

Should You Hire a Career Coach?

What you need to know about cost, payoff and finding a professional worth the investment.



Before investing time and money, make sure the career coach you hire will guide you to career success.

By [Laura McMullen](#) | June 24, 2015 | 9:54 a.m. EDT



Sometimes, there are only so many self-help books to buy, career inquires to Google and [U.S. News articles to read](#) – as helpful as they are – before you need reinforcements.

"You know you need outside help from a career coach when you're stuck in any phase of the pipeline of bettering your career or changing it," says Kathy Caprino, career coach and author of "Breakdown, Breakthrough: The Professional Woman's Guide to Claiming a Life of Passion, Power, and Purpose." Career coaches can help you find a job or, more broadly, a career. They can support you while transitioning industries, starting a business, honing specific skills or performing better at work.

But here's the thing: Some coaches are great at helping you, and others are totally winging it by Googling exactly what you're Googling. That's why you need to know how to find a quality coach, what to pay and what to expect from sessions – before you invest your time and money.

What should you look for when choosing a career coach?

"Literally just about anyone can start calling themselves a coach," says Lisa Quast, career coach and author of "Secrets of a Hiring Manager Turned Career Coach: A Foolproof Guide To Getting The Job You Want. Every Time." That's why, she says, "the most important thing is really doing your research ahead of time to find the right coach."

Start with recommendations from friends and colleagues, and do some Google searching, recommends "Reinventing You" author Dorie Clark in a Harvard Business Review article, "[Find the Career Coach Who's Right for You.](#)" From there, consider these factors:

- **Online presence:** Look for coaches who've built their online brand. "If you're not on social media and LinkedIn, you're not very relevant as a coach," Caprino says. Coaches should also have a slick website that shows client testimonials, rates and credentials from professional organizations, such as the Association of Career Professionals International, Institute of Career Certification International or International Coach Federation. Another must on the career coach's website: information about his or her experience and specialization. Speaking of which ...



- **Experience and specialization:** Several years of experience as a coach are a major plus. As Caprino puts it: "Think of it as any professional service – a doctor, a lawyer, a financial consultant – do you want to start with someone who's two months into it?" Also consider the coach's experience in successfully helping people with your specific need. (To continue the comparison, would you rather get bypass surgery from a doctor who's done the procedure hundreds of times or a resident who's giving it his first try?) You should be able to tell a coach's specialization from her website, whether it's job searching, advancing to the C-suite, starting a business and so on.
- **Complementary work:** "Today, great coaches are also thought leaders," Caprino says. "They write, they speak, they train, they do workshops, et cetera." Again, this experience should be evident on the coach's website.
- **Red flags:** Beware of coaches who promise you a [dream job](#), make you pay a substantial fee upfront or have you sign long contracts, warns [this AARP article about career coaching](#).

How much do career coaches cost?

Caprino tells it like it is: "Good coaches aren't cheap." She says rates – which are by hour, session or comprehensive program – vary dramatically and depend on the coach. Caprino's "Jumpstart Your Career Success" program, for example, costs \$1,995 for four 45-minute coaching sessions via phone. (That's about \$500 per session.) Quast's rates are closer to \$175 (via phone) and \$200 (in person) per hourlong session.

"I like to think of [career coaching] as an investment in yourself and your career," Quast says. If the price tag for said investment concerns you, consider it all the more reason to research various coaches and choose the one who is right for you.

What can you expect from sessions?

Early in the process, you'll figure out if the coach's skills and experience align with [your needs and goals](#). (You don't want a dermatologist to perform that bypass surgery.) As far as expectations, Caprino says that while there are no guarantees, "the coach should provide you with specific details about what the coachee will get out of the program and exactly how they'll help you achieve your goals."

Each coach has her own strategy for reaching those goals, but whatever it is, Caprino says good ones will have a "tried-and-true process [they] bring everyone through." (It's not some "loosey-goosey" method of asking questions and just trying stuff as you go along, she adds.)

Whatever route your career coach leads you on, it'll likely involve homework – reading a book or networking, for example – and [require effort and enthusiasm](#).

"Coaching is going to guide you to become different and do different things, so it's best you don't resist that," Caprino says. "Come with an open mind and willingness to change."

