

Discover: Coaching!



What Makes a Great Christian Coach?

by Tony Stoltzfus

What does a great coach look like? Most people's first answer would be the basic listening and asking skills coaches use. But skills are only one facet of what makes a coach—and in fact the transformational results coaching promises only come by going beyond the skill level. If you are looking to hire a coach to experience deep life change, here are four things to look for:

The Heart of a Coach

I believe the most important key to coaching excellence is cultivating the heart of a coach—deeply embracing the value system that underlies coaching. Learning to see people as God sees them is the foundational discipline in coaching. God chooses to work with us according to our creation (made in the image of God) and our destiny (made for relationship with him) instead of our condition (woefully screwed up). If he were responding to us according to our condition, he'd just destroy the planet and start all over again.

Coaches choose to believe that you can be what the Bible says you can be. And they believe that God has you on the road to becoming just that. Coaches are people who have cultivated a posture of faith about God's work in human hearts: that God is already at work in people, he is well able to get his work done, and he doesn't need us to step in to fix everyone to make sure that his plan is carried out. Coaching is about having faith in the heart-changing power of the Holy Spirit.

So look for a coach who believes in you—who sees your potential and calls you to become all you are capable of becoming.

An Other-Centered Outlook

This discipline of belief in others also leads coaches to a place of humility: our part in changing people is much smaller than what we've become accustomed to thinking. The work is started by God: a coach simply comes along side it, helps the person see it, and walks with them to see it through. When someone we coach gets a victory, it is their victory, not ours, because they've done the work. So a great coach is someone who has gotten beyond his or her ego enough to help you win and let you take the credit when you do.

And that's a real dying to self. We are so addicted to the kudos and sense of accomplishment we get back from fixing others—but coaching doesn't offer those rewards. We are forced to actually give without receiving anything in return. To coach well, you must actively cultivate the discipline of sacrificial love in your life. So look for a coach who pays attention to you, respects you, and loves you well.

Great Coaching Skills

This is the familiar part of coaching: listening, asking powerful questions, getting buy-in, helping you take responsibility for your life. If you are looking for a coach, does s/he ask questions that really make you think? Listen intently and help you clarify your thinking? Dream up options you hadn't thought of before? Your coach's ability should take you beyond what you are capable of on your own to a place of greater creativity and accomplishment.

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The Lifestyle of a Coach

Here's another widely-overlooked part of being a coach. Your life is the reservoir you draw from when you work with others. Coaching is the art of drawing things out of people; and it's hard to draw out of others if you haven't dug your own well and learned to draw deeply from it. "The purpose in a man's mind is like deep water; but a man of understanding will draw it out (Prov. 20:5)."

That understanding comes from life experience. For instance, many people come to coaches to get perspective on their circumstances. The coach who is able to help you find a life-changing attitude will most likely be someone who has paid a price to seek out new perspective in his or her own difficult places. Great coaching is drawn out of the well of a great life.

I'm not talking about accumulating knowledge or information to share with others. I'm talking about being fully, highly engaged with life. Coaches are people who help others live life at a higher level. To do that requires that you live a significant, growing, purposeful, heart-engaged life. Living at a high level means cultivating deep relationships, giving and receiving genuine feedback, loving and grieving, going out of your way to find personal wholeness.

This is something crucial to look for in a coach as well: is this person living the kind of life I want to live? Is it a life of purpose, of intelligent risk-taking, a creative, God-focused, authentic, worthwhile life? The best companion on the road toward leading a life of significance is someone who is walking that walk himself.