

AN E-BOOK FOR ANYONE WHO WANTS TO GO FURTHER · PAWEŁ
KARDACH

*You don't need a problem to deserve growth.
It's enough that you want to go further than
you are today.*

A Guide to Coaching by ICF Standards

What coaching really is, how it works in a
business context, and how to start using it.

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Why this is worth reading

Coaching has become a buzzword today — used so often it's started to lose its meaning. This guide is here to give it back.

For 20 years I made decisions in executive roles — at Gates, International Paper, Xerox and Atos. I watched the strongest people in an organization — the ones already succeeding — turn to coaching not because something was wrong, but because they wanted to go further. That observation shaped how I work today as an accredited ICF coach and mentor.

I wrote this guide to set the record straight on what coaching actually is — without the marketing noise, and without confusing it with therapy, training or consulting. Inside you'll find a clear definition, an explanation of who this method works best for, what a session actually looks like, how it plays out when a company is footing the bill, and the standards every serious coach should work by.

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What coaching is

Coaching is a process that can create significant impact in a short time. During a single, hour-long conversation, a coaching client can reach important conclusions, discover resources they didn't realize they had, gain clarity on something that had been weighing on them, or make a decision that changes the direction of their career or life. That's not a rule, though — sometimes the change only becomes visible weeks later, as a result of concrete actions taken over the course of the process.

It's a partnership between a coach and a client, where both work toward one goal: the outcome the client defines. The coach's role is to stay in the background — listening closely and directing the client's attention toward lines of thinking that lead to change. It's the client who does most of the talking and creating in the room; the coach asks questions, not answers.

A coach doesn't need to be an expert in the client's field or profession — and if they are, they deliberately set that expertise aside for the session. That way the client defines their own answers and sets their own next steps, instead of executing someone else's plan.

WHO IT WORKS BEST FOR

This method works well for people who already have a reasonably good life or career and are generally satisfied with it, but want to sharpen a specific area. In business, coaching works best with talent — people who are already succeeding — not as a "fix-it" tool for someone falling short of expectations. That's why coaching isn't therapy, training, or consulting.

All of us need support sometimes, to reach the next level of our development or carry out a task more effectively. Coaching assumes we already carry the talent and resources needed to get there — the coach's job is to help find them, not supply them from outside.

A coach's aim is to improve results and help the client reach the goals they've set — whether that's about performance at work, higher income, career growth, or personal satisfaction. If, at the end of the process, the client hasn't moved closer to those goals, it's hard to call it effective coaching.

It's also worth telling coaching apart from mentoring. Mentoring, while it sometimes borrows coaching techniques, is built by design on a teacher-student relationship and functions as advice-giving — a mentor shares their own knowledge and experience directly. Coaching doesn't do that: it doesn't hand over ready-made knowledge or recommend solutions, because a coach isn't required to be an expert in the area they're supporting. In my own practice, I work in both roles — and which one we use at a given stage depends on what the client actually needs: a proven path (mentoring) or space to find their own (coaching).

In business, coaching also gets confused with a so-called performance improvement plan — a tool for documenting an employee's shortfalls before a possible parting of ways. That's a misunderstanding that damages the reputation of the whole method. Coaching isn't a last resort before letting someone go — it's a standard tool for developing leadership and a company's investment in the talent it wants to keep.

When we set a new direction, a coach helps drop anchor in a way that keeps the ship from drifting off the newly chosen course.

Why working with a coach increases effectiveness

Elite athletes, artists at the peak of their careers, leaders running large organizations — many of them work with a coach not because something in their life isn't working, but precisely because they're already succeeding and want to go a step further. It's a pattern visible across many fields: the higher someone climbs, the more valuable it becomes to have space to think through the next move with someone who doesn't judge, just asks the right questions.

We're not talking here about a situation where coaching is imposed on someone, or used as part of a performance improvement plan. Under those conditions it's hard to call it an effective process — someone "asked" to take part in coaching, or who shows up mainly to test whether it works but has no real topic of their own to work through, can walk away with a mistaken impression of the method and its effectiveness.

WHEN IT WORKS

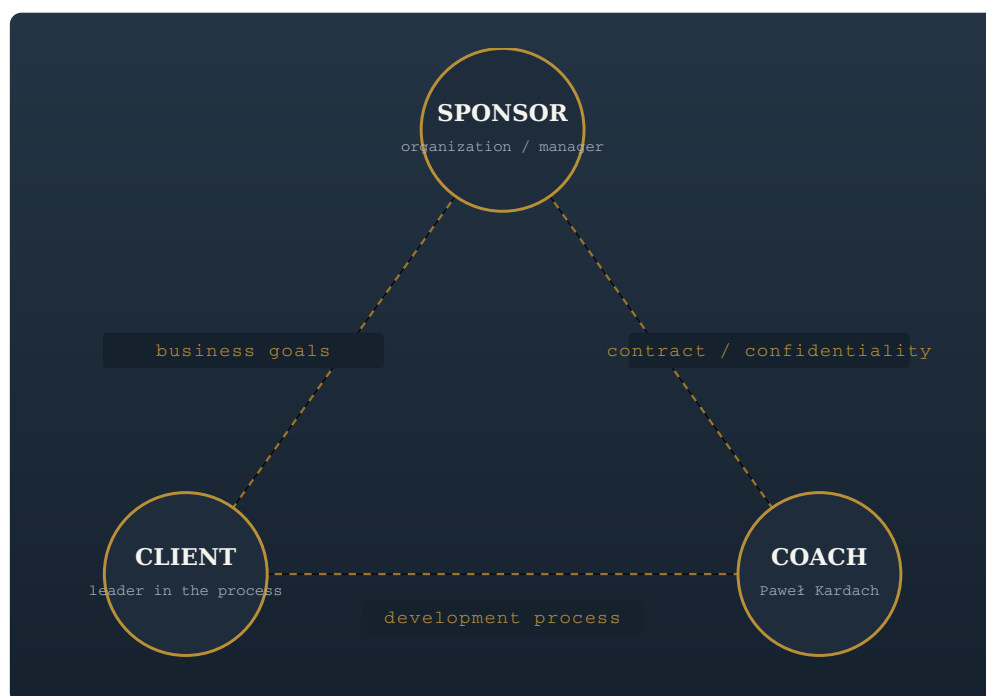
If you have something real to think through — something you genuinely want to change — coaching is worth considering. In business, the best candidate is a person or team oriented toward continuous growth, not toward preserving the status quo: aware of their own potential and ambitious about achieving above-average results.

