

# Isn't It Time You Got Yourself a Career Coach?

by Aurora Brito, certified Five O'Clock Club Career Coach

**A**s a career coach in private practice, I am often asked what it is exactly that I do. If you are reading this magazine you probably have a better understanding of the role of a career coach than do most people. But there are still so many people who have no idea what is the relevance of a career coach in their lives. According to one study, "only about 15 percent of the general population has heard about coaching and even fewer are aware of its true identity and power."

A career coach can be quite helpful in navigating through dramatic changes and workforce reductions—most of which are beyond our control. Today the average American expects to stay in his or her job for only five years. Job security for 25 or 35 years is a thing of the past. The global economy requires a fresh and innovative approach to career management.

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According to *Forbes*, coaching "is the second fastest growing profession in the country. Fortune 1000 companies have used it to transform their organizations, and testimonials from around the world keep pouring in about the power of professional coaching." Executives have long known about coaching. It has been provided to professionals and managers to get a boost up the corporate ladder. Today, coaching is fast becoming accessible to the mainstream, primarily in the form of help for thriving internally. There are coaches who focus on leadership training, team building, and enhancement of organizational effectiveness, just as there are career coaches who can help individuals with goal setting and career transition. Coaching provides feedback and helps in

self-development by offering resources, support and self-accountability.

## The Role of the Coach

When I was in high school, my track coach was Mr. Corjulo. He wasn't about to run the track to show me how it was done, nor would he run the 440 relay for me or the 110 meter. For sure he didn't jump my hurdles (still a scary proposition when I recall that I actually did that), but it is safe to say his own experience guided me well. He provided the guidance and encouragement when I didn't think I could make it to the finish line. He worked with each one of us and helped to forge us into a winning team.

In the summer of 2004, we saw coaching in action when we watched the Summer Olympics in Athens, Greece. We cheered when teams prevailed and individual athletes demonstrated prowess and achieved greatness; we gasped as some Olympic dreams ended in collapse and defeat. It was amazing to see how coaches continued to guide crestfallen athletes, often helping them recoup to get ready for the next event. After so much training and effort, the motto had to be, "Get up, dust yourself off and move on." A career coach has to do much the same thing.

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## Paying Your Own Way: Looking for Help with Job Search

A career coach usually helps people to target their next job or reposition themselves within their current company. As a Five O'Clock Club Coach, I use the proven methodology developed by the club through some 20 years of research. I help people to:

- advance their job searches

- get jobs more quickly, and
- manage their careers for the long-term.

After some ten years as an executive recruiter, a career development counselor, and placement manager, I've been in the trenches. I've also managed my own career: I have first-hand knowledge of what it's like to work hard for an MBA—with a corporate goal in mind, then move to the risky terrain of private practice! I used the Five O'Clock Club methodology myself, which relies on an organized progression:

- accurate self-assessment
- broader job targeting
- effective interviewing techniques, and
- proactive follow-up that leads to job offers.

One of the initial hurdles, either for people in an active job search or who want to plot how to get ahead where they are, is accurate self-assessment. One of the vital exercises we use at the Five O'Clock Club is the Forty-Year Vision. At first glance, this exercise can seem quite daunting. I know it certainly was for me! It's not uncommon to get a call from clients who want to reschedule an appointment because they think I'm expecting them to have the next four decades all mapped out: "Forty years is so far off! I'm not sure if I'll even be around then." Or, "I'll be too old by the time I have enough money to really do what I want to do!" I say, "You are allowed to dream." Putting goals on paper gives people the power to begin to make things happen. I ask clients to break down this exercise into manageable segments: "Well, just plan out for five years, that's far enough away, yet close enough to see where you want to be." And then we do the ten-year mark, and fifteen and so on. Suddenly, the exercise is not so frightening and clients eventually confess, "Oh my goodness, I'd better start planning now if I want to be somewhere else and not in this dead-end job," or "I just want to follow my real passion for..."—and they fill in the blanks.

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## TIME TO GET A COACH?

### What Coaching Is Not

It is important to recognize the limits of coaching—and the parameters within which it works:

- Coaching is not therapy. People who are suffering from clinical depression would do well to work with a trained mental health professional before tackling job-search issues. Career coaches can help people come out of the depression that can be overcome by seeing progress in a job search.
- Coaching will not work for clients who expect a coach to find job leads for them, or to do the work for them. A good coach will keep you focused on the right work to be done—but the job-hunter must commit to the many hours a week it takes to accomplish the task.
- Coaching won't work unless you are fully committed to mastering the tools and techniques of a smart job search. Assessment is crucial, as is developing a targeted approach and mastering Internet research. There are no shortcuts.
- Coaching won't work if you are unable to commit financially to the process. Anyone hoping to get something for nothing—or who doesn't appreciate that coaches earn their living through their coaching fees—should look for free community services. Of course, you should shop for a coach who fits your budget.

### How to Find a Career Coach

As I noted earlier, the coaching field is growing, and regulation is more the exception than the rule; anyone can hang out a shingle and claim to be a career coach. It is important to do your homework to avoid getting burned. You are taking a very important first step in your career and making a financial investment toward that end.

The Five O'Clock Club certifies its coaches through a rigorous training program that is akin to graduate school, and maintains a strict fee policy: its coaches can charge on a per-hour basis only, with no large up-front fees. One of the services of membership in Five O'Clock Club is

matching up with a coach. If you call the main office, 212-286-9332, you will be put in touch with David Madison, Director of the National Guild of Career Coaches. He will give you the names of two coaches who are a likely match, based on your background, goals and incomes. It is important to get a coach you feel comfortable with, who will help to provide momentum and keep you focused. Chemistry is vital because, after all, you want to launch an effective partnership. In the overwhelming majority of cases, clients end up working with one of the two coaches recommended.

### Coaching is not therapy, and a coach does not find jobs for people.

Once the process is under way, sometime people simply get the boost they need to move on to their next job, and sometimes the change is more profound; coaching can really help turn someone's life around. The lesson is that we must take control of our own individual careers and make decisions to manage them wisely. With the help of a good coach, for the first time you might end up in the driver's seat—and have more say than ever before in where you're going! ●



Great coaching requires great support. Our top two administrators celebrate their anniversaries with the Club: Angie Cayo (4 years) and Miguel Villarín (10 years!).

## The Job-Search Buddy System

Do you wish you had someone to talk to—fairly often and informally—about the little things?



“Here’s what I’m planning to do today in my search? What are *you* planning to do? Let’s talk tomorrow to make sure we’ve done it.” You and your job-search buddy could keep each other positive and on track, and encourage each other to do what you told the small group you were going to do: Make that call, send out those letters, write that follow-up proposal, focus on the most important things that should be done—rather than (for example) spending endless hours responding to job postings on the Web.

With your buddy, practice your Two-Minute Pitch, get ready for interviews, bounce ideas off each other. Some job-search buddies talk every day. Some talk a few times a week. Most of the conversation is by phone and e-mail.

Sometimes, people match themselves up as buddies. Just pick someone you get along with in your small group. Sometimes, your coach can match you up. However you do it, stay away from negative people who talk about how bad it is out there. They will drag you down.

The small group changes over time: people get jobs; new people come in. If you lose one buddy who got a job, get another buddy.

Your buddy does not have to be in your field or industry. In fact, being in the same field or industry could keep you focused on the industry rather than on the *process*. But you *do* have to get along! The relationship may last only a month or two, or go on for years. Some buddies become friends.

Of course, you should see your Five O'Clock Club career coach *privately* for résumé review, target development, salary negotiation, and job interview follow-up. It's usually best to get professional coaching advice for these areas. ●