

Sample from *Christian Coaching* / ISBN [1576832821](#)

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PART ONE:
INTRODUCING
CHRISTIAN COACHING

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CHAPTER 1: WHAT IS A CHRISTIAN COACH?



PLAYA TAMBOR IS A REMOTE RESORT, A SHORT FLIGHT NORTH OF SAN JOSE ON the Pacific coast of Costa Rica. My wife knew why I wanted to go there for my birthday. It was a comfortable vacation spot. But more important, it was isolated and hundreds of miles away from telephone calls, birthday cards, or friends who might be inclined to throw a party. I was about to turn sixty and didn't want to face it.

First morning there, I went off to the beach lugging a 670-page book by Betty Friedan. This wasn't about Friedan's feminism; it was a book about her age. I immediately connected with the first words:

When my friends threw a surprise party on my sixtieth birthday, I could have killed them all. Their toasts seemed hostile, insisting as they did that I publicly acknowledge reaching sixty, pushing me out of life, as it seemed, out of the race. Professionally, politically, personally, sexually. Distancing me from their fifty-, forty-, thirty-year-old selves. Even my own kids, though they loved me, seemed determined to be parts of the torture. I was almost taunting in my response, assuring my

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friends that they, too, would soon be sixty if they lived long enough. But I was depressed for weeks after that birthday party, felt removed from them all. I could not face being sixty.¹

I never finished the book, but I mentioned it to a friend when we got home. George Callendine was a former student who had become a consultant to business and church leaders.² I expressed the same concerns—that hitting sixty was making me feel pushed out of the race, out of life. When he offered to take me through the process that he used to help his clients move through transitions and get their lives and careers back on track, I accepted eagerly. This was the birthday present I needed most.

Over a period of months we looked at my spiritual gifts, abilities, and interests. We sent questionnaires to the people who knew me best and got their perspectives. With my friend's gentle guidance, I looked honestly at my goals, career, place in life, values, passions, style of work, and hopes for the future. We discussed my concerns about aging and my irrational fears that my younger friends—the ones who keep me creative and challenged—might abandon me in my old age. For weeks I struggled to write a vision statement for my life and a mission statement that could be a filter to guide my decisions and activities in the coming years. My friend never made demands, gave advice, or told me what to do. Instead, he gently pushed my thinking in new directions, helped me narrow my goals for the future, and kept my focus on what God might want for my life. Sometimes he prodded me to consider issues I wanted to avoid. But he never stopped giving encouragement. We never used this term, but now I can see that I was being coached.

WHAT IS COACHING?

In the 1500s the word *coach* described a horse-drawn vehicle that would get people from where they were to where they wanted to be. Many years later, in the 1880s, *coach* was given an athletic meaning, identifying the person who tutored university students in their rowing on the Cam River in Cambridge. That use of the word stuck, and coaches became known as people who help athletes move from one

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place to another. Over time the word also became associated with musicians, public speakers, and actors who rely on coaches to improve their skills, overcome obstacles, remain focused, and get to where they want to be. Former Miami Dolphins coach Don Shula writes about the athletes who would come to his team with their skills and talents, ready to submit to the coach whose job was to instruct, discipline, and inspire them to do things better than they thought they could do on their own.³ The coach leaves each person being coached, or PBC, more competent, fulfilled, and self-confident than he or she would have been otherwise.⁴

Coaching might have stayed in the realm of sports and entertainment if it hadn't burst into the corporate world a few years ago. Faced with the unsettling impact of galloping change, rapid technological advances, and tidal waves of information glut, business leaders began to see that no single person could keep abreast of everything. The CEO could no longer manage from the top, keep aware of everything that was going on, and have the ability to tell people what to do. In companies large and small, people at all levels had to learn how to deal with change, develop new management styles, make wise decisions, and become more effective, all while they coped with their hyperactive lifestyles and increasing stress. Many wanted help with their own life planning and life-management issues. Workers needed to think and behave like leaders and decision-makers. CEOs and other executives wanted people to guide them into this new world, like my young friend coached me through the transition into my sixties. The coaching principles that athletes and performers had used for years suddenly became relevant to the business community. Personal coaching moved beyond health clubs and into corporate offices and the workplace. According to *Fortune* magazine, coaching has become the "hottest thing in management" today.⁵

But the impact of coaching goes beyond management. Currently, coaching is hot everywhere except in the church. People are turning to nutritional coaches, fitness coaches, financial coaches, public-speaking coaches, and what have become known as "life coaches"—who help others find focus and direction for their lives and careers. Some people look for marriage coaches, parenting coaches, coaches for their spiritual journeys, time-management coaches, and coaches

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to help them through life transitions. All of these coaches come alongside to guide others through life's challenges and to help them move forward with confidence in the midst of change.

