

Got game? When it comes to the game of life, a Life Coach could make all the difference. Coach Giuseppe Totino tells Ayşe Şahin why.

Certified "life coaching" is a profession that has come onto the scene relatively recently. You make the point that you are not a Life Coach but a Professional Coach. What's the difference? And what makes personal coaches different from psychologists?

When you ask a question rather than giving an answer, when you allow for plenty of time to think about the answers, and when you encourage someone to pursue his/her true intentions, you would apply coaching techniques. Now, may I invite you to think about how often you do so in your everyday life? Perhaps often. You see!... I believe that everyone can be and has been a Coach 'of a kind'. But, being a Professional Coach means that we have rules we need to follow – for example, on the way we contract with clients, on confidentiality, or on conflicts of interests. That's why I like to emphasize our Professionalism! It is important that our clients understand this peculiarity, while we strive to maintain the highest reputation for our profession.

My association, the International Coach Federation (ICF), sets these rules for all its members. Professional Coaches differ from Psychologists for three main reasons:

Our clients (not patients) are fully functional individuals. So Coaching is not about moving clients from minus six to minus two, but from plus three to plus eight; Coaching is future focused. We do not analyze the past; Paramount to Coaching is action and forward-movement. There is a motto in coaching that says, "No action, no coaching!" Indeed, the emphasis in a coaching relationship is on action, accountability and follow-through.

Are there different kinds of (certified) coaches? If so, could you give us some examples?

No, there is only one type of ICF Certified Coach! However, to market themselves, Coaches like to emphasize what they do in different ways. I like to call myself "Professional Personal and Business Coach", as I focus on both personal and business topics. A colleague of mine, also interested in cross-culturalism, likes to call himself "Spiritual Coach". Others may call themselves Executive-, Career-, or Life-Coaches, or other titles.

How did you decide to become a Professional Coach and how long have you been at it? What were you doing before coaching?

Somehow I feel that I have been a Coach for my entire life, but I just was not aware of it! There was a time, not too long ago, when I decided to stop and retire from everything I was doing and dedicate time to myself and my family. Unexpectedly, it was then that I realized how, throughout my life across 4 countries, first as a student (I hold a BA in Finance and Management, an MSc in International Marketing, and an LLM in Law), then one after the other as a business consultant, tax advisor and entrepreneur, I was going after the wrong thing: "numbers". In fact, it is relating to the best side of human beings that gives me a great deal of energy, enthusiasm and sense of fulfillment. I was lucky enough for having been coached while working for a Big Four consulting firm in London. And so it was not difficult to "connect the dots" and realize that Coaching was the best way to achieve what I truly wanted in life and have maximum control over it, while putting to the benefit of my new business and of my clients all I have learned and experienced in life. I am so grateful for realizing and taking action at the tender age of 36!...

You are credentialed by the International Coach Federation (ICF). What's the significance of that?

To be credentialed means that you've received coach-specific training, achieved a designated number of experience hours and have been coached and supervised by a mentor Coach. I should get credentialed by the end of the year. The road to credentialing requires hard work and a lot of commitment. This is in addition to the professionalism I was talking about at the beginning.

What kinds of issues do you work on with your clients and what types of clients do you work with?

My clients come from many directions, and can be both individuals and groups, both private and corporate. As mentioned earlier, I like to call myself Professional Personal and Business Coach, as I believe neglecting one of the two sides somehow limits the potential for coaching to support an individual's or a team's growth. And it often happens that clients shift from personal to business topics during their coaching program. So my clients can be managers willing to develop skills towards a specific goal such as a promotion, or can be young entrepreneurs willing to work on setting up their new ventures, or teams wishing to increase their performance at work.

Another area I am very keen on is coaching fathers – both new fathers and fathers-to-be, as well as fathers with a challenge. I am also enjoying coaching a client willing to get rid of self-limiting behaviors when relating to the other sex, something she connects to a deeply ingrained, culturally driven outlook, which she wanted to change in herself. Another client, for example, simply could not put herself first in life!

I also like to work as a mentor to new coaches or for those that are thinking of coaching as a career change. Last but not least, I have been professionally trained to teach coaching to individuals and to corporations that want to introduce coaching as a management tool.

You mentioned a colleague of yours who specializes in spiritual coaching with cross-cultural interests. Is there a special certificate for that area as well?

This is an interesting example of coaching diversity! Hakan Arabacioglu is an ICF Coach in Istanbul. He has been a life-long student and worked with many guides and teachers. He is now combining his learnings with coaching. He's traveled to many countries; but in the Far East, as he put it, what he knew and learnt did not help him. His mind gave up talking and he started to hear his inner voice. Now he's helping his clients to hear their own inner voice and find their real self. His web site is: www.zestcoaching.net. There is no special certification in Spiritual Coaching. You just apply the art and science of coaching in a spiritual context. You generally conduct your coaching sessions by phone. Why is that?

This might sound unusual, I know! But think about how many deep conversations you've had over the phone with your best friends, your lovers, your parents. These conversations really are based on very active listening. When you get deeply involved, and you do not miss anything that is being said, you are fully connected to the other person and can have powerful conversations. This is very close to what Coaches do! Also, this allows for clients to stay in the comfort of their room or office, or to call me while abroad, optimizing their time, energy and expenses. Face-to-face sessions are possible only for Istanbul-based clients.

What brought you to Turkey?

Very simply: my wife! You know, when you come from abroad and marry an "Istanbul'lu", you actually get a package – and Istanbul is included in the package as your bonus...!

Before we sign off...is there anything else you'd like to add to our interview?

Yes, I would like to share one beautiful coaching concept. ICF Coaches believe that every client is creative, resourceful and whole, and the expert in his/her life and work! You can see how coaching is different from consulting and from mentoring too! And perhaps it is this new philosophy that is behind the huge success that coaching has received in recent years.