

If You Can't Make a Living, How Can You Make a Difference?

Results from C.J. Hayden's session at the 2006 International Coach Federation conference

INTRODUCTION

A group of almost 300 coaches worked together in my breakout session to explore why coaches aren't earning a better living and what we can do about it. We chose the profession of coaching because we want to help others and make a difference in the world. But if we can't earn a decent living, we give up our coaching practices, spend our energy at day jobs, and never make the powerful impact we know that we could. How can coaching make a difference if coaches aren't coaching people? Earning a better living isn't just about making money; it's about making more of an impact.

Below are the complete results of this powerful session. After reading them, I invite you to come help us implement some of the solutions we identified. See the Next Steps section for how you can join us.

CAUSES

In order to identify the problems to be solved, we began by examining the causes of our current situation. (If you're more interested in the solutions, skip down to that section.) We asked the questions:

- What is stopping us from earning a better living at coaching?
- What problems need to be solved for us to remedy this situation?
- What are the specific areas where we need to focus our efforts?

The answers we came up with fell into five different categories, four that I suggested initially and a new one that emerged during the session – lack of essential business skills. Here is what our group of coaches had to say:

1. Obstacles in the Marketplace

- Public is uninformed about coaching; they are unaware of it or don't know what it is
- Confusion about distinctions between coaching, therapy, consulting, and training
- Marketplace doesn't perceive coaching's value or return on investment (ROI)
- Not enough information is available about ROI
- Many people who need coaches can't afford them
- Coaching is too expensive; a luxury; people don't want to spend that much
- It's hard to identify where and what the needs for coaching are
- Many people who could use coaching don't believe they "need" it
- People need to experience coaching to really understand it
- People think coaching is about fixing rather than enhancing or growing
- Public has a negative image of coaching from Hollywood and media depiction
- Too many "moonbeam" coaches devalue coaching in general
- People call themselves coaches without training or credible expertise
- Not enough salaried jobs or paid internships for coaches

2. Gaps in Marketing Knowledge or Execution

Not being clear enough about what we offer; to others or to ourselves
Not communicating our value; not talking enough about ROI or measurable results
Not understanding what our own ROI is; not tracking or quantifying
Not using the right language to talk about coaching; using jargon and “coach-speak”
Not relating coaching to the needs of organizations and people we market to
Spending too much time explaining the process of coaching instead of its benefits
Not educating people about coaching enough to create more awareness
Not sharing enough success stories and specific results
Defining coaching too broadly; not emphasizing our specialities
Not having a niche, target market, or brand; refusing to choose or afraid to choose
Targeting people who don't have the ability to pay us
Not establishing our credibility or credentials; not enough focus on expertise
Don't know enough about sales and marketing
Not enough useful information about what works to market coaching
Not working enough at sales and marketing; not allowing enough time/money for it
Not asking for the sale or knowing how to ask
Many coaches are introverts or “feeling types”; marketing isn't a natural skill
Not having marketing plans or researching our market
Unprofessional about marketing, e.g. amateurish websites or homemade brochures
No pre-existing network to reach out to; lack of networking skills
Not giving enough talks and workshops in our communities
Not asking for referrals; expecting them to just materialize

3. Lack of Essential Business Skills

Don't have the basic skills needed to run a business; no business experience
Not taking the time (or having the patience) to build a firm business foundation
Lack of understanding what it takes to start and operate a successful business
Unrealistic expectations about the time, money or learning curve to get started
Not taking advantage of existing resources, e.g. local ICF chapters, trade groups
Not enough mentoring from established coaches
Coaching schools don't provide or emphasize business training
Being un-businesslike; not collecting fees when due or charging for missed sessions
Poor time management; lack of prioritization; too much multitasking
Not delegating or outsourcing enough; can't afford to hire support
Fear of technology or lack of technology know-how

4. Inadequate Business Models

Too much 1-on-1 coaching; not enough group coaching or other leveraged models
Offering coaching as a standalone solution instead of combining with training or consulting that leads into coaching
Not charging enough, lowering rates, too many barter, or coaching for free
No passive income or multiple streams of income; most successful coaches have this
Suffering from feast or famine syndrome; too much client turnover
Don't “package” coaching in ways that people find tangible or valuable
Billing based purely on time, not value or knowledge
Working in isolation; not enough partnership or collaboration
Not having a model for business growth; unsustainable businesses

Lacking business plans, a vision, or goals
Not enough attention or time on running the business; too much on just coaching
Expecting a full-time income from a part-time business

