

# This month:

## New Year, New Goals

The start of the New Year is a time for reflection upon the successes of the past 12 months, and naturally leads us to revisit our personal intentions for the future.



## From confusion to clarity

by author Heidi Hoff

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You're looking for a new career but are confused by the options. You want to start a small business but don't know where to begin. Something's missing in your life, but you just can't put your finger on it. Engaging the help of a life coach might be the answer.

Life coaching is still a very young practice but is quickly gaining in popularity. It is thought to have its roots in the 1980s, when large companies began to offer executive coaching to their top management as a way to help improve performance.



### Move forward

Life coaching is not to be confused with traditional counselling. "The focus of a therapist is to deal with crisis situations or past trauma," says life coach Julia James. "The distinction with coaching is that it is a more forward movement or action-oriented practice."

"There's a broad cross-section of people who use life coaches," says Steve Mitten, a master certified coach. "They recognize that what they've been doing hasn't worked for them. We have all had the experience of hitting our head on a ceiling somewhere. When that's the case, it's usually a knock on the door from the universe saying, 'Hey, maybe you need another set of eyes.'"

James agrees. "Most of the people who contact me have been struggling for a while on their own, trying to either get clarity on what they want to achieve or to move forward with their goals and accomplish them. They see themselves procrastinating and feel overwhelmed with all the things they have on the go."

Tara Jones (not her real name), a client of James's, says she was in a constant state of agitated boredom. "I tried different hobbies, new friends, and even bought a new sports car, but nothing helped. I was simply at a standstill in life." Jones felt that counselling was not what she needed, rather someone to help define what she really wanted out of life.

### Set realistic goals

The New Year is a time when many of us seek change in our lives, but we often set lofty goals that fall flat in a matter of weeks. "To set goals or resolutions without having a clear idea of where you want to end up is like heading off on a trip without a map or compass. You're going to get somewhere, but it's potluck whether it's going to be somewhere that's important to you," says Mitten.

#### Start off small

The key to achieving successful resolutions is to start off small, says James. "If someone wants to become more [physically] fit, we explore the smallest action they can take to incorporate more movement or fitness in their life."

#### Reflect on possibilities

Rosamund Hyde, a research support coordinator, sought the help of a life coach for career reasons. "I needed to schedule time to reflect on the possibilities for my work and life. Having a coaching session once a month ensures that I fit this reflection into my days and weeks," she says.

With her coach's help, Hyde has changed the landscape of her job to reflect what matters to her most. "When I made changes in my work role, my requirement to live in a large city changed. My family was able to move from a very large urban centre to a rural location closer to relatives," she says.

"My spouse is now exploring his dream job, and our children are enjoying a new breadth of freedom and learning. Our two years of preparing, moving, and settling in has been a time of transformation of our relationships inside our family and beyond."

#### Commit to the process

While some life coaches require at least a five-month commitment from their clients, others operate on a session-by-session basis. Coaching is done over the phone to accommodate busy schedules, and a typical call lasts about 40 minutes. Most coaches end the session by assigning a task, whether it's to read a certain book, try journaling, or practise relaxation.

#### Learn to relax

James's book, *The Mini-Retreat Solution* (Sparknotes, 2010), helps the reader learn how to relax anywhere, any time. "When you're at a red light, it's a good opportunity to take a deep breath and calm yourself," she says. When you're relaxed, you're much more able to make decisions that will serve you well.

James recommends that her clients reduce or eliminate stimulants such as sugar or caffeine. She also finds yoga a beneficial way of helping clients to relax.

"One of the things I love most about coaching," says James, "is witnessing people falling in love with themselves. It's almost like appreciating for the first time who they really are and what special qualities they have. So often we take all of that for granted."

## Choosing a life coach

Having a good rapport with a life coach is key to your success. Here's how to find a life coach and what to look for:

- Ask friends and family for a referral.
- Conduct an Internet search.
- Interview several coaches to find the best fit.
- Ask whether the introductory session is free of charge.
- Check the coach's training; a reputable life coach will have graduated from an International Coach Federation (ICF) accredited school ([coachfederation.org](http://coachfederation.org)).
- Check that the coach has one or more of the following credentials:
  - Associate Certified Coach (ACC)
  - Professional Certified Coach (PCC)
  - Master Certified Coach (MCC)

## Areas of expertise

A life coach can help you set goals in the following areas.

### Personal planning

- life planning
- health and fitness
- relationships (singles, couples, and families)
- school/educational planning for children, teens, and adults
- spirituality
- organization

### Career planning

- career transitions
- exploring new career options
- decision-making

### Small business planning for:

- entrepreneurs
- company owners and managers
- those wishing to start a business

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