

[WORKPLACE WELL-BEING]

Finding that elusive balance

Life-coaching

Some get overwhelmed by attempts to reach their personal aspirations in life without becoming stressed out — others hire a life coach

by SANDY GADD and DION KLEIN

WORK-LIFE balance is currently a hot topic. We know what we need and we want it, but getting it still seems to elude us.

No-one can really quarantine themselves in the workplace from the stress of all the competing role demands others place on them. Not only are there expectations on us as employees, but also many of us have responsibilities as parents, friends, relatives, children, volunteers, students and neighbours.

One of the key aspects of achieving life balance is that we need to look at what tasks we must undertake to achieve that balance. As part of this process, we can identify how we might go about getting our lives in balance, and what balance means for each of us. The process of moving towards a state of balance is one of using and/or improving our mental fitness in the same way we might look to improve our physical fitness (which is also inter-related).

The process of achieving this life balance can be an overwhelming task for some. As people now use personal trainers to get into shape, many are seeking the expertise of life coaches to either get them or keep them on track to reach their personal aspirations in life without becoming stressed out.

In the 1950s the corporate world realised that the field of expertise coaches brought to sport also had applications in the playing fields of industry. By 1997, more than 100,000 Americans annually enlisted the help of more than 4000 coaches (*Money*, December 1997). By 2001 this had grown to 10,000 and is still climbing (*Wall Street Journal*, June 2001).

Another article noted, "For years, business people have used corporate coaches to help their companies work more effectively. Now, an increasing number of individuals are turning to coaches for help in find-

ing balance in their personal lives." (*Spokane Spokesman Review*, 1998)

The process of coaching is essentially one of conversation. The coach provides a safe environment that is productive and results-focused. The coaching relationship implies a feedback loop concerning the person's own behaviour and awareness. This is very effective because the coach is totally independent. A coach's only agenda is you, and your journey towards life balance. Coaching is proving so effective because it can produce sustained behavioural change.

How, then, do organisations and individuals go about the process of finding a personal or life coach? First, a coach should know about, have a philosophy on, and be trained in coaching. Coaching is not therapy, mentoring or training. If you want to hire a coach, you need to know what his/her qualifications are in coaching as a discipline. Do they understand human growth and development? How do they believe adults learn and change?

There are at least 10 coach-training institutions in Australia and even more overseas. As with most professions it is wise to check that the individual belongs to the relevant professional body, in this case, the International Coaching Federation. Do they adhere to the standard of ethics? What is his/her level of accreditation?

Second, the right coach for you has a background or training in a field that is relevant for you. Coaches come from a variety of professions and industries. What skills and experience do they bring to the coaching relationship?

What resonates for you as you or your organisation embarks on the journey to balance?

Do they have the interpersonal skills that you require? Do you sense you would relate to them and be

able to trust, work and learn with them?

Finally, how do they operate? Do they have a transparent framework for sessions? How do they establish your needs and what process do they use for goal setting and attainment? Do they use ongoing evaluation? How will success be measured? What redress will you have if you are dissatisfied?

More and more CEOs and managers are seeing the cost benefit of engaging coaches to work with employees. Reports claim an average return of more than \$100,000, or about six times what the coaching had cost their companies (*Fortune*, February 2001).

All work and no play makes one dull and unproductive. We need to remember this — if you don't run your own life, someone else will. A personal coach may be just what is needed to get on the path to balance.

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GUIDING HAND



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