5. Negative Beliefs and Conflicting Values

Not placing enough value on our own work
Stuck inside our comfort zones; not being bold enough
Afraid to market, sell, and talk about coaching even when we know how
Believing marketing and sales are “yucky” or “scuzzy”
Playing too small and not thinking out of the box; limiting our possibilities
Not willing to promote ourselves
Don't want to run businesses or be businesspeople
Acting like “lone rangers”; not getting enough peer support
Not modeling self-care or healthy and happy lives; not walking our talk
Not willing to take risks or give up job security or steady income
Insisting on perfection in ourselves and our businesses before we can act
Negative beliefs about money or asking to be paid; not making income a priority
Collapsing differences between friends and clients; valuing clients more than self
Negative attitudes about selling or being a salesperson
Lack of confidence in our coaching or ourselves; don't believe in our success
Don't take enough personal responsibility for our own success

SOLUTIONS

Whew! With all that facing us, it's no wonder coaches are having trouble earning a good living. In interviews and focus groups I conducted before the session, coaches identified a number of existing solutions to these problems, including self-study with books and audio, participating in workshops and group programs, getting one-on-one help, new business models, and community initiatives. To read a summary of those recommended solutions, go to www.getclientsnow.com/ICF-2006-Handout.pdf and see Page 3.

But the evidence tells us that these existing resources simply aren't enough. In my session, we focused the brainpower and energy of the coaches present on creating innovative *new* solutions to the challenges we are facing. Each table concentrated on solving one category of problem. Below is what the group came up with. As you read this amazing collection of ideas, consider which ones speak to you. What might you be willing to take on for yourself or for our profession?

1. Obstacles in the Marketplace

Launch a national PR campaign to educate the public about the benefits of coaching, with celebrity spokespeople and client testimonials
ICF could sponsor a TV commercial about the benefits of coaching and hiring a coach
Collect and share data about coaching ROI
Name specific, measurable results whenever we market coaching
Create a sample packet coaches could use for community outreach
Build a library of tools for coaches to help them better educate prospective clients, like the tools that vendors provide to financial planners

ICF could create a coaching slogan we could all use
 Launch a “pledge drive” where each ICF member would agree to talk to a group about coaching, then get a referral from them to another group
 ICF or chapters could have coaching trade shows or fairs; invite HR and executives
 ICF could have a speakers bureau marketed to the public
 Create a clearinghouse for coaching referrals: the National Coaches Bureau
 Build strategic alliances as an industry, with health care, nonprofits, associations, educational institutions, and allied professions; encourage referrals
 ICF website could have inbound links from other organizations and industries
 ICF could sponsor charity events (e.g. a race) to build awareness of coaching
 Have a coaching day at stadiums; tie in sports because people understand it
 Identify the “tipping point” for awareness of coaching and make a plan to reach it
 Locate and capitalize on champions of coaching in your local area
 Educate children about coaching (our clients of the future); bring coaching to schools and universities; promote to parents also
 ICF or chapters could market coaching as a solution to specific organizations
 Training schools could promote coaching to the public
 Give awards to businesses that embrace coaching or for best practices in coaching
 Hold events where the public could experience coaching
 Create coaching booths in shopping malls and major retail stores
 Coach people in the media and other thought leaders so they understand us better
 Dispel the impression that coaching is woo-woo; position it as a solution
 Ask each local ICF chapter to create their own PR plan and act on it
 Copy the model created by the San Antonio Prof'l Coaches Assoc – partner with a bookstore to offer monthly workshops by coaches based on popular books
 Find out what’s needed in our local communities (e.g. hold focus groups) and market coaching to address it
 Record and market ringtones of coaching tips; engage the next generation
 Get the postal service to issue a coaching stamp
 Stage coaching parades in major cities

2. Gaps in Marketing Knowledge or Execution

Have regional conferences focused on the business and marketing of coaching or for coaching SIG's to share best practices
 ICF could require training schools to include classes on marketing and how to build a business, and/or a mentoring component to their program
 MCC's and PCC's could be required to volunteer as mentors to newer coaches to maintain their credential
 Use a pay-it-forward model where each coach mentors someone more junior and that person does the same later on
 Organize a system where coaches submit marketing/business plans to ICF for critique by volunteers
 Marketing and building a business could be an ICF competency and/or requirement for credentialing
 Create a website or message board where all coaches could share best practices, tools, resources, and expertise
 Have a “business of coaching” track at every ICF conference or a full pre-conference day

Use Open Space technology to hold sessions on marketing and business building at ICF conferences

