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Fine-tuning your life

'Coaches' help clients stay focused on goals

By BEVERLY BARTLETT, *The Courier-Journal*

Feeling lackluster at work? Not sure you're adequately fielding everything at home? Is your performance on the balance beam of life less than steady?

What LATimes.com recently dubbed "one of the world's newest professions" stands willing to help. People who call themselves "life coaches" or "personal coaches" say they can help you meet your goals -- whether that means finding your dream profession, improving your sales performance or setting up a workout routine. (They help fit exercise into your schedule, but don't time your laps.)



Life coaches typically charge between \$250 and \$500 a month for what generally amounts to three 30-minute phone conversations and occasional e-mails or quick "emergency" calls.

A client might call and say, "I'm really off today, I need a five-minute motivational hit," says Stacey Vicari, a Louisville life coach who has worked with about a dozen clients since she started coaching in September.

Skeptical? Think it sounds like some goofy pep-talk therapy you'd read about in a new age magazine?

Well, St. Matthews personal coach Lee Baucom did first read about it in a new age magazine.

A pastoral counselor, Baucom found the story while researching different models of counseling for his dissertation at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Baucom says he recognized coaching as the name for a kind of work he already enjoyed -- helping basically happy people fine-tune their lives.

"Coaching tends to be for people whose life is going on pretty well and they just want it to be better," Baucom says.

Despite the new age feel, life coaches soon started showing up in the speed-dial directories of big-time executives. Now they've almost become mainstream, advising Louisville-area stay-at-home moms, car dealers and TV anchors.

Take Kirby Adams, the WHAS-TV anchor, for example. Her husband, John Grantz, purchased sessions with Vicari for Adams at a charity auction. "I'm just the kind of person who likes to have goals," Adams says.



She once set a goal of competing in the Olympic trials in a sport. She did, in cycling. She once set a goal of living in Seattle. She made it happen. And she once set a goal of anchoring an entertainment show, which brought her to the now-defunct "Louisville Tonight" in 1993.

But now?

"I just got to a point in my life where I had fulfilled all my goals," says Adams, who is 41. "I thought, 'This can't be good.' "

And she wanted to start thinking seriously about where to go from here. "I want to be sure I get everything I can out of my life," Adams says.

Now, after two sessions with her life coach, Adams says she hasn't decided yet where she's going, but as the mother of two children

under 4, she's sure that one area she'll explore is balancing her broadcast work with her family life.

The coaching phenomenon is usually traced to Thomas Leonard, a financial planner in Seattle who found that some of his clients wanted to brainstorm about life goals as much as they wanted investment help. He started doing what he called "life planning" and in 1992 founded Coach U, a telephone training program for coaches and would-be coaches.

The program estimates that there are at least 10,000 coaches worldwide. Baucom estimates that there are probably half a dozen life coaches working in the Louisville area.

But because coaching is done mostly over the phone, geography is not really a factor. (One of Vicari's clients is a Chicago businessman she met on an airplane.)

Often a coach's specialty is more important than location anyway. Baucom focuses, for example, on coaching people involved in family businesses, on couples and on individuals looking for more meaning in their lives. His wife, Kathy Baucom, coaches people through the adoption process.

Jona McKee, a retired Army lieutenant colonel who coaches in a Virginia suburb of Washington, D.C., specializes in helping small-business owners and using handwriting analysis to inform his coaching. He says coaching was a natural fit for his skills: "My forté was always bringing out the best in people."

Vicari's focus is as broad and ambitious as the name of her company: Ideal Life.

"I've always been wired to have a five-year plan and a 10-year plan. . . . I'm just a big goal-setter," Vicari says.

This is a woman who wrote her own mission statement at 18: "To facilitate change by serving as a role model." In 1989, as a recent graduate of the Indiana University business school, she decided she wanted to get paid to teach people about vegetarianism. She moved to Louisville in 1991 and worked in sales while she founded the local EarthSave chapter. It grew quickly and eventually became

large enough to justify a paid staff member.

Guess who got the job. Vicari later became president of EarthSave International. She gave up that job about two years ago. And since last fall, she's been trying to help other people identify and reach their goals.

Often that means simple things -- like listening to their complaints about the dirty house and saying, "You need a housekeeper." And going over their budget with them to find a way to pay for one. "Because this matters to you," she says. "We'll find things that don't matter to you."

Vicari gives the impression of living a balanced, organized, well-run and lovely life in her Highlands home. But she says she doesn't get frustrated with people who can't delegate at work or get their closets clean at home.

"I have a lot of compassion for that. . . . I have my stuff," she says. She is referring to what you might call "issues," not to actual stuff in closets.

The difference, she says, is that as a good life manager, she knows how to get things done even if she doesn't like doing them.

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