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SHAPING UP

IN A RUT? MANY ARE TURNING TO CAREER COACHES

By KEREN TOLEDANO September 11, 2006

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GUIDING LIGHT: Judi Glova of Manhattan once sought out a career coach - then she became one. Photo: Michael Sofronski

Robert Smith was struggling to support his family as a messenger when he found a career coach on the Internet.

"I was making \$9 an hour until my coach turned my life around. He said fear was holding me back, and then helped me get focused and take action."

Two years later, his career has "taken off like a rocket," says Smith, now the owner of a successful p.r. firm - and he largely credits his coach for the turnaround.

"He made me accountable for my situation, and encouraged me on to great things," he says.

Smith's verdict: "A good coach can help you shortcut your way to success."

It's a conclusion more and more stressed-out workers have arrived at in recent years. Career coaching is a booming business: The International Coach Federation lists over 11,000 member coaches, up from only 2,122 seven years ago - and they're adding 200 new members a month.

"Years ago, career coaching may have sounded like a luxury," says career coach Daisy Swan, "but in our rapidly changing and demanding workplace, people are recognizing that getting support can increase life satisfaction."

Career coach Shawn Driscoll likewise credits a changing work environment for the boom.

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"In this decade of downsizing and layoffs, companies invest less in ongoing professional development," he says. "Employees need a sounding board, and coaching fills that gap."

He adds that 9/11 spurred a "meaning movement" that led many to seek a customized approach to their work lives.

So what exactly do career coaches do? The short answer is that their job is to create a road map for their clients' success - the particulars depend on what a client's needs and long-term goals are. Some need motivation and encouragement; others need step-by-step guidance.

Whatever the situation, the successful client-coach relationship runs on compatibility, say coaches.

"Ideally, coaching is more a partnership than a crutch," says Lisa Quattelbaum, a corporate life coach. "The coach guides the client to her true career ideals. My sessions are never about what I think my clients should do, and always about what they value and crave."

Judi Glova of Manhattan's Pinnacle Coaching & Consulting - who once sought out a coach and eventually became one herself - says the successful coach sees the client's "big picture."

"He listens when his client is silent," she says. "He identifies barriers and creates a manageable plan."

While coaching can be helpful at any stage of the game, there are some timing considerations that may optimize your experience.

Swan suggests consulting a coach before graduating from college, and then a couple of years later if your job isn't a good fit.

"New graduates often have idealistic notions of the working world, and a coach can be a good reality check."

Quattelbaum, on the other hand, suggests waiting out your initial frustrations, and seeking a coach only when you've made a commitment to change. At this point, she says, "a coach can assist you in redefining your goals."

Whenever you decide to see a coach, experts suggest seeking out one who is not only certified (by organizations like ICF), but also compatible with your needs.

"It's best to find someone in the field you want to be in," says Smith.

Coaching runs from \$200-\$1,000 a month, depending on the type, intensity, and

regularity of sessions. It can add up to a significant investment, but Smith, for one, deems it worth it.

"If Tiger Woods has a coach to be best in his field," he says, "why shouldn't we?"

To find the right coach:

- * Get references. A good coach will provide them.
- * Many coaches offer free consultations. Try a few and see who works for you.
- * Find a coach with experience in your field. The International Coach Federation (coachfederation.org) offers a referral service listing coaches' backgrounds.
- * Coaching is a process, so make sure you're prepared to commit time and energy. It typically lasts between three months and a year.
- * If one-on-one sessions are too pricey, consider group coaching.

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