

Findings from a global survey of certified professional co-active coaches

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Abstract

Currently, research supporting the validity of coaching is rising in both executive and life coaching arenas. Research has revealed that co-active life coaching (CALC), a particular style of coaching, is compatible with health-behaviour theory. However, very little information is known about co-active coaches themselves. The purpose of this study was to develop a comprehensive, applied coaching profile using a global sample of English-reading and -writing certified professional co-active coaches (CPCCs). The survey used for this study was a revised version of the Grant and Zackon (2004) coaching survey. A total of 390 CPCCs who were over 18 years of age, could read English, and had access to the internet participated in the current study. Data on credentialing, prior professional backgrounds, and coaching session structure were collected. Virtually all CPCCs came from a prior profession, most had a college or equivalent degree, and coaching over the phone was the most common method of conducting coaching sessions. In addition, data on coach demographics, coaching careers and CPCCs coaching clientele was collected. This paper elaborates on these findings and makes suggestions for future research.

Key words: Life coaches, Co-active Coaching, Coach Training, Survey

Introduction

It is clear that life coaching, in both executive and health arenas, is continuing to grow as a means for individuals to make changes in their professional and personal lives, as evidenced by a number of empirical studies (Grant, Green, and Rynsaardt, 2010; Kilburg, 2004; Newnham-Kanas, Gorzynski, Irwin, and Morrow, 2009; Wasylyshyn, 2003). At the same time, opportunities to become trained as a life coach appear vast given the over sixty training schools that can be found using a simple “Google” search. In 1999, The International Coach Federation (ICF), which is self-described as the voice of the global coaching profession, reported over 16,000 coaches worldwide (Morris, 2000) and numbers as high as 44,000 worldwide reported in 2009 (Frank Bresser Consulting, 2009).

Coaches around the world use a variety of titles ranging from “Executive Coach” and “Business Coach” to “Life Coach” and “Personal Coach” (the term “coaching” will be used throughout the document to refer to any of these titles unless otherwise mentioned in the results section; Gale, Liljenstrand, Pardieu and Nebeker, 2002; Liljenstrand and Nebeker, 2008). The different titles used extends coaching’s boundaries beyond the boardroom into individuals’ personal lives (Liljenstrand and Nebeker, 2008). Further, the decrease in stigma associated with coaching has also helped increase its popularity and use. For example, in executive coaching, historically only employees who were struggling would be assigned a coach. However, with coaching’s professional evolution and elevated profile, it is now fairly common for successful employees to receive coaching to increase performance even further (Liljenstrand and Nebeker, 2008). In addition, coaching has separated itself from traditional mentoring

programs with the coach being viewed as a sounding board and “thought partner” (p. 58) instead of an expert, which decreases employee perceptions regarding why a coach was assigned to an employee and decreases resistance to coaching and thus increased demand for coaching services in the workplace.

Coaching is not a new phenomenon. However, the academic life coaching literature on the effectiveness of life coaching only first emerged relatively recently (e.g. Grant, 2003). A significant portion of the literature first released on coaching was focused primarily on organization and executive coaching from the fields of management consulting, training and development, and consulting psychology (Kampa-Kokesch and Anderson, 2001). According to Feldman and Lankau (2005), academic research of executive coaching has been sparse. Grant and Zackon reiterated this point and reported only 131 papers in the peer-reviewed behavioural science press in 2003. Of those 131 articles, only 56 were empirical studies, the majority of which did not use a control group or were case studies. A recent annotated bibliography of health-related coaching publications reported a growing number of empirical studies; however, the majority of those studies lacked methodological rigor or clear explanation of the type of coaching used, thereby reducing any ability to determine whether coaching was actually associated with any behaviour change (Newnham-Kanas et al., 2009).

Currently, research supporting the validity of coaching is on the rise in both executive and life coaching arenas. Grant and Zackon (2004) reported that in the late 1960s more rigorous academic research started to emerge in the form of doctoral dissertations with an emphasis on organizational coaching. At the beginning of the 1990's, there was considerable momentum of doctoral and empirical coaching research. There are a number of studies in the health field in the areas of obesity and smoking cessation that continue the trend of rigorous academic research that extends beyond executive coaching (Newnham-Kanas, Irwin, and Morrow, 2008; Mantler, Irwin, and Morrow, 2010; van Zandvoort, Irwin, and Morrow, 2008; 2009). Although the literature about and evidence surrounding coaching's effectiveness has grown exponentially over the last few years, only recently has research emerged focusing on the coaches themselves, such as their prior professions, training, coaching practices, and client demographics (Bono, Purvanova, Towler, and Peterson, 2009; Frank Bresser Consulting, 2009; Gale et al., 2002).

In 2004, Grant and Zackon conducted a large-scale survey of International Coach Federation (ICF) members. The ICF is the leading global organization of coaches whose mission is to support and advance the coaching profession. This was the first study specifically to examine characteristics of coaches who were members of the ICF. Grant and O'Hara (2006) contend that coaching is an emerging cross-disciplinary profession that can be considered a para-therapeutic methodology based on its emphasis on enhancing well-being, personal functioning, and goal attainment (Grant and O'Hara, 2006). Traditional therapeutic helping professions such as psychologists, psychiatrists, or social workers are regulated and carefully governed. However, there are no such regulations governing life coaches and their training. Thus, it is vital that a common knowledge base about coaching is developed. Grant and Zackon (2004) suggested in their published manuscript that future surveys should draw on a sample base that extends beyond the ICF as a means of comparison to forward research and track trends in professional coaching. Based on our team's research program that has focussed specifically on co-active life coaching (a particular style of coaching) and as we continue to research its impact on various health behaviours, we are interested in finding out who is drawn to this type of training as we learn more about this particular coaching approach.

