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Coaches advise professionals, entrepreneurs

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Professional career coaches don't quote Vince Lombardi, chew people out in the locker room, or make clients jump through an obstacle course of tires.

But they do help motivate people to win.

"She is a constant source of encouragement," said Milwaukee business owner Jennie Aiello of her coach, Patricia Clason.

Aiello hired Clason to coach her as she moved her home-based business, Custom Cuisine, into a storefront in December 1998. Custom Cuisine prepares a week's worth of healthy gourmet meals for people to reheat at home, one meal per evening.

Clason's business is to help Aiello's business prosper.

"They just want a different set of eyes," said Clason, owner of Accountability Coaching, Milwaukee, of her clients. "I become that objective third party who listens and can say, 'Have you considered this, have you considered that?'"

Career coaching is catching on in the Milwaukee area and the nation as a form of business consulting. Coaches serve small business owners, middle managers, or top executives. They help clients succeed at their jobs or decide to quit them. They guide clients through the start of a small family business or give them advice on how to balance work and family.

Membership in the three-year old International Coach Federation, Angel Fire, N.M., has doubled every year to reach 1,800 members, said spokeswoman Amy Watson.

She said there are an estimated 10,000 coaches worldwide.

Need advice

The coaching practice grew out of the corporate downsizing of the past decade that forced dislocated workers to review their career options, Watson and others said. Also, the growth of entrepreneurship is creating new small businesses whose owners need advice. Another group seeking coaches is young people moving into high technology jobs in new cities where ties to career mentors don't exist.

All those professionals need someone to turn to who will support them and prod them to excel. The sports coach analogy fits, said Clason.

"A coach evaluates the strengths and weaknesses of team members. He finds a way to have them complement each other. Helps them build a strategy for playing the game, critiques their mistakes, acknowledges their successes and urges them to continue," Clason said. "That is exactly what I end up doing with my people."

Clason meets face-to-face with her clients once every three months and talks by phone with them about once a week. She charges \$250 a month. According to the International Coach Federation, fees range from \$150 a month to \$500 a month and beyond.

Coaching has been popular for a half dozen years in high tech areas in California, Arizona, Colorado, or Massachusetts, said Ginger Stuckemeyer, owner of ThunderCreek Coaching, Greendale. Milwaukeeans have picked up on coaching by reading about it in national newspapers and magazines.

"Milwaukee is just beginning to get the word on coaching," said Stuckemeyer.

The growing demand for coaches has prompted corporate trainers, consultants and other human resources professionals to adopt the "coach" approach.

"Everyone is calling themselves a coach," Stuckemeyer said. "But it requires a lot of hours of coaching to be a professional certified coach."

Attending Coach U

The Coach University is a virtual campus through which students can complete 36 courses in the field of career coaching, said the International Coach Federation's

Watson. Course material is distributed by the university through telephone conference calls and the Internet, she said. The federation also has a certification program offered to coaches who have completed the course work and have worked a given number of hours in the profession. Certification applicants must submit detailed case studies of clients they have already coached, Watson said.

Clason serves as a sounding board for Aiello's fledgling catering business. Aiello is too busy making food and filling orders to take the long view of where she wants to take her venture.

"I'm busy running the business so I can't afford a staff and I can't afford a marketing person," Aiello said. "I don't know how to pull it all together. She is so smart in terms of knowing what to do next."

For example, a review of Aiello's client list revealed that a lot of them were health care professionals. She wanted to further penetrate the health care market and Clason gave Aiello the contact people at health care employee newsletters where she could advertise.

Clason's coaching role differs from that of a consultant, she said. First of all, consultants are typically hired by a corporation to provide a solution to an organizational problem. But a coach deals one-on-one with an employee or business owner. Also, a coach doesn't tell the client what to do, but guides them through the process of deciding for themselves what to do.

The coaching relationship also has a unique structure. After an initial assessment of the client's situation, the coach and client set specific goals for the client. In each subsequent meeting with the client, the coach determines what goals have been met and why other goals were not. A different set of goals is agreed upon for the following meeting. The coach prods the client to keep to the action plan.

"I'm an unfocused guy. She keeps me focused and on track," said Joe Schlidt, a small business banking consultant based at the Wauwatosa branch of M&I Bank.

Schlidt hired Clason to help him balance his bank job, a side public speaking business, and his young family.

Clason also is coach to Blue Rose Digital Graphics & Design, a Grafton graphic services firm. The business has four partners, all related to one another and in need

of an outside voice.

"For a small business person, it helps to have an outside person to share goals and objectives with and keep an eye on the bigger picture," said Laurel Kashinn, founder and co-owner of Blue Rose. "(Clason) helped us achieve our goals when we had been involved in day-to-day fires you had to put out."

Jo Hawkins Donovan, president of Hawkins Donovan & Associates, Ltd., has been coaching in Milwaukee for five years. She sees her coaching role as building up the client's strengths rather than dwelling on their shortcomings.

"I'm not going to encourage someone who is 5-foot-2 to try out for the Bucks," she said.

Likewise, she will help a client assess their strengths and see how they can be used to improve their current job situation or find another.

Often clients are people who are muddling along in a job they've grown unhappy with. They come to her when they decide its time for a big change. Encouragement is often the greatest service the coach provides.

"I really believe in my clients and sometimes that is the greatest gift," Donovan said.