At its core, *coaching is the art and practice of guiding a person or group from where they are toward the greater competence and fulfillment that they desire*. Coaching helps people expand their vision, build their confidence, unlock their potential, increase their skills, and take practical steps toward their goals. Unlike counseling or therapy, coaching is less threatening, less concerned about problem solving, and more inclined to help people reach their potentials.

Coaching is helping others to feel inspired and motivated to grow themselves.

—Lou Tice

Coaching is not counseling. It is not for those who need therapy to overcome disruptive painful influences from the past; coaches help people build vision and move toward the future. Coaching is not reactive looking back; it's proactive looking ahead. It is not about healing; it's about growing. It focuses less on overcoming weaknesses and more on building skills and strengths. Usually coaching is less formal than the therapist-patient relationship and more of a partnership between two equals, one of whom has experiences, perspectives, or knowledge that can be useful to the other.

WHAT ABOUT MENTORING, DISCIPLING, AND CONSULTING?

Is coaching just a fancy name for the mentoring that has been in business circles for years or the discipling that Jesus talked about in Matthew 28:19? Certainly there is overlap. Some writers talk about coaching-mentoring, implying that they are one. Others use *coaching*, *mentoring*, and *discipleship* interchangeably. Sometimes these words are replaced with new terms like modeling, spiritual guidance, soul care, sponsoring, or partnering.

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A young pastor suggested still another term that I have used consistently. Over one of our breakfast meetings he said, “Gary, I don’t need a father. I’ve got a good one. If I want a counselor, I know where I can get one. What I need, more than anything else, is someone to journey with, someone who has walked the road of life a little longer than I have. I want to be able to come alongside you for an hour or so every week, talk about life, learn from your experiences, and have you help me avoid some of the potholes on the road.” From that point we called our meetings *journeying* times.

Whatever term you prefer, all involve a relationship in which at least one person is further along in the journey of life and willing to guide others—often as a trusted role model. All of these terms involve accountability, encouragement, and a commitment to growth. Some of the relationships are informal, like the journeying that I did with my pastor-friend. Others are very structured with formal contracts, specific goals, and the giving and completion of assignments. Some are short-term partnerships. Others are like Bobb Biehl’s definition of mentoring as “*a lifelong relationship in which a mentor helps a protégé reach his or her God-given potential.*”⁶

As I write this, I’m surrounded by piles of books on coaching, mentoring, and discipleship. Many give elaborate definitions and explanations, attempting to distinguish one term from another. For the most part, these discussions reflect the personalities, preferences, and personal experiences of the authors. I’ll probably reflect all of these when I suggest that coaching is similar to both mentoring and discipleship but broader.⁷

In a very helpful book, Ted Engstrom defines a mentor as someone who “provides modeling, close supervision on special projects, individualized help in many areas—discipleship, encouragement, correction, confrontation, and a calling to accountability.”⁸ According to Engstrom, a mentor is someone who has achieved superior rank and influence in an organization or profession. The mentor is an authority in his or her field as a result of disciplined study and experience. This person is willing to commit time and emotional energy to a relationship that guides an understudy’s growth and development.

The idea of mentoring apparently came from Homer’s *Odyssey*, in which King Odysseus went to war leaving his household and young

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son, Telemachus, in the care of a wise and proven teacher named Mentor. Clearly, the king was not in a great hurry to get home because he was gone for twenty-one years. When he returned he found that the young prince had become a competent leader and man of integrity, molded by the example, guidance, and wisdom of Mentor. For centuries, the concept of apprenticeship meant something similar—the guidance of an older, more experienced person, passing knowledge and teaching skills to a young learner.