Provide a marketing and/or business toolkit to every new coach, or a workbook like “What to Expect When You’re Expecting”

Build a nonprofit collaborative training institute or “think tank” that focuses on marketing and business building

Find out what works in other similar industries and transfer their knowledge

Take more advantage of existing resources like SCORE

Set up coaching brokerages to market many coaches under one umbrella

Coaches could have agents like athletes and actors do

Have “celebrity coaches” speak and funnel audiences into sample sessions with newer coaches

Engage a storytelling expert to train coaches in telling client success stories; collect and share success stories

Create a book of testimonials and one-liners about coaching, e.g. “Even Tiger Woods needs a coach”

Offer clients a money-back guarantee if they don’t see results

Monetize potential results from coaching; tell clients what they’ll gain or avoid losing

Partner with other small businesses, Chambers of Commerce, or SCORE chapters to jointly develop business and marketing competencies

Coaching schools could co-brand with their graduates to market coaching

Local chapters could match up coaching business buddies to support each other

Create more networking opportunities for coaches to interact

Organize leads groups just for coaches

Outsource the marketing of coaching to experts

Host lunches/breakfasts for client groups with coaching demos

Launch a coaching blog for the whole industry

Create a watchdog group that researches what does and doesn’t work in coaching

Have colleges offer coaching through Career Services; starting with freshmen

Bring coaching to employee assistance programs and other areas where counseling is the current norm

Create podcasts about coaching topics; collect on a CD

Sell coaching on eBay

3. Inadequate Business Models

Provide paid internships for new coaches to provide low-cost coaching under supervision during their training

Groups of coaches with a similar niche or trained by the same school could form coaching firms or consortiums

Create prosperity circles where each coach has a different set of knowledge about business or marketing

Collaborate with other professions in partnerships and strategic alliances

Set up low-cost coaching clinics for groups of coaches to operate together

Create a revolving loan fund to help coaches build their practices; successful coaches could donate to get it started

Help coaches get SBA loans for business startup/expansion

Launch business incubators for coaching

Make use of barter to get access to needed services and expose others to coaching

Create marketing co-ops to leverage money and time
Ask MCC's and PCC's to refer to newer coaches; have associate coaches in their firms
Set up "shadow coaching" or an apprenticeship program for new coaches to learn from experienced coaches
Get coaching covered by insurance and employee assistance plans
Create more passive income opportunities for coaches
Diversify our products and services; have multiple streams of income
Create a core coaching-related product or service, then build in add-ons
Don't offer free sample sessions; offer "exploratory meetings" or a conversation about what the client needs and what coaching can offer
Provide training for coaches in what business models are and why they should care
Create a data bank of successful coaching business models; coaching schools could do this
Sponsor a government allowance for coaching for every citizen

4. Negative Beliefs and Conflicting Values

Hold consciousness raising groups for coaches, like the ones pioneered by feminists in the 60's
Participate in mastermind groups or peer support groups with other self-employed professionals to help each other
Practice marketing and asking for money in safe environments
Organize "rookie camps" for new coaches
Create a 28-day program to revise/reframe money and marketing beliefs
Develop tools and strategies to resolve our own conflicts in these areas so we can better coach our clients to do the same
Invite speakers and experts on these topics, e.g. cognitive/behavioral expert or author of "Taming Your Gremlin"
Work with a coach or volunteer mentor to overcome barriers
Trade coaching with each other and focus on these issues
Have someone to whom you are accountable
Write about these tough issues in coaching publications
Get inspiration from successful coaches; use them as role models
Get serious about coaching as a profession; don't tolerate unprofessionalism
Write a "Chicken Soup for the Coach's Soul" book
Stop talking about how launching a coaching practice is such a struggle and focus on sharing best practices and success stories
Visualize abundance, prosperity, and success wherever coaches gather

(Note that we didn't focus on solutions for "lack of essential business skills" in the session, although some of the ideas suggested above would certainly address those issues also.)

NEXT STEPS

Wow! If a group of less than 300 coaches can generate a list of ideas like this in a 15-minute discussion, imagine what the 10,000 plus members of ICF could create in a few weeks or months if we implemented just a few of these suggestions. Which of these ideas speaks to you? What would you be willing to take on or participate in as a project to help coaches earn a better living?

If you'd like to join a group of coaches who are ready to bring some of these ideas to life, go to groups.yahoo.com/group/coachesmakeadifference and become part of our conversation. Together we can make a positive difference for the coaching profession and therefore for the world.

You are welcome to share this document with anyone who might benefit from it.