

CHAPTER 1

WHAT IS GROUP COACHING?

*A leader is best
When people barely know he exists,
Not so good when people obey and acclaim him,
Worse when they despise him,
But of a good leader, who talks little
When his work is done, his aim fulfilled
They will all say "We did it ourselves"*
— Lao Tse

THE CONTEXT

The time is now! The coaching industry generates approximately \$1.5 billion (all dollar amounts are in U.S. dollars unless otherwise noted) annually¹ with group coaching quickly gaining ground. The economic events that began in 2008 continue to make group coaching a pronounced growth area for clients.

Group coaching is still a young profession as can be seen in the ICF Global Coaching Survey (2009)² estimated that there are approximately 30,000 active coaches. A majority of coaches has been operating for fewer than ten years.

When asked about their coaching specialties, 58.1 percent indicated that their specialty involved leadership, 57.8 percent indicated executive coaching, and 53.6 percent indicated business or organizational issues.

In 2007, \$139.39 billion was spent by U.S. organizations on employee learning and development. Two-thirds or \$83.62 billion was spent on the internal learning function, including staff salaries, and internal development costs. One-third, or \$50.77 billion, was spent on workshops, vendors, and external events.³

Throughout this chapter we will explore:

1. Is group coaching for you?
2. The diversity of group coaching—models for group coaching
3. What group coaching can look like—virtual/in person and corporate/public
4. Why group coaching is even more important today
5. Continuum of group processes: coaching, training, facilitation, and retreats
6. What is the role of the group coach?

You will meet and hear from other group coaches undertaking this work with their clients while reading through this book.

WHAT IS GROUP COACHING?

Fusing together principles, skills, and practices from the realm of group development, coaching, and facilitation, group coaching can be defined as follows:

Group coaching—a small-group process throughout which there is the application of coaching principles for the purposes of personal or professional development, the achievement of goals, or greater self-awareness, along thematic or non-thematic lines.

—Jennifer Britton, MES, CPT, CPCC, Potentials Realized

Ginger Cockerham, MCC (creator of the “Power of Groups”), defines group coaching as:

a facilitated group process that is led by a professional coach and formed with the intention of maximizing the combined energy, experience, and wisdom of individuals who chose to join in order to achieve organizational objectives and/or individual goals.

Grounded in coaching processes and skills, group coaching utilizes core coaching skills and competencies, while adapting skills and approaches from facilitation and training.

The International Coach Federation (ICF) defines coaching as “partnering with clients in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximize their personal and professional potential.”

The ICF continues, “Coaching honors the client as the expert in his/her life and work, and believes that every client is creative, resourceful, and whole.

“Standing on this foundation, the coach’s responsibility is to:

- Discover, clarify, and align with what the client wants to achieve;
- Encourage client self-discovery;
- Elicit client-generated solutions and strategies; and
- Hold the client responsible and accountable.”

Source: www.coachfederation.org

Over the past two decades I’ve worn an array of hats—manager, facilitator, trainer, coach and performance improvement specialist—as I have engaged with groups throughout the learning process. Over the last six years, in fusing coaching with my other approaches, I have seen even greater impact in our work together. Supporting hundreds of coaches in acquiring group coaching skills has led me to identify core skills and approaches which make great group coaches.

I believe that *great* group coaches bring to their profession solid group facilitation skills, as well as mastery of core coaching skills and approaches. They create a solid and intimate connection with their groups, and listen for what the participants want is important to them, so that the group’s agenda is respected. Great group coaches adopt their style and approach based on the different needs, creating the space for clients to learn from each other and share experiences is paramount in the group coaching process.

Most significantly, group coaches distinguish themselves from other group facilitators with their strong focus on having the client identify and take action on their goals. A key priority for group coaches is to hold the space for clients *to be accountable* for taking steps in achieving their goals and *integrating their learning* to their “real life” and work. It is this focus on making the learning and results stick that drew me to coaching years ago, and continues to be a primary focus and driver in my work.

As we will see later in this chapter, group coaching exists along a continuum of group processes, including training (workshops, retreats), facilitation, and other group processes. Coaches will find that they sit on different places along the continuum, heavily influenced by what the client wants. Some programs will be more *pure* group coaching than others. The continuum is offered as a foundational principle, which we will continue to revisit throughout the book.

THE DIVERSITY OF GROUP COACHING—IN PERSON, VIRTUAL, CORPORATE, AND PUBLIC

In her interview for this book, Suzee Eibling, the coordinator of the Coach U Group Coaching SIG, commented on the tremendous diversity that exists within the coaching profession around what’s offered to both individuals and group coaching. Throughout the book you will hear directly from a dozen coaches about

the group coaching programs they offer, as well as their insights on what makes this work successful and rewarding. The sections “In the Spotlight” include spotlights and comments from group coaches undertaking this work.

Group coaching is occurring in corporations, small businesses, government programs, and with the general public, either as intact groups or groups of strangers coming together. Gaining significant ground in North America, group coaching is also taking root across Europe and Australasia.

Regardless of the themes groups are coached around, at its simplest distinction, programs may be in person or virtual. Chapter 6 of this book provides you with more information on the considerations for group coaching programs in virtual environments.

What Does Group Coaching Look Like?

As you may have guessed, group coaching can take a number of forms. Group coaching is becoming just as diverse as clients’ needs and preferences are.

