



## Once considered a fringe career, personal coaching is now established enough for universities such as Columbia and NYU.

When David Dowd started his personal coaching practice nearly 40 years ago, he had only a few colleagues—people like himself who had attended Werner Erhard's est programs and had an incredible knack for helping people get out of their own way when it came to achieving their goals. There were no schools or programs that offered any kind of coaching curriculum. It was just something Dowd and his counterparts developed based on instinct and client need.

Now, according to several independent surveys, including one by PricewaterhouseCoopers, there are between 30,000 and 40,000 executive, career and life coaches in this country, earning an average of \$204 an hour. That's up from just 2,000 seven years ago. And major schools like NYU, Columbia and Georgetown University in Washington, D.C., are offering certificate programs in the field.

Still, at this point, anyone can hang out a shingle: Print up some cards and you're in business. "It is still a self-regulated profession," says Ann Belcher, marketing coordinator for the International Coaching Federation (ICF), one of a couple of "governing bodies" of this largely ungoverned field. But its growing popularity—among clients and those interested in pursuing careers—has led to a call for established standards. "As the profession has grown, corporations and individual clients have been asking increasingly for coaches to have specific training, and proof that they've had it," Belcher says.

Other than obtaining certificates through universities, aspiring coaches can take courses from any of the hundreds of programs offered mostly online, and during weekends at conference centers in major cities. Some are "accredited" by the ICF, but you don't need to have gone to one of those to get your own ICF credentials. You just have to complete a certain number of hours of training and coaching, and take an exam. And, accredited or not, you can still practice legally.

For those who've never enlisted a coach, it's a bit like having a therapist, a manager, a mentor and a personal cheerleader all rolled into one. "It's very much the same as if you're coaching an athlete," Dowd says. "A coach is there to support and feed you from the sidelines, rather than assume or take responsibility, whereas in therapy there's a tendency for the client to relinquish responsibility to the authority, the therapist." Clients typically meet with coaches once a week, in person or by phone. The coach asks a lot of questions, and then, based on the answers, collaborates with the client on goal-setting.

"Coaching is about questioning, listening and then designing actions to move a person forward," says Siobhan Murphy, president of Quest Coaching International and an adjunct lecturer in the program at NYU's School of Continuing and Professional Studies. "And unlike therapy, the

questions aren't so much about the past, they are more to mine current thinking."

As the field grows, coaches are becoming more specialized, focusing on particular areas, from business to writing. "Many coaches utilize their additional backgrounds," says Belcher. "They may all have the same solid core coaching foundation, but they can bring something unique to their practice and appeal to a targeted group."

One such specialist is Victoria Rowan, a former magazine editor and freelance writer who is now a writing and creativity coach with clients in publishing, film and other arts. And though Rowan pays attention to a client's work and career, other aspects are examined as well.

"I find it's really important to work holistically, to look at all the different areas of my client's lives," says Rowan. "So many people have difficulty being creative because they haven't made space in the rest of their lives for creativity to exist, so we have to look at that. With one client, we worked on her practicing conversations in which she asked her weekend houseguests to leave in time for her to do her creative work. And we talked about her socializing with only those people who stimulate her creatively."

Although Dowd himself didn't go through a formal training program, he recommends them to his clients who want to pursue coaching as a second career. "I've had some clients who were psychiatrists and therapists, and they felt limited within those contexts," Dowd says. "Coaching gives them a broader, more immediate approach. I have recommended that they take a look at Coach U. ([coachu.com](http://coachu.com)), and at NYU and Columbia. These places provide a structure for learning and working in this field, and they help you with the business aspects, like how to enroll clients."

In fact, being able to enroll clients, or to get a corporation on board to practice internal coaching, is a requirement for passing in the Columbia coach certification program. The course begins with a five-day intensive residential seminar, for which participants are housed at the Tarn/town Conference Center in Westchester. Then there's a six-month practicum, followed by another five-day residential advanced coaching intensive. "The six-month practicum involves supervision with faculty, a project, logging coaching hours, Internet and telephone conferencing," says Terrence Maltbia, a Columbia professor and director of the school's Corporate Learning Solutions Group. "During the practicum, part of the task is to identify coaching clients. They need to be able to convince people to hire them."

NYU has a similar practicum component to its two-semester program. "Because of that," says Jen Zobel Bieber, who got her certificate there and is a partner in Make the Leap Coaching, "I was able to build my practice right away."