disconnected from others; or they may feel empty inside. During these periods, "normal" may be the last word that comes to mind when describing these individuals. Nonetheless, these people are able to function at a relatively high level throughout their lives. Everybody has down moods and periodic losses. A normal person is usually able to keep going in the face of these losses, frustrations, mild symptoms, and

desire for life optimization. They consistently utilize coping skills that prevent repeated lapses into catatonia, a manic rampage, unemployment, or social isolation.

Let's place "normal" on a continuum with mental illness:

Mental Illness	←→	NORMAL	→	Outcomes/Self-actualization
(Therapy & Meds)		(Coaching)		(Goals & Change Attained)
<i>Symptomatic</i>		<i>Symptom-free or Asymptomatic with Treatment</i>		

Within this continuum, coaching is useful for the normal group. If you're already fully self-actualized, you probably don't need coaching or therapy. But for many, self-actualization comes out of coaching. If you have symptoms of a mental illness, you frequently require medication and sometimes require therapy as well. If you have ambitious goals you want to achieve in life, it will be important for you to eventually utilize coaching.

Now, of course, many people can move between two of the points on the continuum. For instance, you may begin with a depression and seek medication. When you respond to medication and become asymptomatic, you fall in the normal range and often begin coaching at that point. With the help of medication you function well in the normal range, and with the simultaneous use of coaching you can work toward behavioral change and self-actualization.

When a person begins to work on himself or herself, therapy is often what is utilized because of the large numbers of therapists as compared to coaches. At first, in therapy, talking about feelings is experienced as helpful, and a working through of the past (making peace with family disappointments) is useful. As is frequently the case, as time proceeds, therapy is often no longer useful to many normal people because they begin to need to work on their vision of their future life and goals, and this usually does not get addressed well in therapy, as it does in coaching. Now let's take a more focused look at who can benefit from therapy versus coaching.

Therapy or medication is good for symptoms of mental illness such as depression or anxiety. Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), a form of therapy, helps people examine their thoughts and sometimes changes the way they think and feel. CBT aims to lessen symptoms of mental illness. Therapy is also appropriate when people simply want to talk about a significant issue bothering them or causing symptoms.

In other words, when people require a clinical and empathetic ear, therapy is useful. Therapy also is used for significant symptoms of mental illness, and it is useful for people to discuss their past in detail to make peace with their history to whatever extent possible.

Coaching, on the other hand, facilitates working toward one's vision of his or her life and goals; coaching helps effect change and transforms lives. It also is useful for those who want to achieve specific outcomes in some area or areas of their life. Coaching is not mainly about symptoms of mental illness that cause dysfunction. Instead, it focuses on achieving a range of positive objectives, such as doing better in a career, improving relationships, or becoming a more spiritual person. The coaching process may involve some discussion of feelings, but the intent of the discussion is to set the client free to achieve objectives. Unlike therapists, coaches don't confine themselves to one role. Instead, they can help create action plans, offer options, and measure progress toward objectives. They are often hands-on with goal implementation. The coaching process is dedicated to achieving personal or organizational greatness.

Another interesting difference between therapists and coaches involves terminology. Therapists, as do physicians, usually refer to clients as *patients*. This makes sense in that the patients are seen to have disorders and diseases. In contrast, coaches see their clients as *customers* who have come to utilize their services as coaches. For this reason, I call the people who come to see me *clients*. Coaching also tends to follow the lead of the client, while therapy tends to be therapist-driven. For example, the history of providing therapy and analysis included the therapist telling the patient why they were doing things and thinking in certain ways.

I've created the two following lists that spell out the specific problems or indications for which either coaching or therapy is appropriate. Determine which list seems better suited for the issues or goals you're facing:

Frequent Indications for Therapy and/or Medication (Note issues and problems)

- Negative thoughts
- Intensity of emotional symptoms causing dysfunction
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Attention deficit disorder
- Schizophrenia
- Bipolar disorder
- Severe eating disorder
- Severe grief
- Severe addiction (or refuses recovery from or reduction of addictive behavior)
- Shame (feeling inferior to others)

Frequent Indications for Coaching (Note goals)

- Get unstuck
- Achieve vision of life in some or all spheres
- Accomplish career ambitions
- Address performance issues or goals
- Work toward empowerment goals
- Date better
- Enrich significant relationship
- Build resilience
- Manage mild addictions or bad habits (procrastination, sloppiness)
- Improve nutritional habits
- Work toward greater wellness
- Accomplish greater sports performance

- Optimize body image
- Raise self-confidence
- Improve financial management
- Raise school performance
- Increase energy and stamina
- Manage severe addictions while compliant with recovery

Looking at these two lists, you may still find yourself in a quandary about whether you require therapy or coaching. You may be suffering from anxiety, yet you also want to get unstuck and achieve goals and vision. It's possible that you could benefit from medication as well as coaching. The odds are, however, that once treated, you fall within the normal range of the continuum, so that even if you're somewhere between mental illness and normal, coaching would be a good choice. Remember that coaching is compatible with medication if you are completely or almost symptom-free.