Throughout this book, we are going to explore a number of case studies—programs that take place in person and those that take place virtually (by phone or web). We will also explore the work of coaches and programs that are delivered in organizational settings, as well as those marketed publicly to individuals who then form a group.

In-Person Programs

In-person group coaching programs may include:

- A one-hour drop-in session with different participants each week, where clients are coached on specific themes or topics;
- A six-hour program delivered over the course of several weeks or months in smaller modules (i.e., one-hour sessions) to the same participants;
- An evening group coaching program; or
- A one- to five-day intensive group coaching program.

From Experience: In-Person Female Entrepreneur Group Coaching

One of my favorite group coaching programs that I both developed and delivered was a series of group coaching programs for small business owners. As part of a

nine-month government-funded program for new female entrepreneurs, I was invited to launch the first two weeks of the program several years ago. For ten consecutive business days I met the women for a three-hour group coaching session.

I was asked by the program coordinator to launch this intensive nine-month program by coaching the group and setting a positive learning foundation. We had thirty hours to create and move through a very powerful business development program using a group coaching approach. Over the span of those two weeks, the women and I explored topics such as strengths, values, the wheel of life, work-life, and time management, as well as core business areas such as business vision and planning. Having been given *carte blanche* from the program coordinator, I was able to really bring in a wide variety of approaches and coaching tools. We had small group discussions, large group discussions, assessments, and visualizations, and we kept journals. Each afternoon, I designed the next session from where we had left off in the morning with the questions and priorities. The group's feedback at the end of the session as well as the check-ins the next morning iteratively pointed us to the next topic.

This experience allowed me to truly clarify the difference between using a training and coaching approach. It also allowed me to experiment with many of the core coaching tools in a small group environment. Looking back almost four years later, more than 90 percent of these women are still self-employed, a much higher statistic than the norm.

Practically, the experience of working with two separate groups of female entrepreneurs allowed me to adapt much of the material that I was using as a business faculty member and lecturer for the group coaching context. This experience also created the foundation for the 90 Day BizSuccess Group Coaching™ program that I now offer quarterly to business owners globally, in a virtual format.

So, what are other coaches doing in person?



In the Spotlight:
Jill MacFadyen, MSIR, ACC
(www.careercoachjill.com)

Jill MacFadyen, a career coach, writes the following about her group coaching programs in the nonprofit sector:

I offer an in person two-day group coaching program on how to get a new job. It covers dealing with transition issues; identifying values; visioning the future; writing a resumé; job search techniques; writing cover letters; networking; interviewing; and salary negotiation. It is very interactive and

energetic. It runs from 9:00 to 4:30 over a two-day time span. Ideally, there would be a week in between the two sessions.

I also offer a two-hour in person coaching program on any of the topics mentioned above.

JB: Who are your participants/clients? What do they value the most from your programs?

JM: My clients have been local nonprofit agencies. Participants are those looking for a new position. Frequently, they are people who have been laid off. On a personal level, participants have mentioned that they feel empowered and energized afterwards.

JB: What have been the successes of this program?

JM: Clients develop job search skills. We practice in the session and this increases self-confidence. Some who have been in a rut have learned techniques to re-energize their search.

Virtual Programs

In addition to in-person programs, many coaches develop group coaching programs which are delivered virtually—by phone and/or web to clients around the world. Virtual programs might include:

- A one-off group call;
- A monthly group call held with the same participants each month (1 to 1½ hours per session);
- A six-week program delivered weekly by phone (one hour) to a group of eight participants around a common theme;
- A twelve-week program which meets every other week with assigned work in between; or
- A ninety-day program, delivered as both group calls and email support;
- A blended program of two group calls per month, and one individual coaching call between sessions.

From Experience—Needing to Virtualize

Almost a year into my starting my business I gave birth to my son. I quickly realized that I did not want to continue traveling to deliver programs to teams and

groups either locally or around the world. At the same time, I needed to keep revenue coming in to support my growing family. This was enough to push me to look at how I could take my in person offerings virtual, which at the time, revolved around work-life issues, leadership, training issues, and business development issues. The trial-and-error process I undertook during that first intensive year of converting all of my offerings to a virtual format has informed a lot of this book.

As you will see throughout this book, group coaching can be a very powerful vehicle for connecting clients around the world. As a former global manager myself, there is nothing more exciting than having participants from five or six different countries and time zones all on the same group coaching call. The diversity of perspectives, insights, and “ahas!” are greater than we could ever create in an in person environment with the same effort.



In the Spotlight:

Victoria FittsMilgrim, CPCC (www.truelifecoach.net)

Sovereignty Circles is a group coaching program which I offer over a six-month period. It includes group calls twice a month, and a private thirty-minute coaching call once a month. For a full description, please visit www.truelifecoach.net/sovcircles.htm.

JB: Who are your participants/clients? What do they value the most from your programs?

VFM: My clients so far for group coaching have all been women looking for tools to increase self-awareness, self-care, and living as the Sovereign in charge of their own lives. I believe they value:

- The coaching tools I provide to unveil who they are to themselves more fully;
- The connection with others—to see themselves in the mirror;
- The clarity about obstacles they generate internally and how to overcome them.

JB: What have been your successes with group coaching?

VFM: With the Sovereignty Circles, I feel my success comes from creating a safe and loving space of acceptance to try new modes of *being* and *doing*. I have seen my clients grow and become more confident in this container to

moving into authentic action towards their goals. My success comes when I facilitate a place to grow, learn, and take action in alignment with their true selves.

