

Raising the Bar through Coaching

by Claudia Maledy and James Redfern

Coaching has been around for thousands of years. There have always been people devoted to supporting others in building their skills. The career of lifestyle and business coaching, however, is slightly less than 20 years old.

Do not confuse coaching with consulting, mentoring or counselling. Although coaching utilizes elements of those practices, it is in a category of its own.

Coaching offers a vehicle for analysis, reflection and action that ultimately enables the client to achieve success in one or more areas of personal or work life. Discussing options with a trusted coach can be clarifying and constructive, motivating clients to extend their reach in some specific area of their life.

Sechelt resident Cassandra Gierden turned to coaching as a career 10 years ago. The idea of a career change came to her while employed at the Four Seasons hotel in Vancouver. Always fascinated with the power of the mind, Gierden was drawn to exploring the motivational-training profession.

She arranged an interview with Brian Tracy International, one of North America's leading companies in that field. Although they were interested in bringing her on board, they encouraged her to practice what they preached: to make certain that their company was the right choice by

first researching other motivational-training firms. Her homework was to conduct at least two other interviews before accepting a position. "When you have choice, you make better decisions," Gierden points out.

Browsing the Yellow Pages under Motivational Training, Gierden was curious about an ad for Lorraine Sims, Lifestyle Coach. She had never heard of coaching and wanted to know more about it and why it was listed under Motivational Training. She booked an appointment with Sims. During the informational interview, Gierden learned about a new career option – coaching – a vocation that resonated with her. She had found her new path: helping others to reach for more and achieve their potential by positively empowering them to create desired outcomes.

Gierden took the necessary training, and is now certified by the International Coach Federation and Coach U, as well as being a certified teleclass leader recognized in the international coaching community for her leadership skills.

"Someone might choose to use a personal trainer to help them get fit. They could do it on their own, but results will be faster and better working with a trainer," explains Gierden. "Likewise with coaching."

Gierden makes a distinction between lifestyle coaching and business coaching.

"The parameters of the coaching assignment are often determined by who is footing the bill," she says.

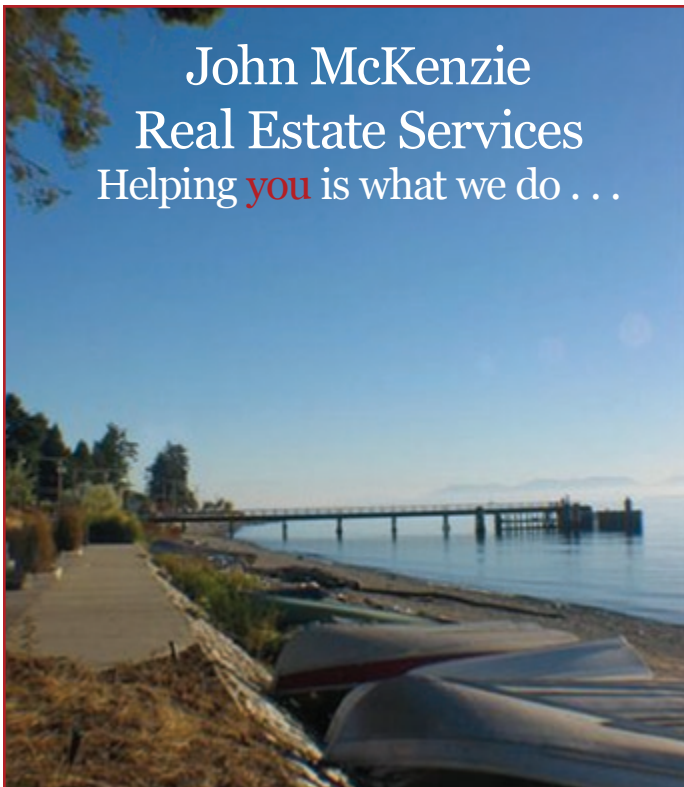
A client may be looking to balance her lifestyle, clarify options or manage a transition in life such as a career change or divorce. Support may be required in learning or honing skills such as managing time or money.



Cassandra Gierden

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A business, on the other hand, has other needs for its staff. Typically, business clients have an agenda with an economic or productivity payoff that might include budgeting, goal setting, turning around a difficult situation, improving work performance, setting priorities or increasing sales.

Among Gierden's numerous business clients is Sysco Canada, part of one of the largest food distributors in North America. Their Toronto head office uses the coaching skills of Gierden and her associates, Prophet Coaching, in leadership-development programs for senior managers. Together, Sysco Canada and Prophet Coaching won the 2007 PRISM award for Excellence in Organizational Coaching.

Another major client has worked for his employer, RONA, for 21 years. Russ Jones was asked to launch a commercial division and manage the company's new role as a national sponsor for the 2010 Olympics. He credits the business coaching he received for helping him

manage multiple projects and navigate the complex decision-making processes in this division, and for his newfound sense of focus and balance.

It's a good thing that Gierden loves to travel as most of her work is off-Coast, but she has cultivated some local assignments. One of them is Kim Foster, owner of Aligning Productions, a special-events planning and marketing company. Foster felt she could benefit from business coaching and contacted Gierden earlier this year.

"I felt overwhelmed. I was spinning my wheels. I thought if I didn't use the coaching skills that were recommended to me, I wouldn't be able to move forward," Foster says.

Gierden offers new clients a complimentary session to ensure there is an appropriate coach/client personality fit. Foster took advantage of the offer and it helped her allay some fears, as there was an immediate connection.

"I was impressed with Gierden's high level of commitment to me, and her professionalism," says Foster. "She immediately recognized some issues I was wrestling with and helped me break down my problems into manageable portions. I could then rebuild to be congruent with my initial business vision. I think she's really good at what she does. She is non-judgemental, understanding and intuitive."

"Coaching can be delivered during regular weekly sessions by telephone or in person, but most of my work is by phone," Gierden says.

A business, a project team or individuals do not need to be struggling to benefit from business coaching. With the help of a seasoned coach you might not only raise the bar, you'll possibly jump it! **JB**

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