

Getting on Track: What a "Life Coach" Can Do For You

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# Pep Talks

A number of so-called life coaches are helping Mainers get through more than just the winter.

It happens to all of us, sooner or later. Another birthday, and there's our unfinished novel languishing in the same dresser drawer, our business plan still adrift in the dream stage, our ideal mate still unfound. Or perhaps it hits us during the midwinter torpor, in the recriminatory heap of unsplit wood we never got to, or the job we intended to quit before spring. These soft regrets aren't critical; we've lived with them for years, after all. We're doing fine, in fact - except for a nagging notion that "the way life should be" is not exactly the way life is.

Maybe it's time for a life coach.

No, not a shrink. If it's psychotherapy you're after, walk your fingers a little farther through the Yellow Pages. "People go to a therapist because they need healing," says Alfred DePew, 52, a certified life coach from Portland. "My life-coaching clients are whole, resourceful, and creative. They're looking for more balance in a life that is already fulfilling to them." What they get, typically, transpires over the phone, lasts thirty minutes, and results in a specific goal, an "action" toward fulfilling the goal, and a clear deadline for completing the action and reporting back to the coach. Skeptics might deride the concept as self-indulgent hand-holding, another baby boomer fad. But life coaching is meticulously focused, non-therapeutic,

results-oriented - and the first session's free. Talk therapy it ain't.

"Life coaching offers a different kind of support, a way of taking action in the world," DePew adds. "This is not about processing feelings." Despite his rolling-thunder laugh, DePew comes across as a soft-spoken, spritlike fellow with a face that appears sighted from within - the physical opposite of the letter-jacketed hulk on the sidelines that the word coach often conjures. "I invite people to start living their values," he says. "I believe this is a radical act. When people start honoring what's really important to them, their lives change. They come to an articulation of their life purpose and their life vision."

If this sounds like too tall an order, consider this: Scarborough periodontist Jill Gaziano's first "action" as DePew's client was to clean her bedroom. DePew had asked her to divide the areas of her life into a pie chart - a common coaching technique - and assign each section a number according to her satisfaction with each area. "One of the things I

wanted was an organized environment," she says, "so we started there. It actually changed the way I felt when I woke up in the morning." She eventually embarked on a more metaphorical de-cluttering by breaking up with her boyfriend and re-amalgamating her daily schedule to make room for painting. (Note: Interactions between certified coaches and their clients are confidential; people quoted here have granted permission to use their names.) "This isn't about resolving past issues," Gaziano points out. "Life coaching starts you in the present and directs you toward the future."

A growing international phenomenon (new Web sites pop up daily, it seems), life coaching appears to be thriving in Maine. The Coaches Alliance of Maine emerged in 1998, co-founded by Nancy Lubin, of Camden, the first life coach in the state to be certified by the International Coaching Federation, the profession's de facto regulatory body. "I think Maine attracts a certain independent-minded kind of person to whom the

Alfred DePew, of Portland, doesn't wear a whistle around his neck, but he is a coach of sorts. DePew is one of dozens of personal motivators for hire who can help you identify and realize your potential - like your own private Bill Parcells.