JB: What's the one tip you'd like to share with other coaches as your golden nugget (i.e., your most important lesson)?

VFM: Designing as many ways as possible for the group to interact, listen to each other, and connect even outside the scheduled calls (Yahoo! group, buddy system that rotates), all fosters more trust and openness among participants. This, in turn, makes the calls more lively and open, as people feel safe to be transparent. They can remove their masks.

Public/Corporate Programs

Another distinction I will make throughout the book is that groups may come together in corporate realms, or a group may consist of individual members who are initially strangers to each other. These groups I call public groups.

Corporate group coaching programs are increasingly becoming very popular. Lower in cost than traditional one-on-one coaching, group coaching programs get more employees involved and have the potential for greater impact. As we will see in Chapter 2, a group coaching approach may also build internal capacity and be an important tool in shaping and changing corporate culture.

Typically, corporate group coaching programs will bring together employees from different parts of an organization. Providing employees with the opportunity to share experiences and learn together, the new collective wisdom created by this cross-functional, multi-disciplinary group has the potential to effect significant change within organizations and industries.

Corporate Group Coaching



In the Spotlight: Rita Weiss of Pinnacle Consulting

I currently offer three group coaching programs for business leaders, managers, and business professionals:

1. Thriving in Times of Uncertainty and Change
2. What's Your Next Step? Creating Your Road Map to Success
3. Leadership and Culture: Achieving Results through Inclusive Leadership

I offer three-month and six-month programs that can either be conducted in person or virtually (by phone). In general, my clients choose to start with the three-month program, and about 50 percent continue for a second three-month program. Currently, my group coaching clients have all requested in-person meetings, which I find is generally preferred with corporate clients.

Participants are senior leaders in corporate, government, and academic/educational organizations. I'm currently coaching the senior leadership team at a major government agency, senior administrators at a private college, and leaders and high potential managers at several corporations.

My clients tell me that what they value most are:

- The opportunity to think strategically about issues and challenges and develop long-term plans and strategies;
- Receiving confidential and objective feedback;
- Sharing ideas with and learning from colleagues; and
- Identifying new approaches to achieving their goals and building better relationships.

Successes:

1. I provided a three-month group coaching program for the senior leadership team of a major public company. The team started out fiercely noncollaborative, with entrenched silos and little respect among the VP leaders. As a result of group coaching, the team now appreciates the value of working collaboratively, and they actively work together to resolve issues and achieve individual, team, and organizational objectives.
2. A six-month group coaching program at a global pharmaceutical company resulted in improved cross-cultural communication and interaction, better relationships with colleagues and customers, and promotions for several executives in the coaching program.
3. I provided a three-month, 360 feedback plus group coaching program for the high-potential leaders of a financial services company that resulted in significantly increased leadership skills, improved management of staff, and a clear succession plan for the company.

4. A six-month group coaching program for the administrative leaders (Deans and Assistant Deans) of a private university resulted in a more balanced focus on both the academic and business requirements of leading a successful academic institution.

Other corporate case studies can be found in Chapter 2 under the heading “Business Case for Group Coaching.”

Public Programs



From Experience: Jennifer Britton Public Programs

A number of coaches, like myself, will also design a program and market it for the public domain. In these instances, the inspiration for a new program may come from a direct request from one or more individual clients, requests from past group program participants, or from noticing trends or unfilled gaps in the marketplace.

Over the past six years, I’ve offered a range of programs for the general public in a variety of formats. These programs have included:

The BizSuccess Series: Building on my own work expertise as a former business faculty member who worked with small businesses and startups, I wanted to continue providing high-value programs for my small business and entrepreneurial clients. The 90 Day BizSuccess™ program for business owners was launched in 2006. In 2007, I also added quarterly business retreats held virtually for business owners. The BizSuccess Virtual Retreat is a focused retreat for business owners who are looking to plan and take action on their business. Held over the span of one to two sessions with a follow-up group call, the BizSuccess Virtual Retreat continues to get rave reviews from business owners.

In addition to continuing to offer these programs myself, I also licence these programs to other coaches who wish to offer it to their clients.

Your Balanced Life™: Offered initially as a five-week session in 2004, over the years this program has become a three-month session, meeting twice a month. Several years ago I also adapted it for a one-day intensive format,

which is delivered by phone. This program is called Your Balanced Life Virtual Retreat and has been offered on a quarterly basis.

The inspiration for this program came from my own passion concerning work-life issues as I transitioned into my role as business owner from former global manager. I ran this program quite frequently throughout the period of 2004–2007. I also hosted a blog on the same topic (<http://yourbalancedlife.blogspot.com>).

I now licence this program to other coaches who wish to deliver the material to their clients as a virtual retreat and/or 90-day program.

Get Organized Virtual Retreat™: Partnering with professional organizer and TV host Hellen Buttigieg, the Get Organized Virtual Retreat is designed for individuals who want to take action around, and gain insights on, getting organized. Delivered over one day or two evenings, the program has provided participants with the opportunity to delve into organizing tips, explore their preferences and most importantly, take steps to getting organized in a supportive group environment.

In Chapter 6, you will also read about the highly successful work of three coaches who deliver their work by phone—Heidi Michaels and her virtual vision board program, as well as coaches Eva Gregory and Mary Allen.



