

FACILITATORS, CONSULTANTS AND COACHES – WHICH ONE DO I NEED?

Do I need a coach, a consultant or a facilitator? What does each do and how are they different from each other? How can coaches, consultants and facilitators help me and my congregation? Where do I find outside help and what is the cost?

These are some of the many questions the Center for Congregations receives from pastors and lay leaders as they navigate the many complex challenges and opportunities within their congregations. In recent years, the Center has seen a rise in the number of calls inquiring about outside help. Oftentimes, pastors and lay leaders are unsure as to the kind of external help they need and whether the congregation as a whole will be supportive of someone from the outside coming into their congregation.

The Center's mission is to help congregations not only find the best resources, but also to use those resources successfully for the good of the congregation's mission. In order to understand more deeply the distinctions and practices of a coach, a consultant and a facilitator, the Center interviewed pastors who recently engaged the services of one or more of these outside resources. The insights and experiences of the pastors we interviewed gave greater clarity to the differences and surprisingly, some similarities between and among coaches, consultants and facilitators. This article reveals what we learned from these pastors. We also interviewed an experienced coach and conducted our own research.

UTILIZING A COACH

What is coaching? Coaching is a one-on-one relationship focused on one's personal life or need for leadership growth. Coaching usually takes on a holistic viewpoint helping a person understand the interdependence of one's personal faith, personality and relationships in the context of one's gifts and resources. According to the International Coach Federation (www.coachfederation.org), a coach is professionally trained to help a person maximize their personal and professional growth potential. Coaches honor the client as the expert in his



or her life and work and believe every client is creative, resourceful and whole. 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.
- Hold the client responsible and accountable.

When do you need a coach? One pastor stated that he knew he needed to take his leadership to the next level if his congregation was going to grow and flourish. He knew he could not do it on his own and needed a "voice" to help him. Another pastor stated that he was in a transitional season in his life and needed help in gaining clarity on future direction. A third pastor explained that she simply needed help in separating her personal and pastoral life in order to maintain her own personal health, as well as the health of the congregation. Finally, a fourth pastor needed help in implementing a recently developed vision and plan for the congregation. In each of these instances, the pastor had a specific area of his or her personal or professional life that the pastor could not address without some outside help or guidance.

What does a coach do for you that you cannot do on your own? Virtually all the pastors interviewed stated that their coach provided a structure out of



which to explore their questions and challenges. In all cases, the coaches never told the pastors what to do or provided the answers to the questions, but rather challenged the pastors to discover the answers from within. The coaches asked good questions and helped equip the pastors with plans to follow. The coaches made accountability an important component of the coaching relationship. There is a rhythm to the coaching relationship with coaching engagements taking place on a regular basis, ranging from once a week, bi-monthly or monthly phone calls, depending on the need of the pastor. Several of the pastors emphasized that the coach provided a safe space to explore possibilities within a hopeful and affirming environment.

How does a coach differ from a mentor or therapist?

Mentoring is a one-on-one relationship much like coaching. However, a mentor serves as a role model to the mentee, whereas a coach is focused on drawing out the potential and gifts of the person he or she is coaching. A therapist helps an individual resolve feelings or behaviors, usually from the past, in order to achieve a higher level of functionality, either personally or within a relationship. Coaching is focused on the future and the person's potential to achieve that future.

What are the characteristics and qualities of a good coach? Not surprising, each pastor echoed the same qualities and characteristics of their coach. Coaches are viewed as experienced, professional, trusting, positive, wise, gifted, insightful, good listeners and highly relational.

What should one look for in selecting a coach and how do you determine a good fit? First, the Center recommends that you find a coach who is professionally trained and certified. The International Coach Federation provides training and three levels of certification: Associate, Professional and Master, all based on the number of hours both in training and in practice. Second, the Center recommends that you engage in a

two-way interview with a potential coach. Here you are looking for “fit.” Important considerations include: can you trust this coach, can you be vulnerable with this coach, does this coach understand and speak your theology and/or polity? Many of the pastors we interviewed emphasized how important it was that the coach understood and spoke to their theological context and/or spirituality.

CONSULTANTS AND FACILITATORS

What is a consultant? Consultants are persons who bring expertise to a situation. Consultants offer services in many areas, including strategic planning, fundraising campaigns, building issues, organizational development, and more. Oftentimes, the consultant will not only bring his or her expertise to a situation, they will

recommend solutions or advice on how to address a problem or challenge in the future. As such, consultants are diagnostic and prescriptive in nature. Consultants are in the business of telling others things that oftentimes they cannot see on their own or do not have the expertise to assess, such as building conditions, fundraising potential or architectural issues to name a few.



What is a facilitator? A facilitator enables a group to work more effectively and efficiently through structured processes that achieve optimal group interaction. Congregations, like other organizations, have a multiplicity of governing groups, committees, task forces and teams that often require skilled facilitation in order to ensure that quality decisions are crafted and implemented. Many leaders complain of meetings where there is a loss of focus, ensuing conflict, uneven participation, difficulty in reaching agreement and lack of follow-up action after the meeting. Allowed to continue, these problems can lead to growing frustration and resignation by some members.

A facilitator is a neutral, outside person who has no investment in the meeting outcome. Using a facilitator enables



the pastor and other congregational leaders to be free to fully engage in the discussion at hand and not be responsible for the management of the meeting. Most facilitators will design the meeting or process, send out agendas and other notices, establish ground rules for participation, facilitate the meeting process, and provide a written summary of the meeting once it is completed. A good facilitator brings out the best of the group and insures balanced participation, high energy and total group engagement.

When do the roles of consultant, facilitator and coach overlap? Sometimes the roles of consultant and facilitator can blur. For example, a consultant will come into a congregation, assess a situation and deliver a report. In order to help the congregation create movement forward on the recommendations, the consultant may act as a facilitator of a meeting to help develop a plan of action.

Coaches, too, can blur the lines with a facilitator. One pastor described how his coach later became a coach for the entire congregation. The congregation was navigating the various options for future change. In this case, the coach came to meetings with the congregational leaders, asked questions and facilitated a discussion. The coach was very careful in enabling the congregational leaders to shape their future and did not suggest or recommend strategies or actions.

What is the cost of a consultant, coach or facilitator? Fees will vary depending on such factors as length of the engagement, scope of the work and the experience level of the consultant, coach or facilitator. Most consultants will charge a flat fee for a project. In contrast, coaches and facilitators oftentimes charge by the hour or, in the case of a facilitator, offer both a daily rate and hourly rate. In all cases, a congregation should discuss the fee structure, payment schedule and cancellation policy of the person they are considering to hire before they sign a contract.

How can I find a consultant, coach or facilitator? The Center encourages you to first ask around within your denomination or ministry network. Many of the pastors we interviewed found a coach through recommendations of fellow pastors. Additionally, there are

two websites that will aid in finding either a coach or a facilitator, the International Coach Federation at www.coachfederation.org and the International Association of Facilitators at www.iaf-world.org. Consultants, on the other hand, are subject specific. Your own local ministry network is a good place to ask others about potential consultants.

RESOURCES YOU CAN USE

For resources on this subject, check out the Congregational Resource Guide (CRG) at <http://thecrg.org/>. Suggested CRG search terms: facilitator, facilitation, coach, consultant.



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