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What You Should Ask Before Hiring a Career Coach

By THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

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DES MOINES Iowa (AP) -- Finding yourself unemployed or frustrated in a dead-end career and looking for change? Many people are thinking it's time for a career coach to help find a new -- or better -- job. Don't rush in, though, there are plenty of pitfalls in this rapidly growing business.

About 60 to 70 percent of the people seeking coaching services are looking for a job, said Joel Garfinkle, an Oakland, Calif.-based career coach and author. They may be unemployed or may have reached a point in their careers where they need a change. The other 30 to 40 percent are working on their career and want help with a promotion, communication skills or just to more narrowly define career goals.

A coach can help you focus in on your skills and think more broadly about the types of jobs for which you qualify. They also can help you work through personal issues that may be in the way of successfully landing a job such as appearance, interviewing, preparing a good resume and cover letters, said Garfinkle, who has provided individual coaching and executive coaching services for 12 years.

He is working with a larger number of clients who are unemployed for the first time in their careers, wondering how to start a job search.

"There's a shock. They call and say, 'Oh my God, I've never had to look for a job, ever,'" he said.

WHY WOULD I NEED A COACH

Those who have been out of the job market for a long time, may not be as adept at using the latest tools such as the online social networking site [Facebook](#) or the professional site LinkedIn. What's more, many are not even sure what their personal brand is -- their individual set of skills that sets them off from others, said Kay Cannon, a coach in Lexington, Ky.

For many, online tools and other publications can help move them in the right direction and give them the help they need with resume preparation and location of job sites, said Margaret Dikel, of Rockville, Md. She operates The Riley Guide, an Internet site that offers links to employment and career information.

Others, however, need the guidance of a coach or counselor.

"It's such an individual thing," she said. "If someone has a lot of questions and needs maybe a little bit of help or coaxing or someone to help sort through their thoughts, I advocate a coach or a career counselor."

She said anyone struggling with making the right decisions or who feels they're stuck in a rut, may want to

seek out a career counselor, someone typically with a psychology degree and trained in counseling.

The career coaching and counseling field has grown tremendously in the past decade but the fact that it's unregulated should raise your level of skepticism.

Trade organizations offer professional certifications which indicates the coach has passed tests and an application process that indicates they follow ethical guidelines and have passed competency testing.

The International Coach Federation, the Worldwide Association of Business Coaches and the National Career Development Association all offer certifications.

They also offer free search features on their Web sites which allow you to find a certified coaches in your area.

TIPS FOR FINDING A COACH

Anyone can call themselves a coach but if you're looking, here's a suggested checklist to keep in mind:

1. Ask whether they follow a professional code of ethics. Make sure the person you're considering subscribes to a professional code of ethics advocated by one of the professional trade groups.
2. Check on training and education. Choose someone who's been through a coach training program to ensure the person has had some professional preparation. Career counselors listed by the NCDA, for example, hold a graduate degree in counseling with a specialization in career counseling. Coaches could have other qualifications such as a psychology degree or other training. It's a good idea to ask.
3. Ask for credentials. The ICF credentials, for example, require members to follow a code of ethics, have specific training and pass through written and oral testing and an application process
4. Look for experience. Specifically, a coach experienced in the area for which you are seeking help. If you're an executive, seek one with executive experience. The same goes for factory workers or those in certain professions.

Garfinkle, the Oakland coach, agrees that hands-on experience is a must for a job coach. He says it's OK to ask how many years they've been coaching and how many clients they've seen. He also recommends asking about their process.

Coaches likely will establish a specific number of meetings a month and discuss their preferred communication methods, whether its telephone calls or e-mails. A charge of \$100 an hour is not uncommon and could be considerably more in some cases.

5. Be sure there is a chemistry between you and the coach. A good rapport could make the process go much faster. In your initial interview with a prospective coach, spend 15 or 20 minutes talking about one of the issues you want to tackle, Garfinkle said. See if he or she is willing to coach you a little right there on the spot, this will give you a sense of whether you can build a rapport.

He says narrow your choices down to a couple of coaches and ask them for references of clients you could call.

Whether you're entering the work force again or just looking for a leg up in this competitive job environment, a coach may offer some value if you're looking for help. Approach the search for a coach with eyes wide open, do some homework and seek a professional with a history of success, some credentials and a personality that's a good fit with yours.

On the Net:

Kay Cannon: www.leadershipwhisperer.com

Joel Garfinkle: www.dreamjobcoaching.com

International Coach Federation: www.coachfederation.org

Worldwide Association of Business Coaches: www.wabccoaches.com

National Career Development Association: <http://associationdatabase.com/aws/NCDA/pt/sp/Home--Page>

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