In the Spotlight:
Deena Kolbert, CPCC, ORSCC
(www.deenakolbert.com)

Coach Deena Kolbert offers four different group coaching programs across the public and organizational domains. All of her programs are virtual and vary in length from one and one-half hours to two hours, usually with four to six participants. For people in groups that do a lot of professional traveling, she uses a minimum of six people to form the group. Some groups are international, but the language is English. Each group determines the number of times per month that they meet, usually one or two times.

1. Taking Charge of Money Issues: For people seeking to better understand their relationship with money while working towards creating financial well-being—personal, family, institutional, and for some, a broader movement.

These monthly call-in group sessions help them clarify issues, build strong foundations, and look at their feelings and actions in their journey towards change. The experiences are designed to strengthen participants' ability to make sound financial decisions and not feel alone as they explore their behaviors and boundaries or lack thereof. I offer an environment that is structured, supportive, open, and warm. There is time devoted specifically to each client to be heard through reporting back, strategizing actions, and asking for, and receiving, specific support from group members.

My clients are executive leaders who work internationally. While their skills are highly developed professionally, on a personal basis, they have not taken good care of themselves. On a financial basis, they feel they are not showing true leadership in all that they can be.

Skills Used: This co-active group coaching includes experiential exercises, creativity, ORSC (Organization and Relationship Systems Coaching) skills, techniques, and inquiries (assignments) that help each participant identify their financial goals and learn how they can move through the process of acquiring them. In so doing, the participants take responsibility for their decisions, learn to acknowledge their gains, and empower themselves to continue on the journey they have chosen for themselves.

Successes: The financial group improved on many levels. The key learning was the intensity of the work. Some of the issues are very complex and need time and are consciously being worked on. The list is long because much work was accomplished on foundational issues such as communication, accountability, responsibility, values diversity, negotiation, and alignment on choice. Much time was spent on defining, claiming, and knowing the conditions of trust. They all were able to articulate their definition of a rich, fulfilled financial life. Successes include paying several years of back taxes; meeting with family members over financial matters; moving forward on lawsuits; writing wills; combining financial accounts; knowing how and where money is spent; budgeting and making comparisons between proposed and actual spending; living within their budget; and saving money.

Challenges: The leadership skills within this group of women was amazing and they traveled much of the time. Doing follow-up assignments and inquiries between sessions was quite challenging, so little took place between the coaching sessions. Much was learned by doing specific exercises during our times together, but individual actions were hard to come by. Emotionally, they needed time to assimilate the information and then, maybe, little steps were accomplished. This was a self-formed group that found that the financial security aspects had taken over its initial intent, which was to be an emotional

support group. They needed healing time to emotionally get back together, which has been happening.

2. *The Wisdom of Knowing Ourselves:* Provides an opportunity for people to explore and reflect deeply within and with others, as well as to connect in a social and spiritual context that gives them renewed inspiration and a source of confidence, hope, and fulfillment. I direct the focus and intentionality on their journey forward using their deep sacred wisdom. Thus, the sage in us all is brought forth and can be filtered throughout participants' communities and the greater world.

This is a group of strong female leaders, racially diverse, from different professional fields. They want to deepen their knowledge and move to the next level of achievement with more confidence, empowerment, and ease. They want to know that they know and own their own wisdom with confidence within. We work from a philosophical, scientific, body/mind/spirit, and cultural perspective. We also work from a historical, economic, wellness, and social aspect. As women leaders, we are also noticing a "shadow" self—the impostor, coming from people who feel they are unable to internalize a sense of themselves as competent and talented.

Skills Used: I use the co-active coaching model with relationship, group, and team exercises—experiential exercises, creativity, hands-on, exploration of archetypes, meditation, ORSC skills and techniques that help one identify with their personal visions for change and to deepen their knowing.

Successes: The foundation for this group is based on calling forth participants' wisdom from their experiences. The group is relatively new.

Challenges: The standard challenges of building trust and spaciousness for deep work. Each person is responsible for an "opening/closing" ritual/meditation that brings the group together to do the work at hand. Finding leadership at the beginning holds its challenges unless someone jumps in, which is not the case in this group.

3. *Taking Charge of Your Health:* Participants become empowered to take charge of their health care. They "design new alliances"—with themselves, doctor(s), disease, and relationships (family, friends, colleagues). Suggested segments are not limited and include *You Are Not Alone*; *You Have the Right to Know*; *You Have the Right to Choose Your Own Treatment(s)*; *Realigning Your Relationships*; and *Living the Life That You Want*. A warm, open, and supportive environment is very necessary to draw on each other's strengths and gain courage to move forward.

This group is mixed gender, people who have ongoing health issues. They want to learn to incorporate their disease into their whole lives in a conscious, direct, and natural way.

Skills Used: Sharing, using each other as resources and support is fundamental to this group. Within this group context of learning, there is an energy field established for inner knowing (intuition) about one's health that is invaluable. The group support allows a feeling of not being alone. I use the co-active coaching model with relationship, group, and team exercises, experiential exercises, creativity, hands-on, meditation, ORSC skills and techniques that help one identify with their personal visions for wholeness and well-being.

Successes: Building a spacious, trusting, open environment has been accomplished. The group is new.

Challenges: Allowing feelings to be expressed without clients' flooding (literally and figuratively), because they haven't had an opportunity to be seen or heard. Overcoming fears is a huge challenge, as is not trusting themselves to know what is right for them.