As iron sharpens iron, a friend sharpens a friend.

—Proverbs 27:17, NLT

While mentoring has become a popular idea among Christians in recent years, its modern popularity arose in the business world, where more established and successful leaders took on the task of guiding protégés in their professional growth. When I began my teaching career as a young professor fresh out of graduate school, a more senior faculty member took me under her wing and gently guided me in the ways of academia. We never used the term, but she was a mentor—helping me become more proficient in my profession and career. Mentoring still takes place in many work settings, but it’s fading in popularity. According to a professor at Northwestern University’s Kellogg School of Management, mentoring systems have largely failed. In organizations that are lean and focused on the pressures of change management and strategic planning, there’s little time left for mentoring. People are paid for what they produce, not for the time they spend developing others. As a result, executives and managers are looking for coaches outside their companies and vocations.⁹

Coaching, then, is broader than mentoring, encompassing but going beyond career or apprenticeship issues. A coach and person being coached (PBC) often are not even in the same vocation. People who are coached typically want more out of life in general, not just in their vocational or spiritual lives. They look for a coach who, by example and dialogue, leads them into greater confidence, commitment, and competence for living. “The highest calling of coaches

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today is to become guides to a transient culture,” writes Frederic M. Hudson in *The Handbook of Coaching*.¹⁰ “Effective coaches inspire those they coach with a sense of self-reliance and deep-seated determination that is much needed in these uncommon times. . . . Effective coaches model the future because they are willing to invent it, design it, and insist on it. As for change, they see change as an asset for getting a job done rather than a reason to be afraid.”¹¹

Discipleship is even more focused than mentoring. Discipleship centers on teaching biblical truth and spiritual disciplines to younger believers. While there are different ways of approaching the discipleship task, it often involves set courses of study, a more limited time frame, and a teacher-student type of relationship.

*The goal of coaching is not in fixing what is broken, but in
discovering new talents and new ways to use old
talents that lead to far greater effectiveness.*

—Elizabeth and Gifford Pinchot

In many ways, coaching seems like the consulting that has become popular in business and some church circles in recent years. In these settings, consultants are paid to analyze a situation and give advice. We once attended a church that had grown beyond its capacity but had no place to expand. A paid consultant was hired to analyze our situation and give advice. He talked to the church leaders, gave a detailed questionnaire to the congregation, looked carefully at the community, and then gave his analysis and recommendations in return for his consulting fee. We frequently need experts like this. If you're sick you go to a doctor for a consultation about your problem and its treatment.

In contrast, coaching is broader. It doesn't involve making a diagnosis or giving advice. As a coach, you don't need to be an expert in the areas that concern the PBC. But you do need the ability to listen, understand, and guide as a person looks at his or her own situation, reaches conclusions about what to do, and then takes action as you guide as an encourager and cheerleader.

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WHAT MAKES COACHING CHRISTIAN?

Books and professional articles on coaching often mention values and sometimes refer to spirituality, but most are written for a secular market and without reference to anything Christian. Coaching, therefore, is new to the Christian community—although it could be argued that much of the ministry of Jesus and the early church involved coaching.

My first introduction to Christian coaching came from a counselor named Christopher McCluskey. In the early part of his career he worked as a therapist in private practice, but often he saw people in his office who didn't really want or need a counselor. They weren't in some state of crisis or struggling with unsolvable problems. Instead, they had a distinct feeling that something was simply missing from their lives. They wanted help from someone who was objective, confidential, a skilled listener, and able to give them honest feedback. They wanted some sort of guide to help them find greater peace and joy in their Christian lives. These people were looking for a life coach.¹²

McCluskey took a bold step. After training to be a coach, he closed his practice in Florida, moved his family to a farm in Missouri, wrote letters to his clients and colleagues explaining his move, and began coaching people using the telephone, fax machine, and e-mail. Today he works as part of a new profession of Christian coaching that I will describe later. Many of the principles he uses and teaches to others can be applied by anyone. For Chris McCluskey, coaching is more than a profession—it's his ministry. It's a way of helping people find God's vision for their lives and learn to live accordingly.

