

WHAT a PROFESSIONAL COACH BRINGS to the TABLE

If you need or want someone to help you to gain clarity about a situation, you may be tempted to save money by scrapping the coach idea and venting to your brother. Good choice? Probably not. Here's why:

You need objectivity.

It is difficult for most family members and friends to be totally objective with blood relatives or persons with whom they have a close relationship. Rather than looking at all angles of a problem, these people may be biased to see it the same way you do. As a result, you miss that fresh perspective, the critical insight, the little nuance you minimized. Further, if your sibling secretly resents you, he may present an interpretation of the issue that is more negative than it is. Be cautious about asking a loved one to play the role of a coach in your life. Hiring a third party who has no previous ties can provide you with the objectivity you need.

You deserve skilled sessions.

Your family member or friend is most likely not a skilled, professional coach. Chances are that individual won't ask bold questions, seriously challenge you, pick the multiple layers of a complex problem, or synthesize all the pieces. While you may receive lots of empathy, you won't get what you really need to work through the issue. Professional coaches bring particular skills to the conversation that help you connect with the resolution that will serve you best. Persons who don't have those same skills cannot possibly move you to where you want to be. Be careful that you don't trap yourself in a lot of wheel spinning with somebody who is merely chatting.

You need someone who can absorb and quickly release strong emotions.

People close to you usually cannot do this well. Instead, they get embroiled in your intense feelings and then spend too much energy trying to cope with their own responses to those feelings. Unfortunately, they may not be able to get beyond your feelings or theirs. Professional coaches are trained to acknowledge clients' emotions, but they are also trained not to internalize them or suffer from them. Professional coaches do not get stuck in clients' emotions. And—they do not allow their clients to stay stuck either. Consider this: family and friends occasionally benefit from you being stuck. Don't let this happen. Avoid "armchair coaching" in the first place.

You require wake-up calls at times.

Family and friends generally are reluctant to tell you outright that you're headed for trouble if you continue down a certain path. The reason? Their primary interest is to preserve the relationship. While they may see a certain truth or eventual outcome, they probably won't communicate it you directly. A professional coach won't hesitate to tell you something has to change and the rationale behind it. You owe it to yourself to bring someone into your life who isn't afraid to "tell it like it is". In fact, if you honestly do want your situation to improve, then you've got to invite periodic wake-up calls. To opt out of them means you are choosing a safe zone that allows you to stay comfortably in denial.

You deserve nonjudgmental coaching.

It's tough for family members and friends to remain neutral when they hear your problems, dilemmas, and crises. Immediately, they take a side, take a position, or assume a role in the matter. If they judge you harshly, then you've acquired another burden. Do you really want this?

Professional coaches can hear just about anything and refrain from judging you. At least not in a way you can detect. While nobody is completely free of judgment, these people are able to create a venue in which you can move forward without feeling like a bad girl, a deficient boy, a loser. If you think about it, you absolutely have to know you aren't being judged in order to change, grow, improve. It's the lack of judgment that gives you the freedom to explore new ideas and become a different or better person.

You owe it to yourself to look at an old problem through a different lens.

Are you still wrestling with an issue you've been dealing with for months or years? Most likely this is because you keep on viewing it in the same way you've always looked at it. As a result, you can't possibly reach a different conclusion that once and for all works for you. If you're relying on family or friends to help you see it in a new light, give it up. There's a good chance they aren't capable of doing it because they are too close to the situation, don't understand all of the aspects, or even get something out of seeing you in quicksand. A professional coach, far removed from your circumstances, has the ability to support you as you put on new glasses to examine the issue. Actually, she'll give you several pairs of glasses so you can begin to view things more comprehensively, more clearly, and more accurately. Remember: your goal is to make a decision or to solve a problem NOW instead of walking in circles for perhaps another year.

You should see the big picture.

Rarely do family members and friends see the big picture of YOUR life. Typically, they see a phase, an incident, an event, or a small part of your life. Usually in isolation. They tend to offer advice accordingly. What can fix this particular situation? What can make him feel better today? What could make things okay now? While these folks mean well in most cases, they may not be considering the multiple facets of you, the historical perspective, the bigger picture tied to the future. A professional coach leads you to decisions in the context of the big picture. Living your life consciously aware of the big picture helps you to avoid significant mistakes and unnecessary struggle.

As you toss around the possibility of hiring yourself a coach...as you weigh the pros and cons...ask yourself what you truly want. Do you simply want to feel better for the moment, or do you want to embark on a rich, exciting, life-changing journey that ultimately brings you to a brand new place? **The choice is yours.**

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