4. Perspectives: As coach, host, and producer of several local radio programs, current events discussions included experiences with a variety of elected officials, policy makers, and advocates who all participated in exercises bearing upon a wide array of issues. The goal of the workshops was to open new perspectives by broadening participants' currently-held positions.

This senior group was open to new members from week-to-week so that many different people were present over the course of time. Many were active in their communities and members of both genders attended.

Skills Used: Sharing, using deep democracy and getting all voices, opinions and perspectives heard; using ORSC and group coaching skills, debate techniques, and learning to listen to others' views; and inviting outside guests to speak on a topic for one-half hour and then using ORSC skills, integrate the listening and nuggets of learning.

Successes: This group had new members every session, so designing an alliance each time was new for older members and served as a successful lesson to use at the beginning of each session. There was a lot of buzz about the sessions, which allowed many more people to attend.

Challenges: New members came every week for months, so the nature of the work shifted to accommodate its members. Every week we worked on different topics and issues, rather than digging deeper into one theme.

WHO CREATES THE THEMES?

I often get asked, “*Do you provide the themes of the group coaching sessions or do the clients?*” Over the years, I’ve tried several approaches and I often say, “It depends.” What has worked well for me, and what my clients find to be very useful, is to have a theme defined in terms of what is bringing them together. For example, people know that they are signing up for a group coaching program about work-life issues, leadership, business development, or parenting. If you are marketing your group coaching program to the general public, it will be very difficult to market and implement it if there is no common theme. I’m not saying it is impossible, but from experience I have found that it is extremely challenging. Within a program theme (i.e., work-life, business growth) I will also set broad themes for every session. A broad theme might be values or vision or strengths.

There are always a number of things I want to do to make sure I understand my clients’ agenda(s). First, before the start of each and every program, I always meet with each individual member of a group coaching program. I like to connect with each participant, to find out *what are their major issues/questions/pains* related to the anchoring group coaching topic (i.e., work-life or business growth). I also like to ask them *what are topics they would like really addressed* during the program? You will find more detail about this approach in Chapter 5: Designing Your Group Coaching Program under the heading “Knowing Your Client.”

In our first group session, I present the themes that emerged for the group based on my pre-calls, as well as other issues that I have seen as having been very useful for other groups to work on. This is an opportunity to start designing the process with the group and I inquire if there are any changes, additions, or deletions we want to make as a group.

The way we approach exercises will be influenced by our client. For example, when working with values, there are a myriad of ways we can approach this topic. We could undertake values clarification work; we could provide a values checklist for clients to complete; or we could undertake demonstration coaching at the front of the room with a client while other clients look on. The demo coaching method gives the group an idea of what values are, and models an approach so they will be able to identify their own values.

A values checklist is a more directed approach. Clients can individually rank their own values. Next, you may wish to pair them up with another member to discuss a series of questions. For example, *What values are most important to you? How are these values reflected in your work? How are they not? How are*

values reflected in your decisions? Provide each pair with questions. Don't hesitate to provide your learners with opportunities to develop coaching skills and approaches such as powerful questions. This approach to values could wrap up with each pair reporting to the larger group and some facilitated large group discussion.

Getting to know your clients is an important ingredient for success with this work.

DIFFERENT MODELS FOR GROUP COACHING

This book explores and provides a number of different models and structures for group coaching through the provision of spotlighted case studies of coaches undertaking this work in the world.

As we will see, time and again, the model and approach for group coaching is shaped by what the client wants and needs, as well as your own coaching preferences. Coaches may adopt a pure group coaching model (with little or no content), or one where there is a heavier emphasis on learning and coaching at the same time. Later in this chapter I will discuss the “Continuum of Group Processes,” along which most group coaches place themselves.

Coaches may also coach groups differently depending on the topic areas, agendas, etc. In general, there are two different focus areas for group coaching—coaching a group as a set of individuals versus coaching a group as if it were a system. The former may be very appropriate when groups of strangers come together for a program; the latter may be more effective if the group is part of a larger entity or system—for example, a community group. In this instance, more focus would be put on developing the group process, and coaching the group towards its' vision, values, etc. This is in contrast to a group coaching approach for a group of ten separate business owners where the focus would be more on strengthening the individual capacity of each business owner, rather than the capacity of the group itself.

In addition to a group focus, for years I have also explored and implemented a **hybrid approach** which I consider to be a mix of group calls and individual one-on-one sessions. During the 90 Day BizSuccess Group Coaching™ program, I found that group calls alone were not maximizing the traction for individual business owners. Over the past two years, I have added a monthly laser coaching call (20 minutes) in addition to the two group calls per month along with regular e-BizTips being delivered to participants' inboxes.

Mary Allen of www.BeyondSixFiguresforCoaching.com identifies three main models for coaching:

1. **A pure group coaching model:** In this instance, a small group of individuals hire a coach and each person gets a certain amount of one-on-one coaching time during a session. In this instance, participants can listen to each other being coached and can participate in the process.
2. **Hybrid:** Some teaching/lesson focus with an agenda and coaching orientation. This approach is interactive. This approach pulls dialogue from the group and also includes teaching.
3. **Open Coaching Forum:** As part of ongoing programs, there may be four calls per month. The first three have a lesson focus. The fourth monthly call could be a guest expert call or open coaching forum (OCF). During the OCF, the coach will show up, but there will be no formal agenda with the agenda being pulled from the group. The coach will take an inventory at the front end to determine the theme. For example, time management may show up as the theme for the session as the participants check in.