If you're still unsure if coaching or therapy is better for you, or if you should fire your therapist and switch to a coach, consider the specific benefits people report achieving from being coached:

Potential Gains from Coaching (Outcomes)

- Achieved vision and goals
- Improved career performance and satisfaction
- Stronger relationships
- More effective dating
- Greater resilience when stressed
- Improved nutrition
- Better body image
- Weight management
- More friends/better friendships
- Improved family relationships
- More community involvement/volunteering
- Working out regularly and more effectively
- More involvement in spirituality or organized religion

- More fun
- Better home environment created
- Improved leadership qualities
- More purpose
- Improved task and time management
- Greater happiness and satisfaction
- More and better sex
- Empowerment
- Bad habits managed
- Better management of substance use and other addictions (person is in good control or in recovery)
- Greater self-confidence
- Achieved financial goals and improved money management
- Optimized school performance
- Increased energy and stamina
- Athletic prowess
- Optimized wellness
- Life more in balance

I suspect that one or more of the gains found in the outcomes listed above are high on your priority list. If so, coaching may be your better option.

Here's another way to make the determination between therapy and coaching. Coaching is for normal people, and though the boundaries of normality can become a bit hazy, you can determine if you fall roughly within its boundaries by using the following checklist:

Normality Checklist

- ☐ Are generally content with life, even if you have goals yet to accomplish
- ☐ Cope well with some of the problems you encounter
- ☐ Function effectively in many (if not all) areas of your life
- ☐ Have not been diagnosed with a specific mental disorder (or it's in remission)

- ☐ Have a grip on the reality of your situation (even if you're not handling it effectively)
- ☐ Are accomplished at some aspects of your life
- ☐ Have some productive, fulfilling relationships
- ☐ Have no severe addictions to drugs or alcohol (or in recovery)
- ☐ Find satisfaction and meaning in at least some activities

Here's another way to look at normality. The following are common situations people face. After each situation, I'll suggest whether coaching or therapy is called for. Use these "if-then" scenarios to evaluate if therapy or coaching would be better for you:

If-Then Scenarios

If I believe a lot of what I do for a living isn't particularly meaningful, then I need to see a coach.

If I sit in my room all day and have trouble even making a phone call, let alone holding a job or going out with friends, then I need to see a therapist.

If I haven't had a date in more than a year and am unable to form a romantic relationship, then I need to see a coach.

If I can't go to the store without having a panic attack, then I need to see a therapist or a psychiatrist.

If I have adopted a series of ritual behaviors such as washing my hands fifty times a day or checking locks obsessively that prevent me from enjoying even routine activities, then I need to see a therapist or a psychiatrist.

If I am neurotic about catching certain diseases and am often anxious when facing stressful situations, then I need to see a therapist.

If I believe everyone is out to get me and suspect people are spying on me, then I need to see a therapist or a psychiatrist.

If I find myself struggling to find a sense of purpose, then I need to see a coach.

If I find myself hurting myself in some way or have suicidal thoughts, then I need to see a therapist.

If I'm pessimistic about my chances for meaningful relationships and convinced that I'm never going to be successful in my career, *then* I need to see a coach.

How You Know You Are Ready for Coaching

You are talked out. You have talked to friends, relatives, and even therapists. You find you are searching for something or are just not satisfied, but just talking about it does not help you feel better any more. You know you are headed somewhere but you need some sort of facilitator to guide you or at last accompany you down the path. You want to make your own decisions, but it would be useful to have someone understand you and help present alternative choices, to work with someone who has a method to guide you in planning the next phase of your life and career. Everyone you know seems to just listen or tell you advice that you don't find useful. Deep inside, you realize it is time to work with a coach, someone who understands that your life is a work in progress and that you are ready to work hard at it again.

But I'm getting ahead of myself. Let's begin by reading the following Inspiration and then completing the following exercise, The Ocean Yell. You'll also see that I've included an example of how a client completed this exercise. In addition, you'll find this individual's sample blog, designed to encourage you to write your thoughts in a blog online or in a journal, about the topics discussed in this chapter and how they relate to you.

DR. JOE'S INSPIRATION

"Coaching unlocks your deepest wishes by raising the possibility and probability that buried truth can be transformed into vibrant reality."

Full Life Exercise

The Ocean Yell

If I were to yell on an empty beach with the waves breaking (no one else can overhear) . . . what do I want in my life that is not there now, what would I yell out in each sphere?

Sphere	I would yell the following: "I want . . ."
Self	
Work	
Love	
Family	
Body	
Friends	
Community	
Spirit	
Money	
Fun	
Home	

SUSAN'S RESPONSE

Sphere	I would yell the following: "I want . . ."
Self	I want to be confident!
Work	I want a career I love!
Love	I want a great boyfriend and eventual husband!
Family	I want to get along with my father!
Body	I want to lose twenty-five pounds!
Friends	I want a few more close friends!

(continued)

Sphere	I would yell the following: "I want . . ."
Community	I want to volunteer somewhere!
Spirit	I want to believe in something bigger than everything!
Money	I want more money so I won't have to worry!
Fun	I want to have more fun!
Home	I want to have a home I love!

SUSAN’S BLOG

I am ready for coaching. I want to get my life in shape. Specifically, I want to address my issues and work toward things I really want. I want to get less anxious and stop getting so irritated with others. This seems unnecessary and unhelpful to me. I want to make my current job more interesting so I don't get bored. I want to have a great relationship someday. I want to accept my parents' divorce so I can get on with my life. I need to manage my occasional binging and purging. I need to make new friends. I want to be part of a group of friends or at least take part in more group activities. I want to explore other faiths and forms of spirituality. I want to save more money and cut spending on clothes. I want to enjoy life more. I would like a bigger apartment soon.

I am looking forward to working with my coach.