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## NEED A LIFE? GET A COACH

By Kendall Hamilton, Newsweek: February 5, 1996

They're part therapist, part consultant - and they sure know how to succeed in business

When Robert Wagon enlisted an outside professional to help him build his Houston mortgage-banking business last summer, he didn't get quite what he expected. Early in their relationship, Wagon's new adviser sent him a survey. "It had nothing to do with my business," says Wagon, 32. "It was 'Do you live in a well-lit, clean, orderly place? Is your car in good order? Do your sheets need mending?' I thought, I ain't hiring a therapist." Wagon **\*\*wasn't\*\*** hiring a therapist. But he wasn't hiring a business consultant, either. He was hiring a 'coach.'

Coaches say they're in the vanguard of an entirely new, and distinctly '90s profession. Part consultant, part motivational speaker, part therapist and part rent-a-friend, coaches work with managers, entrepreneurs, and just plain folks, helping them define and achieve their goals -- career, personal or, most often, both. For fees ranging from \$150 to \$500 per month for weekly half-hour phone sessions, a coach might consult on everything from selling a business to shopping for snowtires. The most successful earn six-figure incomes, and proponents say the field is primed to explode. "It's a new thing, so a lot of people don't know what it is," says Talane Miedaner, 30, who works by day as a Manhattan bank executive, and coaches part time in the evenings. "But I think within the next five years people are going to say 'Who is your coach?' not 'What is a coach?'"

Despite his initial misgivings, Robert Wagon is now an enthusiastic client. His coach helped him understand that his work and home lives are interdependent. "I might be sitting in a meeting with you, thinking about the fact that my wife and I might not be getting along real well. As a business person, I might not choose to address that. I might say, 'I know what my problem is, I need another \$100,000 in sales this month.' Well to get there, I may have to go clean up something else." Dr. David Wadler, a Houston orthodontist, says his coach helps him stay on track. "I didn't have anyone to answer to, so if I said I was going to do something, there was no one keeping me focused." With his coach's help, Wadler, 50, beefed up his marketing efforts -- and ensured that an addition to his home was completed properly. "It's like having a friend to bounce things off of that has my best interests in mind," he says.

Coaches generally ask new clients to sign up for six months, and rely on word of mouth to generate business. Advertising, you see, is a little crass for an endeavor as personal as coaching. "We're not selling coaching services; we're selling a partnership in someone's life," explains Thomas Leonard, a former Salt Lake City financial planner, who in 1992, founded Coach U to train potential coaches. "If you turn that into an advertising campaign, I just question the intimate nature of the coach/client relationship." Not to mention that where there's advertising, there's regulation, and coaches are still free from any licensing requirements. Though some have backgrounds in business, education or therapy, they're not necessarily experts in anything. "There's no industry standard currently on what's OK and what's not OK in terms of how much advice one gives, other than common sense," says Leonard. Anyway, say proponents, coaching is much more than mere consulting. "Most of what coaching's about is having you find out what you really love to do and then setting up your life so you're just doing stuff that you love," says Miedaner. "People start living their dreams."

Interestingly, many clients decide that living their dreams means a career change...to coaching. "It's a very optimistic, upbeat, fun kind of profession," says Lee Smith, 52, who's phasing out a 10-year family-therapy practice in Dallas to coach full time. "I also like that it's very portable. You can do coaching from anywhere, anytime, as long as you have a telephone." You can also learn to coach from the comfort of your couch. Leonard's Coach U is an entirely virtual institution. Would-be coaches can download expensive training 'modules' and self-administered tests from the Coach U Web page and dial into regularly scheduled conference-call 'TeleClasses.' Leonard, who runs the show from a roving RV loaded with the latest computer and telecommunication gizmos, estimates that there are 1,000 coaches nationwide; he says Coach U's enrollment has tripled in the past year, to 350. It's tough to say whether the demand for coaches will keep pace with the supply, but it sounds like nice work if you can get it.