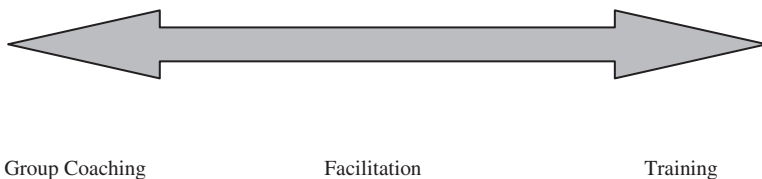
The “Continuum of Group Processes” will further illustrate the range of activities that may fall under group coaching.

THE CONTINUUM OF GROUP PROCESSES

I often speak about the fact that group coaching occurs along a continuum of group processes. Throughout this book you are going to meet a dozen coaches who have shared their real life group coaching experiences. As you read them, you will see the great diversity that exists amongst their work. In fact, this is due in part to the different approaches these coaches bring to this work, as well as the clients they serve.

Group coaching is created by a foundational weave of facilitation, training, and coaching. There exists a continuum of small group processes, which includes, but is not limited to group coaching, facilitation, and training sessions (workshops and retreats).

Figure 1.1: The Continuum of Group Processes



The programs that are highlighted in this book, along with the work that you undertake, will fit somewhere along this continuum. Depending on your clients, their needs, and preferences, each program you design will look and feel different. Some programs may be more purely group coaching, others may weave in stronger elements of facilitation and training. The mix, as we will see, is determined by the client.

Let's take a look at each of these areas along the continuum.

Training

Let's start by looking at the far right end of the continuum where I have placed training. This might include workshops, e-learning, and/or retreats. In its purest form, traditional training has focused on providing a learning experience where a participant acquires new knowledge, skills, and abilities. These are known as the KSAs (knowledge, skills, and abilities). A common definition for training is as follows:

*Training: the acquisition of knowledge, skills, and abilities
to improve performance on one's current job.*

– Alan M. Saks, Robert R. Haccoun⁷

Traditional training environments have typically been in the face-to-face realm—often called workshops or seminars, and if more intensive, perhaps retreats. In recent years, teleseminars (training delivered by phone) and webinars (training delivered using a web-based platform) have become mainstream training approaches.

Common characteristics of training programs, in its purest (but not always participatory) form, are:

- High levels of content that the trainer or instructor wants to get across;
- More instructor led than participant discovery;
- Set objectives you wish to get across to the participant;
- Objectives set by trainer and/or organization who is the expert;
- Agenda pre-created/set by the trainer or facilitator;
- Focus primarily on learning in the classroom and not as much on how to apply the learning in real life/work; and
- Little follow-up back to the work/personal environment.

These descriptions are, of course, related to pure training. As an experiential educator who has used participatory training approaches for years, I am generalizing here to make an important distinction between training and coaching.

Facilitation

In the middle part of the spectrum we have facilitation. The word facilitation comes from the Latin word *facilis* which means to make easy.⁸

John Heron describes a facilitator as “a person who has the role of helping participants to learn in an experiential group.”⁹ In this definition, facilitation is not just about the KSAs, but it is about a group process.

Spinks and Clements¹⁰ provide this alternative definition of facilitators and indicate that “facilitators are essentially *enablers* or *encouragers* of learning who seek to achieve this by focusing on the *experiences and activity of the learner*.” In this definition, learners take center stage.

Process facilitators typically elicit information from a group, providing a framework and process whereby groups create their own content. This is also an important part of group coaching in which the group coach creates the framework for participants to explore and learn. Facilitators, especially third-party facilitators, are not there as experts, they are there to guide the flow.

Ingrid Bens¹¹ states that “basic facilitation skills such as active listening, paraphrasing, and feedback are at the center of today’s leadership skills/competencies,” which she includes under training, mentoring, coaching, and team building initiatives.

Bens identifies the following as core skills for facilitators¹²:

- Listens actively
- Supports
- Probes
- Clarifies
- Offers ideas
- Includes others
- Summarizes
- Harmonizes
- Manages conflict

The International Association of Facilitators (IAF) includes the following as core competencies for facilitators:

- Create collaborative client relationships
- Plan appropriate group processes
- Create and sustain a participatory environment
- Guide group to appropriate and useful outcomes
- Build and maintain professional knowledge
- Model positive professional attitudes

As Rothwell notes,¹³ specifically, facilitators will focus on four main areas or stages:

1. **Prepare for the facilitated sessions:** Including establishing an agenda, preparing questions, and gathering background information about the issues facing the group.
2. **Open the facilitated session:** Manage introductions, clarify ground rules, and review agenda.
3. **Manage the group interaction during the facilitated session:** Including posing questions, noting responses and surface issues, identifying possible solutions, securing agreement, identifying action plans, and evaluating.
4. **Conclude the facilitated session:** Focus the group on follow-up and responsibilities, evaluate, identify any issues to be carried forward to future meetings.

Core tools that facilitators may use include the nominal group technique; brainstorming; visioning; root cause analysis (fishbone diagram or cause and effect charting); and force field analysis.

As you will note, there are a number of common practices and skills used by facilitators and coaches. Some of the differences between these two disciplines are merely from differing approaches. As coaches move to work with groups, the integration and adaptation of many of these core facilitation skills and competencies are critical.

Group Coaching

On the far left end of the spectrum, I have placed group coaching. Returning back to our definition earlier in the chapter group coaching has a foundation in core coaching competencies skills and approaches.