The effect of coaching comes from the process itself: during a session, new perspectives and ways of looking at a situation open up possibilities that weren't visible before. Through this process, your ability to achieve results grows, confidence builds around skills you already have, and you take on new actions — ones you'd been avoiding, for one reason or another, until now.

Coaching in a business context

When a company funds coaching rather than a private individual, a third party enters the relationship — a sponsor: the organization or manager who's paying for the process and has a stake in it. That doesn't change what coaching fundamentally is, but it does change the rules of the game — and those rules are worth putting in writing before the process starts.

In management practice, this setup is called the business triangle. Three parties, one contract: the sponsor sets the business goals and funds the process, the client (the leader) takes part in it and develops, and the coach runs the process and protects its confidentiality. This setup resolves the core tension in buying coaching — the company needs accountability, and the leader needs safety in order to speak honestly. One doesn't have to rule out the other, as long as the boundary is clearly set.



THE ICF CODE OF ETHICS: CONFIDENTIALITY ISN'T A COURTESY - IT'S A CONDITION FOR THE WORK TO FUNCTION

This structure only works if every party knows exactly what they get — and what they don't. In my own practice, it looks like this:

The sponsor gets

- Involvement in setting goals at the start of the process
- Progress updates against those goals
- A closing session and outcome review
- A flag if the goal stops being realistic

The sponsor doesn't get

- Session content — in any form
- An assessment of the leader or an opinion on their future in the organization
- Information for disciplinary proceedings
- An answer to "what did they actually say?"

HOW IMPACT GETS MEASURED

We set the measure in the contract before we start — otherwise, a few sessions in, all that's left is an impression. In practice I combine three levels: a change in the leader's behaviour (observable, not assumed), an organizational indicator the company already tracks (e.g. decision speed, team turnover), and the leader's self-assessment on a scale set at the outset.

This model protects both sides: the company invests knowingly and knows what to expect, and the leader has a space where they can speak honestly — knowing that nothing they say will come back to them in a worse form. It's exactly that boundary that lets company-funded coaching be just as effective as private coaching, and sometimes, thanks to clearly named business goals, even more focused.

What the coaching process looks like

In my practice, the process always starts with a free, no-obligation initial call (45-60 minutes) — we check whether we're a fit, and name your most important goal. Only then do I propose a specific package, matched to how much work the change calls for:

- **Basic package — 6 sessions (about 3 months).** A good entry point for a concrete, well-defined goal.
- **Full package — 10 sessions (about 5 months).** For when a deeper change is involved — in role, management style, or how decisions get made.

Sessions usually happen every 2-3 weeks and last about an hour — extendable to 90 minutes if needed. Every session starts by setting a goal for that conversation and ends with concrete actions the client can take before the next one.

During sessions I use a range of methods that help expand awareness of the issue at hand and look at it from a wider perspective. We examine the topic from different angles, so the client can choose a solution that will genuinely work in their circumstances — not one that just sounds good on paper.

NO CONTROL, ONLY ACCOUNTABILITY

The next session starts with a review of what came from the previous one's actions — but never as a test or a check-up. The client gets support in carrying out their own plans, not a grade on whether they "did their homework."

Standards of practice and ethics

The largest organization representing coaches worldwide is the International Coaching Federation (ICF). It sets the ethical standards and core competencies of the profession — every coach holding ICF accreditation commits to upholding them.

As a client, you have the right to expect clearly agreed working rules, in line with the profession's code of ethics. You also have the right to feel safe in a relationship built on trust — and if that's missing, you can end the process at any stage. A good coaching contract spells out from the start what is, and isn't, part of the engagement, so you know exactly what to expect at every stage of the process.

A well-trained coach also knows the limits of their role — and if they notice you need a different kind of support (therapeutic, legal, medical), they should point you directly to the right specialist, rather than running a process that doesn't address what you actually need.

FROM ME

I wish you the courage to ask yourself the questions there hasn't been time for — and the space to answer them. Here's to a great journey with coaching.

Let's start with a conversation about your situation

A free initial call (45-60 minutes) will help name your goal and check whether we're a good fit. No obligation.

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An experienced leader and manager who became a coach and mentor. For 20 years he held executive roles, including at senior-executive level, building divisions of international organizations — Gates, International Paper, Xerox and Atos — in the paper, automotive, textile and ITO industries, managing teams ranging from a dozen to several hundred people.

Today, as an accredited ICF Coach, Neuro-Change Master Trainer and MBA graduate, he supports executives, business owners and managers with decisions, organizational change and building resilience — combining management practice with psychological knowledge he keeps deepening (currently completing a master's degree in Psychology of Development and Business at SWPS University, defense planned for Q1 2027).

He has run Healthtime for 6 years. He has conducted close to 450 coaching sessions with managers and specialists. He works online — with clients from Poland and beyond — and in person in the Tricity area, Poland, in Polish and English. Outside his professional work, he serves as a mentor with the non-profit organization The Grade.

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