

Rev Up Your Career Skills with a Personal Coach

By Georgia Beaverson

Want to maximize your job performance? Improve your interpersonal skills? Balance your work load? Move up to the next level? A personal job coach can help.

"The role of a coach is to empower," says **Nina McGuffin** of **Equilibrium Coaching**. "The coach will help explore what's next in a supportive environment."

Coaches help clients take a more thoughtful approach to their working life, to be more strategic in how they relate to others, and provide an unbiased ear for their struggles, adds McGuffin. Coaches help clients understand their own preferences and biases—and open up to more effective ways of doing things.

"My role is not to give advice," McGuffin insists. "My role is to help my clients find their own answers. If I'm giving advice, I'm not doing my job."

"I work with a lot of mid-management to corner-office level people," says **Karen**



Nina McGuffin
Equilibrium Coaching

Ostrov of Konect Consulting. "These people are frequently in over their heads as far as fulfilling strategic goals of the company," she says, and are often caught in the middle between a CEO and a board. They deal with a tremendous amount of stress. Sometimes the people who should support them actually undercut them. Ostrov compares them to people up a creek without a paddle. "I help them find the paddle," she says. "And that paddle is communication."

Ostrov, who has a background as a psychological clinician, treats her clients as if they were going through therapy. But this isn't therapy for mental health. She seeks to improve their people skills, giving them an awareness of the responses people have to different actions. She believes improving communication skills of managers and leaders



Karen Ostrov
Konect Consulting

ultimately affects a company's bottom line.

Hiring a coach is just good business.

The Basics

Both coaches typically meet with clients once or twice a month, either in person or on the phone if the client has a tight schedule. "That's common," McGuffin says. "You have to make sure they're invested in it. It's easy to drop coaching when you're busy."

Sessions usually last 45 minutes to an hour. McGuffin estimates she works with clients for 18 months on average. But she starts with an initial agreement for three to six months to make sure it's a good fit for both client and coach. Ostrov offers a prepayment plan that allows clients some extra services.

Much of the time, the company pays for coaching services, especially if the CEO or HR department has suggested improving certain skills. A company may allow an employee to use money set aside for their

education or training for a coach. But not always, and some coaches take that into account. For instance, McGuffin charges \$225-\$350 per session, depending on the client's position, when the company pays. If the client is paying, she charges about \$175.

Pick the Right Coach

There are plenty of reasons to hire a coach, but how do you pick a winner? McGuffin believes a coach should be certified by the International Coaching Federation or moving toward certification. Check out potential coaches at www.coachfederation.com.

Ostrov, on the other hand, feels her Ph.D. in psychology is a powerful credential in itself. She notes that psychologists adhere to a very strict code of ethics, something she believes every coach should do. But not every coach, she says, needs to have a psychological background. It depends on their area of specialty.

Both coaches urge potential clients to research coaches. "Get a referral from someone," says McGuffin. Ask for their qualifications and be sure their rates reflect their level of experience.

"Do the research," advises Ostrov. "Question potential coaches. Be picky. Find a good match. Beware of a coach with a cookie-cutter method." ■