Sometimes when the term “group coaching” is used, coaches have been met with raised eyebrows. It is similar to what coaches have experienced when using the term “coaching” in different marketplaces. Over time the terms “coaching” and “group coaching” are being more widely understood. Coaches new to group coaching often ask “What do I call my work?” What I label my program (workshop, facilitation, coaching) is probably not as important as stating what **approach** I will use—i.e., using a group coaching approach. With certain client groups I continue to get raised eyebrows if I say I’m holding a group coaching

session. People may actually understand the term better from an intellectual level if I say I'm holding a one-day session or a one-day workshop using a group coaching approach, which will include small group discussions, reflective exercises, action planning, and setting accountabilities and commitments. The label you use for your work is likely to depend on your client, their language, and where you position yourself along the group process continuum.

One of the biggest distinctions with group coaching is that the agenda comes from your group. The group itself will drive the process and strongly determine and/or influence the direction, pace, and themes you discuss. The group will also inform and influence the exercises you include in your work. Group coaches will lead from their toolbox of coaching skills and exercises.

Within group coaching, the agenda is primarily the client's agenda and "client" might be a group of four or eight or twelve. The ICF has taken a stand on what they consider to be group coaching for credentialing purposes as a group of fifteen or less. If you look at the marketplace, there are many programs being called group coaching that are really teleseminars, which are simply one-way passages of information and tools so you can move forward into your work. In a pure group coaching approach, there is going to be minimal content, less talking from the coach, more experiential discovery for the client, and a heavy use of core coaching skills and competencies, such as powerful questions.

Group coaching is different from one-on-one coaching, because in a group or team setting the coach will need to be more directive and take charge. It is a very fine balance, one that I call a *tension*, between holding the space for the client's agenda and being directive. We'll continue exploring this tension throughout the book.

Coach Deena Kolbert summarizes this tension well by stating, "The group ultimately provides the agenda, even though you may have created the outer structure to bring them into the group process."

The feedback from clients over the years indicates that they need a *theme* to come together around—whether it is money, balance, leadership, or business development. Without that common anchor, it was very frustrating for the participants and they wanted more direction and focus. As a facilitator, it was very challenging as you can only do so much work on your feet with the group. This has led me to believe strongly that you really need to have a structure. So, with group coaching, there is the delicate balance of a client's agenda as well as direction from the coach.

Flexibility comes in at the start of every session, where I begin the call with a check-in. I ask participants what the issues are that they want to be looking at in the day's session as it relates to the topic. Clients' comments provide us with a

menu of where we can go or their collective agenda. This provides the flexibility to have the client's agenda included.

It also means that as the facilitator, I'm really going to be using my coaching skills to look at what direction should we be going. Unlike the one-on-one context, you may have four, six, or eight different agendas present. A key question to consider is: What's going to give the greatest benefit and greatest impact to the majority of the clients in that session?

Many readers will notice that I interchange the wording of facilitator and coach throughout the book. Group coaches do require strong facilitation skills. There is the whole group dynamic that needs to be monitored and addressed in addition to the client's agenda.

This book is one of the first books about group coaching, and as this sub-discipline of our profession continues to evolve, I am hopeful that our research base and models of what constitute group coaching become even more crystal clear. We will continue to benefit from the cross-fertilization and insights from facilitators and trainers, who, like me, decided years ago to also acquire professional coaching skills. Likewise coaches will also continue to acquire new skills in facilitation or other learning modules.

Where do you stand along the continuum?

Group Size

How large are group coaching groups? An important distinction was made several years ago around what size of group was acceptable by the ICF to be considered for credentialing. They identify a maximum group coaching size as **fifteen**. Coaches interviewed for the case studies ranged from group sizes of three upwards to twelve or more.

The 2008 Group Executive Coaching Survey from the Air Institute indicated that group size was important. "Forty-eight percent coach groups between two and six coaches and 48 percent between seven and twelve. The optimal size of group coaching seems to drop-off dramatically after twelve coachees (*clients*), where it becomes more difficult to differentiate between coaching and facilitation. The study also found that seven, as a group size, was optimal."⁴

Anecdotally, there is a trend towards increased group size as group coaching experience and further confidence are acquired. At the same, I would also posit that "Small Is Beautiful" (just like economist E.F. Schumacher wrote in 1973). Some of my favorite group coaching programs are groups of four to eight members.

Session Length—Individual Sessions and Program Length

In terms of how long sessions run, the Air Survey found that 47 percent of coaches interviewed held sessions for one to three hours, and 15 percent held sessions for one day.⁵ Coach Deena Kolbert notes that she remains flexible, considering what the group wants in terms of length and frequency. There was a general consensus from coaches such as Suzee Eibling, PCC, and Mary Allen, MCC, among others, that 90 minutes or an hour and a half is the maximum threshold for virtual calls.

In terms of the length of the assignment or engagement, the Air Survey states, “Over a third of group executive coaching takes place over three to six months, with only 7 percent exceeding one year.” Specifically, 33 percent of the coaches surveyed undertook their group executive coaching work over three to six months, 10 percent over a six- to twelve-month period. Five percent of respondents said that the length of the assignment varied.⁶ Great variances were found with the coaches interviewed for this book.

WHAT ARE THE DIFFERENCES AND SIMILARITIES BETWEEN WORKSHOPS AND GROUP COACHING?

