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ABI/Inform Full Text results for: '**kw: internet and kw: coaching**'.

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A sounding board in cyberspace

Author: Harrington, Ann **Source:** Fortune v138n6, (Sep 28, 1998): p.301-302 (Length: 2 pages) **ISSN:** 0015-8259
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Headnote:

Online referrals, phone sessions, and E-mail are changing the way we get career help. Your next coach or counselor could be a continent away.

After more than a decade of long hours, Sue Pellant Moore had finally reached a top administrative position in the Pittsburgh public library system-only to feel more pressured and less fulfilled than ever. "I wanted my time back," she said. Unsure what her next step should be, she put her research skills to work by searching the Web. Using keywords like "career change," "counseling," and "consulting," she came across a site for something called Coach University-a training program for personal and business coaches. The Website (www.coachu.com) also featured an online database of Coach U's graduates.

By focusing her keywords, Moore, 38, was able to zero in on three career coaches who also had made the transition from working for a large organization to working for themselves. Ultimately she selected Judy Feld, a former AMR Information Services vice president. In two years of being coached, Moore has never been in the same room with Feld, who lives in Dallas; the two "meet" by phone for half an hour once a week and send each other Email the rest of the time. Yet just one month after quitting her job, Moore's new Web-design business was up and running and in the black.

Thanks to sites like Coach U's, increasing numbers of coaches and clients are forging virtual relationships like Moore and Feld's (see box). The benefits are several. Now clients are no longer limited to whatever career counselor has hung out a shingle in their backyard. "It's just so much more convenient," Moore says. "I don't have to get in my car and go somewhere." Every week she files a client-prep form by E-mail to let her coach know what she's hoping to concentrate on in their upcoming session.

Deb Koen, who developed the telecounseling training program for the nonprofit Career Development Services of Rochester, N.Y., says that in some cases "it's actually easier to build rapport" through telecounseling. CDS has an online referral arm available through the Wall Street Journal's career Website (www.careers.wsj.com). Sherry Lowry, a Houston-based coach (and a former family therapist), cites another advantage to operating "blind": It keeps the coach from making hasty assumptions based on a client's appearance.

Coach Laura Berman Fortgang helped client Alan Page, 32, fill in the gaps when he moved to a new company and found himself working without a supervisor, much less a mentor, for several months. Page believes that having never met with Fortgang face to face allowed him to be more honest and more objective. Talking by phone, he speculates, is not unlike the Catholic confessional, where the invisibility of the priest fosters candor in the penitent.

Leading the move to virtual relationships have been coaches, many of whom trained at a distance, in teleclasses. Most of the 1,300 coaches in the International Coach Federation (which also operates a referral service, at

www.coachfederation.com) work primarily by phone, supplemented by E-mail. But coaching differs from traditional career counseling in other ways as well.

Fortgang compares coaching with hiring a personal trainer: He doesn't build your biceps, but he does help you get to the gym. Today's managers, professionals, and entrepreneurs are hiring coaches to help them with time management, a change in career, or balancing their work and personal lives. People are looking to coaches as sounding boards and motivators who can offer a fresh perspective on career and life problems-but without the conflicting agendas of a spouse, family member, or even a mentor. Fortgang, author of *Take Yourself to the Top* (Warner Books, \$13.99), has described coaching as "just in time" training, because coaches respond to issues that are arising now, while the training provided at a conference or seminar is really "just in case."

Online or in person, coaching is such a new business that it's easier to compare it with other approaches than to describe it. Unlike a therapist, a coach will say he is more concerned with the future than with the past, with action than with introspection, and with how things can happen rather than why they did. Unlike a consultant, a coach helps the client discover solutions instead of telling her what to do.

Coaches tend to blur the lines between career and life more than conventional career counselors, who must be certified to administer personality and interest inventories such as the Myers-Briggs and Strong tests, and who dispense advice on such meat-and-potatoes matters as resumes, interviewing and negotiating skills, and networking.

Career counselors still believe there are advantages to in-person meetings. Susan Eubanks, associate executive director for professional affairs at the National Board of Certified Counselors, worries that telecounselors can't watch how people are reacting but can only listen. The Five O'Clock Club (www.fiveoclockclub.com), a national career counseling network, has 200 counselors (now also often called coaches) who are doing a lot more advising by phone from their locations around the country, but its president, Kate Wendleton, thinks meeting in person is also a good idea. Sometimes, she says, you hear a job seeker's voice on the phone and you realize, "That's the problem!" Or you meet someone in person and you say, "That's the problem!"

For many coaches and clients, the biggest insights often happen between sessions. That's when clients do their "homework" drafting resum*s, business plans, and contracts, and often E-mailing the results to their coaches, who can edit them line by line if necessary. Sue Moore remembers writing a resignation letter when she was in one of those "life's too short" moods-and getting a priority E-mail from Judy Feld saying, "Hold on! Talk to me before you do this!" And with E-mail, those middle-of-the-night inspirations can be conveyed without causing alarm. "I just find it a very polite form of communication," Moore says, "because you can send it anytime, and you don't have to worry that it's too late or too early or if the person's busy. And the turnaround's reasonable too." Many coaches allow unlimited E-mail in a weekly telecoaching package, with responses guaranteed by the end of the next business day.

There have been attempts at cybercoaching without phone sessions, but coaches say it's hard to have a rapport under those circumstances unless coach and client have already met. Harriett Simon Salinger, a former New York psychotherapist, tried to establish a cybercoaching practice when she moved to San Francisco, hoping it would offer her more flexibility than her hourly therapy sessions had. To her dismay, she found herself mired in lengthy messages from clients who had taken wrong turns or who simply didn't communicate clearly in the E-mail format. Within nine months she had switched to the phone, augmented by E-mail, since she finds that people who don't keep in touch via E-mail between sessions can get into mischief too.

The live chat format has found few champions among coaches. Most people's keyboarding skills just aren't good enough to make it feel spontaneous, coaches who have tried it say, and the time delay can be disconcerting. Top executives who are used to having secretaries handle their typing are especially unlikely to be comfortable with cybercoaching.

word of warning: While career counselors are state regulated, coaching so far is not. Most career counselors have at least a master's degree in counseling and have passed an exam developed and administered by the National Board of Certified Counselors. Coaches, by comparison, come from all kinds of backgrounds. Although most coaching schools have formal professional training programs, they vary substantially. The International Coach Federation plans to announce new certification standards soon, but the buyer should beware and never put down more than a month's fee in advance.

Career counseling has traditionally been short term and in response to a particular development-a new job or the need to find one. Coaching, by contrast, is a commitment. Most coaches ask for engagements of at least three months, at rates that start at \$200 a month and go up from there. Is it worth the investment? Sue Moore thinks so, even after spending about \$7,500 over two years. But that, she figures, is more economical and effective than picking up snatches of advice from countless classes or workshops. Besides, she says, "I needed the discipline of someone's being with me every week, making sure I stuck to my goals."



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