Christian coaches use many of the same techniques that are used by their secular counterparts. But Christian coaching is unique in a number of ways. First and most important is the biblical worldview that the Christian coach brings to the relationship. A perusal of the many available books on coaching shows that most authors emphasize the ability of PBCs (persons being coached) to "look inside" with the help of their coaches, to "listen for the values, purposes, and visions" that are deep within, to focus on inner strengths, and to "discover" their passions and life purposes. There are no absolutes and few rules in this kind of thinking. And God is nowhere to be seen.

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In contrast, Christians believe that humans are created in God's image. We have fallen into sin, but we are redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ, who offers forgiveness and salvation as a gift. We can ignore this offer of salvation or we can accept his free gift of abundant life on earth and eternal life after we die.¹³ Christians live with the awareness that God is sovereign, aware of his people, and willing to guide and empower those who are his children. Like everyone else, we seek to become aware of our passions, life purposes, inner strengths, and visions for the future. But Christians realize that these are God-given and that we find ultimate fulfillment only when we're living in accordance with God's plans. For the Christian coaches, God—not human ingenuity—is at the core of their beings, and God is the guide for all coaching work.

*What we believe influences who we are and that
in turn impacts everything we do.*

This leads to a second uniqueness of Christian coaching: the person of the coach. If you're a Christian, seeking to walk in the footsteps of Jesus, you'll approach every aspect of your life from this perspective. Your commitment to Christ will impact your marriage, parenting, lifestyle, values, spending, time management, vocation, and the perspectives that you bring to coaching. What we believe influences who we are and that in turn impacts everything we do. If it doesn't, there's something lacking in our relationship with Christ, something interfering with our level of commitment, something missing in our spiritual lives. We can maintain a halfhearted devotion to Christ and still work as coaches, but the coaching we do will lack the power and impact that comes when we permit the Holy Spirit to guide us in our relationships with our PBCs.

Third, the Christian coach knows that none of us can be completely neutral. One of our goals in coaching is to ask questions that will help others identify and clarify their values. But coaches seek to avoid imposing their own agendas on PBCs. We rarely advise, and we never tell people what they should do. Instead, we encourage people to set their own goals and directions, crystallize their own

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visions, and formulate their own mission statements and plans of action. But we can't ignore the clear and final directive of Jesus to his followers: make disciples. As we have seen, coaching is not discipleship, but we want the people we coach to ultimately become fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ. The previous sentence will be challenged by many professional coaches who believe that our role is to be neutral. But no coach can be completely neutral. Even if we strive to keep our values and perspectives tightly hidden, Christian coaches cheer inside when others move in directions that are consistent with biblical teaching and we're disappointed when they move away. Every counselor knows that in time our own values slip out despite our efforts to keep them quiet. Isn't it more honest for coaches to admit that, although we genuinely respect the independence and decisions of the people we coach, we are still human beings whose values and views will impact what we say and how we guide?

Coaching can powerfully impact the lives of people as we help them more fully embrace Christ's abundant life.

—*Christopher McCluskey*

Fourth, although the Christian coach is committed to learning and applying the established techniques of coaching, he or she also prays regularly for the PBCs and is not reluctant to discuss spiritual issues, especially in working with Christians who share worldviews and values similar to those of the coach. Christian values aren't attached to coaching like a caboose hooked to the end of a train. Christian values permeate the life of the Christian coach and flow into coaching, even as we respect the uniqueness or individualities of PBCs and fully affirm their right to build lives on values that we might consider not to be Christian. Jesus once had a conversation with a rich young ruler who didn't want to give up his possessions to follow him. Jesus didn't force the man to change. He gave him freedom to build his life as he wanted, knowing that he was settling for something far from the best. Sometimes we must allow people to have the same freedoms.

WHY WOULD ANYONE WANT CHRISTIAN COACHING?

I have a friend whose work required him to write an important report that needed to be concise and completed by a fast-approaching deadline. When the first draft was completed, he sent it to me and I went over it with a red pen, making a bunch of editorial suggestions before calling him to discuss what he'd sent. We talked on the phone for more than an hour. I didn't tell him what changes to make, but I gently pointed out some grammatical errors, inconsistencies, phrases that left me confused, and suggestions for making it better. All of this was in a context of encouragement for the job he had done, enthusiasm about what he'd written, and genuine affirmation of him as a person. As we talked, I was only vaguely aware that my daughter Jan was in the room using my computer.