As we have seen, there is often a fuzzy dividing line between workshops, retreats, and group coaching. Components of all three can be present in a program and labeled with any of these three titles. The title used often depends on your audience and what label is most important to them.

Some of the similarities between the approaches are:

- workshops, retreats, and group coaching programs all can be offered in an intensive half-day, one-day, or longer format; and
- all draw on group facilitation, skills, and often experiential principles.

It is possible to bring a group coaching approach to workshops or retreats. Alternatively, we can also have a *pure* group coaching program where the agenda and exercises are created in the moment at the start of a session, just like a one-on-one session, the only difference being the different numbers.

Differences (often dependent on facilitation style approaches) include:

- Workshops usually focus on the transfer of knowledge, skills and abilities (KSAs) versus group coaching, which focuses on having the clients self-discover knowledge.

- Workshops often have a greater emphasis on the agenda of the facilitator versus group coaching’s agenda being set by the participants.
- A key distinction between workshops and group coaching rests on the principle of *being unattached to a specific outcome*. In workshops, trainers are measured on the outcome metrics which are typically set by the organization. In coaching, the outcome and its measurement comes from the client.
- The paramount importance in confidentiality is group coaching work.

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN GROUP COACHING AND GROUP THERAPY?

The ICF Global Coaching Study indicates that a key differentiator for the industry is that coaching is seen as an “action plan” rather than as an exploratory process. When asked why they selected coaching instead of alternatives such as therapy or counseling, some focus group participants indicated that coaching offered them an “action plan” rather than an opportunity to explore their “issues.”¹⁴

Table 1.1: Comparison Chart of Group Processes

Characteristic	Group Coaching	Team Facilitation	Therapy Group	Training/ Workshop
Size	6–12	5–20	4–10	Any size
Decision to participate	Participants opt in	Participants are enrolled	Participants opt in or are enrolled	Participants are enrolled or opt in
Source of members	Same company different companies Community	Same company or organization	Community, self-referral professional referral	Community, company (same/different), individuals
Accountability	Personal and group	Team	Personal	Personal and/or organization
Group agenda	Group creates or helps create agenda	Facilitator sets the agenda	Therapist sets the agenda	By organization
Goals	Individual and group	Team	Individual	Individual, Team, Organizational

Leader	Coach	Facilitator (may or may not be a coach)	Mental health professional	Trainer (may or may not be coach)
Connection	Personal or professional goals or interest, business goal	Business goals, professional goals	Personal health or development goals	Goals (personal/professional)
Examples	Entrepreneurs Sales professionals Executives Career transitioners Leaders Emerging leaders	Sales teams Project teams Nonprofit boards Leadership teams	Divorcees Individuals with addictions Cancer survivors Caregivers	Middle managers Business owners Professionals Soft Skills training Cross Cultural effectiveness

Source: Ann Deaton, PhD, PCC, and Gay Lynn Carpenter, ACC, 2009. Adapted with permission.

Coaching deals with the present in a person's life, focusing on possibilities and potentials, rather than unearthing issues from the past. Group therapy has tended to focus on fixing problems by encouraging clients to revisit their past life issues in order to move forward. By contrast, group coaching starts from the completeness of a client, their resourcefulness, and is structured such that the focus is towards who the person is **being** or **becoming**.

For more information about the contrast between coaching and therapy you may want to refer to documents that have been created by the ICF (www.coachfederation.org).

One of the coaches interviewed for this book, Ann Deaton, PhD, PCC, a clinical psychologist and group coach, provided the following table which summarizes the differences between therapy group, team facilitation, and group coaching. I have also added a fourth category of training /workshops to round out the distinction.

WHAT IS THE ROLE OF THE GROUP COACH?

In addition to the responsibilities of the coach outlined by the ICF at the start of the chapter, what else is the role of a group coach?



From the Field: Views on the Role of Group Coaches

Here is how coaches who are undertaking group coaching describe their role:

A group coach is more than a facilitator—she/he becomes the coach for both the group and the individuals. A group coach creates an environment of confidentiality and trust where group members are open to being coached. Learning and champion for interaction starts from a place of acceptance and values.

—Ginger Cockerham, MCC

I see myself as creating the space where groups can take over. Inevitably, a corporate setting leads you to some information about trends and next steps. My work as a group coach in the corporate context is taking me more into the organizational development field.

—Rita Weiss

To hold the space really big with love and rigor for clients' learning and growth—at the same time know it may not happen on a call or at a site. Changes behind the scene are at deeper, hidden levels. Consistent focus on intentions.

—Victoria FittsMilgrim, CPCC

I see myself as a facilitator and connector. I am very much using the same skills with group coaching—asking powerful questions, etc.

—Heidi Michaels, CPCC

I believe in the art of group coaching—create that heart space where people can share things that they couldn't share otherwise. Confidential Space. Always learn as a coach from the experience.

—Suzee Eibling, PCC

My role is to provide clients with the tools and to create a space to inspire each other.

—Jill MacFadyen, ACC

Create a safe space for people to explore, while creating direction, flexibility, and support.

—Marlo Nikkila

CHAPTER REVIEW

Reflect on the following questions. I suggest you make notes and return to them as you progress through the book.

- ☐ What is your vision for group coaching?
- ☐ What types of programs do you want to deliver?
- ☐ Where do you sit along the continuum of group processes?
- ☐ What do you see as your role as a group coach?
- ☐ What's your biggest question about group coaching?
- ☐ What's been relevant about this chapter for your own development of group coaching work?

