

# **Controversy of Coaching vs. Therapy**

By Dawn Quesnel

Currently in Colorado there is a major controversy going on between Coaching and Therapy. The state of Colorado says that all coaches must register as “unlicensed therapists” to be in compliance with the state mental health law, since they feel that Coaching meets the state statutory definition of psychotherapy. The current law is set to expire and will be renewed or changed on January 1, 2004.

To register as an “unlicensed therapist” would be out of integrity with our training and code of ethics, which specifically states we are not therapists, as well as misleading to the public since Coaches would be listed in the “unlicensed therapists” roster as opposed to one that clearly provides the distinct service of a Coach.

To clarify this issue I will cover the differences between a Life Coach and a Therapist.

The definition of a Life Coach is an ongoing professional relationship that helps people produce extraordinary results in their lives, careers, businesses or organizations. A Life Coach focuses on the present and future. The Coaching philosophy is that the client is creative, resourceful and whole and has the answers inside them. A Coach works with the client to help bring those answers to the surface. A Life Coach is there to listen, support, challenge and ask questions to help guide the client toward taking action and to figuring out the answer on their own.

Therapy by definition is a treatment of an illness or disability. A Therapist works with people and their issues, to help deal with the past and to better understand their behaviors. Therapy is more of a concentration on the past and “fixing” a person, whereas Coaching is more focused on the present and future, and supporting and guiding the client based on their agenda, not a diagnosis.

Additionally, Therapy focuses on healing dysfunction, and Coaching focuses on evolving strengths. Therapy is more of a traditional, rigid relationship between doctor and patient (expert and client), using a medical model based on healing issues such as depression, anxiety, addiction, and trauma. Coaching is an equal and flexible, co-created partnership using a performance model based on achievement. Here the client is the expert and the Coach is there to support, guide and challenge, with setting and reaching goals working toward a better quality of life and finding a balance that works for the client. It’s a dynamic movement to the next level of personal excellence.

The bottom line difference is that Coaches work with functioning people looking to excel to higher function, whereas Therapy works with dysfunctional clients seeking to become functional. We are here to help you discover who you are now and who you want to become in the future. It doesn’t matter where you came from it only matters where you want to go from here.

While some similarities truly exist, there is a clear enough distinction between the two practices to categorize them separately. The current Colorado law that Coaches must register as an “unlicensed therapist” should be abolished. I do not want to be labeled as a Therapist. As a Coach I am not here to fix, diagnose, or ask the client why. I am here to support, challenge, and ask what’s next.

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