She'd seen the pile of coaching books on my desk, and when I hung up the phone Jan asked if what she overheard had been coaching. That's exactly what I'd been doing even though this hadn't crossed my mind as my friend and I talked. He wanted my help in writing a better report, and I responded by giving him guidance based on my experiences as a writer and editor. He felt some insecurities about the final product, but I encouraged him as we thought through the reasons that the report would be well received. He didn't feel criticized or that I had taken the responsibility of rewriting his report. Instead, he'd been coached.

People come for coaching because they want something to be different. The issue may be as simple as reworking an article or as complex as remolding a life. But all coaching is about making changes. Someone once suggested that the classic definition of crazy is continuing to do things in the same way that they've always been done, but expecting different results. Coaches and the people they coach know that for the future to be different (and less crazy), we need to make changes in the way we do things in the present. Sometimes these changes are like my editorial suggestions for a friend's report. More often they involve changes in attitudes, thinking, perceptions, and behavior. There are as many potential changes and goals as there are people who want coaching, but some topics come up repeatedly:

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- Developing skills in areas like athletics, music, money management, public speaking, parenting, or leadership
- Discovering and developing passions
- Finding a life purpose
- Building a clearer vision for the future
- Developing a mission statement
- Learning to manage change effectively
- Learning to relate to people effectively
- Finding clear values
- Building communication skills
- Appraising performance
- Getting unstuck, out of ruts, and moving forward
- Learning to think and see things differently
- Expanding the capacity to take action
- Getting free of self-sabotaging behavior and destructive self-talk—the kind of talk, for example, that says, “I can’t do it,” “Things will never change,” “No one will listen to me,” “I’ll never succeed so why try”
- Building better teams—like getting athletes to play for the name on the front of their shirts instead of the names on the back
- Building self-confidence
- Finding meaning in what one is doing
- Getting the courage to take risks
- Learning to take responsibility
- Developing a closer walk with God

*Coaches, most of whom work by phone,
are sounding boards and motivators who talk
through problems with solo entrepreneurs,
help them set deadlines, hold them accountable
for their actions, and lead them down
the path of self discovery.*

—Daniel H. Pink

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As a coach, the goal is to work yourself out of a job so that the person being coached is able to make changes and then move forward without continued assistance.

This is illustrated creatively by the “amoeba theory of management” that corporate coach James Flaherty presented in his book on coaching.¹⁴ Back in high school biology, we all learned that amoeba are single-cell protozoa. These amoeba can be moved in at least two ways. They can be poked to respond or they can be enticed with sugar so that they move in its direction. This is what behavioristic psychology would see as the most basic stimulus-response means for bringing change. If the people you coach were amoeba, we could poke them or reward them and watch them go. Sometimes, especially when there is pressure to get things moving, managers, professors, pastors, and even counselors still use this poke and entice approach. And sometimes it works, at least for a while. But it ultimately forgets that people are a little more complicated than amoeba.

Think of some reasons why this method falls short. As soon as the stimulus ends, the movement stops and it’s hard to sustain it. Since people are merely responding to stimulation—like the prod of a teacher or coach—they have little self-motivation to change their values, rethink their goals, or discover their passions. Instead, people become passive, waiting until they are pushed again. Ambition, goal-setting, risk-taking, and creativity are all squelched. And because people tend to be smarter than amoeba, we sometimes even find ways to avoid the poke or get the reward without taking the action. Every day, hundreds of workers sit around in their jobs, trying to look good but doing very little else until they’re poked or pulled again.

This example is probably unfair to the positive side of behavioristic psychology, but there’s a point to it. To help others grow, coaches need to know their PBCs, build relationships, take time to assess where people are, clarify goals, and work in a partnership that gets things done in the present and clarifies how present learning can be applied in the future. When my friend and I finished going over his report, he commented that the final document was better than the original, but in addition, he had learned things about writing that he’d never encountered before. He knew he could incorporate these

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ideas the next time he wrote a report. That's good coaching: helping others in the present so that they're self-motivated to do better in the future.