

What Am I Going To Do With My Life?

After her divorce, Julie S. needed a job that would support herself and her small son. None that she found paid enough. She was an excellent knitter, though, and friends suggested she start a business making caps and mittens. Being a bit insecure, Julie couldn't imagine herself as a small business owner. It seemed too complicated and intimidating. So she got a job at a box store, which she hated.

Esther L. didn't know what she wanted to do with herself. She'd graduated last year in English, and since then had worked for a bake shop, a weekly paper, and a dive shop. She had no clue what would really light her fire enough to make a career of it.

Amy P. had left her job as a bookkeeper for a boss who was constantly critical. Amy had done excellent work, but the guy never said anything positive about her performance. When a young man who'd only worked there for a year got promoted over her, she had left and started her own freelance bookkeeping service. Things went fine for a while, but then Amy ran into trouble. Either there was too much work or not enough. She didn't know how to plan for the slow times, and during the rush periods, she either got overwhelmed trying to do it all herself, or she had trouble finding good employees, and then keeping them busy enough to retain them. She started losing accounts.

Then Amy saw an article about small business coaching. It described a variety of benefits that people derive from working with a coach. She found a business coach in her area. Her coach taught Amy why 96% of all small businesses fail within 10 years, and explained the viewpoint needed to be successful. She was prompted to imagine a larger vision of her business and of her life than she had originally imagined. Together, she and her coach mapped out specific steps to take to identify her core values, to build 1- and 5-year plans, to work out technical difficulties in her business, and how to market her services. She learned what she needed to out-source, and what she was best at doing herself.

Amy also wanted to address what made her unable to stand up to her critical boss, so they worked on building her assertiveness, which helped a lot when she negotiated with a landlord for her lovely new office.

Amy was so excited about the changes she was making, that she talked her friend Julie into trying her coach. Julie worked first on the insecurity that plagued her after her divorce. She and her coach then clarified a vision for her life that excited and scared her. With continued support and prodding, she risked taking steps she'd never have imagined she'd be able to take. While her friends thought a knitting business would be great, Julie realized that she wanted to keep knitting as a restful hobby. What blossomed from a vague dream was the idea of becoming a professional story-teller. Based on the plan they developed, she is taking acting classes and is studying story-telling traditions from around the world.

Many people haven't heard of Business and Personal Coaching. A good coach is highly trained to help individuals and organizations develop more rapidly and be more

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successful. Coaching focuses both on goals and on clients' internal growth as equally important. All areas of life - career, home, relationships, fun, spirituality, finances, health – are possible topics.

Coaching works, because the coach takes the point of view that the client is capable and resourceful. Rather than reacting to what is thrown at you, you're able to focus your attention and energies on goals that are intrinsic to you. The coach keeps you on track, helping you to push past obstacles and take risks you wouldn't dare before. Life presents unforeseen challenges, yet the overall experience of your life is so different when you're empowered to move in directions that are right for you. Coaching is not therapy, which is largely about healing and fixing a problem from the past. Coaching aims at growing into the future.

The last time Amy and Julie got together for tea, they worked on a plan to have Amy do Julie's bookkeeping, while Julie would give a performance at Amy's son's birthday party. They got excited about ways to network in order to market their services. Now, the question is, who is going to talk to Esther about her career dilemma?

Bio: Sarah Gillen, LMFT, coaches individuals and organizations, applying Energy Coaching to personal, as well as business coaching. She teaches classes and leads coaching groups, both in person and through teleconferencing.

In practice for 23 years, Ms. Gillen focuses on helping people and companies to increase creativity, output, and affluence, while learning to have more time for fun, family, and well-being. She has trained with MentorCoach, LLC, in executive and small business coaching and is a member of International Coach Federation.

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(SideBar): How to Find a Coach:

Finding a coach may seem like a daunting task. Here are some important questions to ask yourself or them:

- 1) Do you want to meet in person or on the phone? Phone coaching has many benefits: you don't have to travel; no one sees you meet with your coach; you can fit it into your work day more easily.
- 2) Does the coach go by a formula? Does she/he have set questions and a set idea of how to reach a goal? Does that work for you?
- 3) Does he/she jump in with solutions quickly, or do you get the sense that they respect your process and see you as capable?
- 4) Is she/he responsive to **your** goals and needs?
- 5) Does the coach have the depth of understanding that will benefit you in the areas in which you want to work?
- 6) Do you feel heard? Understood? Safe? Supported?

If you want to meet in person, start looking in your area by asking for referrals, or by contacting the Women's Business Network or the Chamber of Commerce. You might also look on the web for contacts in your area.

If you prefer the phone, your choices are infinite. You can pick from all over the world. To start, look at the International Coach Federation website (www.coachfederation.org). You can find coaches with almost any work background. Take advantage of some of the areas of experience that might bring skills that would benefit you in your growth, not necessarily ones that are similar to your own.

With corporate coaching it may be a very good idea to find a coach with psychological background. No business or professional group has a more stringent ethical code than that of psychological fields. Coaches from the business world sometimes get into trouble because they are not trained to identify serious difficulties in executives' personalities, and sometimes they get into trouble. (See "The Very Real Dangers of Executive Coaching" Harvard Business Review, June 2002.)

There is a move to certify coaches, to have a standard by which they are measured, and to which they are kept. Coaching is very new, however.

There are many good coaches who are not applying for certification, or who have years of experience and are just now looking at meeting the requirements. It pays to ask what kind of background, what focus, and what areas of specialty the person has.

By all means, if a friend has a recommendation, look into the lead. You may have to do a little "shopping" to find the best fit for you, so don't be put off by having an initial session with more than one coach. Many offer the first session for free.