



- REPORT -

# Q: CAN COACHING FURTHER YOUR CAREER?

**A:** Whatever your sphere of business, taking the time to consult with an independent expert can help you reach your professional potential

By ERICA WAGNER

**W**hen I meet Aimée Heuzenroeder, she radiates a lively and vital energy I can easily imagine she transmits to her clients. Yet Heuzenroeder is a keen listener too, and when she speaks about her role as a communication and executive coach – she works with high-profile clients across the worlds of fashion, media and business – it’s listening that comes to the fore. ‘People associate coaching with problem-solving,’ she says, ‘and it can be, and that’s fantastic. You can have a challenge like, “My time management is poor” or “I want to transition to a new job”. But I’m always looking at what sits underneath that – my goal is to be really curious about that whole person, and their whole life and work, to discover the underlying issue.’ She might find out that the

woman sitting opposite her – despite being, say, a power-player in the fashion industry – doesn’t feel worthy of taking care of herself or lacks nourishing relationships.

Business and communication coaching is riding high at the moment. The International Coach Federation has more than 53,000 professionals on its books – a jump from 47,500 in 2012; the sector is believed to be worth \$2 billion globally. And no wonder: in a swiftly changing world, both companies and individuals must work to adapt – and for women, particularly, a coach can help unlock a professional potential that has been dormant or unacknowledged.

Last year, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, the youngest ever woman to be elected to the US Congress, paid tribute to her career coach, the former Google executive Megan Hellerer, in an Instagram post that describes her support as ‘pivotal’. ‘You helped me reframe a lot of my thinking, and were part of a series of events that culminated in the big adventure of a Congressional run... and win!’ she wrote.

I’ve been struck, lately, by the number of my female friends – all of them very successful in their fields – who have told me that coaching has been useful to them in figuring out the next stage of their career. ‘It helped me ask myself what I’m very good at and what I really like, and how I can balance that with my personal life,’ says Daniela, a publishing executive based in London. ‘My coach encouraged me to see that some of the things others find challenging about me are in fact valuable. A lot of people see me as very direct, and that can be perceived as “difficult”. My coach said, don’t accept that. Look at what

they’re saying; see how you can turn that around and show them those aspects of your personality are assets.’

Daniela found her coach via word of mouth – the best approach, according to all the clients who spoke with me. Most suggested it is worth meeting a few different people before taking one on as a coach, since chemistry plays a role in the relationship. In that regard at least, it has something in common with choosing a therapist, though the boundaries are very different. Coaching directly addresses the client’s engagement with the world – her goals, her plans, her ambitions.

‘I work with a lot of clients who have been brilliant at school, who have been head girls – they’re Oxbridge-educated, they’ve always been first in at work, last out,’ says Lisa Quinn, who became a professional coach after working as a communications director for the media company that owns *Bazaar*. ‘They get to a point in their lives where they’re either going to burn out or it just doesn’t work for them any more. They find themselves asking, “If I’m not that, if that’s not my identity, because that’s always been who I am, then what am I going to be?”’

Emily, one of Quinn’s clients, tells me that what she gained from the process was a deep understanding of herself and what drives her. Coaching, she said, gives you ‘the luxury of dedicated time and space with someone who’s focused on you – who asks you the questions that you don’t ask yourself, and others don’t ask you. Your coach has no agenda in mind but yours.’

This sentiment is echoed by Amanda Pelham Green, who has been running Odyssey Mentor coaching for the past decade, attracting clients from various walks of life. She has a forth-

right quality that I immediately find appealing; it’s easy to imagine turning to her for advice. She describes coaching as ‘a space you create for somebody to be themselves’. I seek her opinion on what questions I might ask myself if I were going – even only momentarily – to be my own coach. ‘Try saying, what’s the difference I want to make? Imagine I’ve only got 30 seconds left in my life: what message would I like to give to a child or a grandchild? What would I like my best friend to say at my funeral? What matters most to me? What makes my heart sing? But the first question is,

what do I want? People need time and space to think about that.’

A coach, says Heuzenroeder, shouldn’t focus on achievement at all costs; success doesn’t have to mean cramming more into your life. ‘Ask yourself how you can free up space to flourish,’ she suggests. That seems like a very good place to start. □  
Aimée Heuzenroeder ([www.aimeeheuz.com](http://www.aimeeheuz.com)). Lisa Quinn ([www.lisaquinncoaching.co.uk](http://www.lisaquinncoaching.co.uk)). Amanda Pelham Green ([www.odysseymentor.com](http://www.odysseymentor.com)).

‘Coaching helped me ask myself what I’m very good at and what I really like, and how I can balance that with my personal life’

PHOTOGRAPH: ERIK MADIGAN HECK