Laura Whitworth and Karen and Henry Kimsey-House founded the Coaches Training Institute (CTI) in 1992. CTI offers a certification program (whereby a student can become a Certified Professional Co-active Coach (CPCC)) that requires completion of the first four co-active core coaching courses – Fundamentals of Co-active coaching, Fulfillment, Balance, and Process – prior to starting the certification

process. Certification includes the completion of a six-month program offered by CTI, an established mentoring relationship with a CPCC, Professional Certified Coach (PCC), or a Master Certified Coach (MCC) from the ICF. After successful completion of the course, and completion of requisite hours of actually coaching clients, students are eligible to take the oral and written exam (Coaches Training Institute, 2011).

Current research has revealed that co-active life coaching (CALC) is compatible with health-behaviour theory (Irwin and Morrow, 2005). Our previous research indicates that co-active coaching has been associated with positive health behaviour changes in the areas of obesity, physical activity, and smoking cessation (Irwin and Morrow, 2005; Mantler, Irwin, and Morrow, 2010; Newnham-Kanas, Irwin, and Morrow, 2008; Newnham-Kanas, Gorczynski, Irwin, and Morrow, 2009; van Zandvoort, Irwin, and Morrow, 2008; 2009). As co-active coaching has potential as a health coaching modality, the purpose of this study was to develop a comprehensive, applied coaching profile using a global sample of English-reading and -writing certified professional co-active coaches (CPCCs). The intent in creating this profile was to develop a common knowledge base about coaches to track trends and understand who these coaches are. This information can be used to forward research that evaluates coaching services which will, in turn, contribute to the growing body of information needed to form the foundation of professionalism for the coaching industry.

Method

Participants

The present study was limited to CPCCs who were over 18 years of age, could read English, and had access to the internet. An initial 1,184 CPCC email addresses were retrieved through the CTI website (www.thecoaches.com). This website allows the general public to search for a CPCC using their 'Find-a-Coach' link. Numerous search criteria are listed to help clients narrow their search. However, for the purpose of this study, the only criterion used was country of origin. Of the 1,184 CPCCs retrieved, 102 emails bounced back as undeliverable, leaving a total of 1,082 delivered emails. Participating coaches were also accessed through the main community public discussion board provided on the co-active network (which is accessed through the main CTI website), and through an advertisement that was sent out in the CTI e-newsletter. Because CPCCs and non-CPCCs can access the co-active network and receive the newsletter, it is unclear how many CPCCs were accessed through those avenues. Prior to the advertisements on the co-active network and through the newsletter, 300 CPCCs completed the survey. After the additional advertisement circulated, another 90 CPCCs completed the survey for a total of 390 respondents. Prior to the last two advertisements, there was an approximate 30% response rate (this rate may be higher given that it is unclear how the final 90 CPCCs learned about the survey). Of the 390 CPCCs who started the survey, 82.9% completed the entire survey. Further details regarding participant demographics are provided in the results section.

Instrument

The survey used for this study was a revised version of the Grant and Zackon (2004) coaching survey that they graciously provided to us. The questionnaire was adapted to ensure that the purpose of this study was met. As outlined by Grant and Zackon, six broad areas were assessed: demographics (gender, age, education); coaching professionalism (credentialing, training, etc); respondents' coaching career (prior professions, length of time working as a coach etc.); coaching processes used (telephone vs. face-to-face coaching, length of session etc.); coaching practice (number of clients, techniques for generating new clients, fees, etc.); and client profiles (life coaching or executive coaching etc.). Survey Monkey (www.SurveyMonkey.com, LLC), a web-based tool for posting questionnaires, was used in

order that respondents could open the survey from any location they had internet access. Once the survey was adapted, it was pilot-tested with three different groups: 1) CPCCs who were not academics; 2) academics who were not CPCCs; and 3) CPCCs who were academics. These three groups were selected to ensure that all questions and answer options were applicable to CPCCs while maintaining that questions aligned with the purpose of the study and followed the research protocol. Once the first group sent recommendations for revision, the changes were implemented if they continued to align with the purpose of the study, at which point the survey was sent to the second group and so on. The questionnaire was pilot-tested to ensure that the questions were understandable and reasonable (as advised by McKenzie and Smeltzer, 1997); that is, the instrument's face validity was assessed. The final version of the survey included 63 questions with response options using a variety of different response formats, such as yes-no responses, frequency and extent rating scales, multiple response alternatives, and open-ended questions. For some items, participants could choose more than one response.

Procedure

A letter of information was attached to every email that was sent to participants and to the announcement on the Co-active network. Completion of the questionnaire served as explicit consent. Participants completed the survey by accessing the web-based survey link included in every email and advertisement. The survey took approximately 10-15 minutes to complete. The survey instrument automatically recorded participants' responses while maintaining respondent anonymity. The survey remained accessible from October 2010 to January 2011. Upon closing the survey site, responses were stored on a computer server and later downloaded for analysis. Respondents interested in receiving a copy of the results were asked to email the lead author.

Findings

Coach Demographics

The majority of respondents were female (76.7%), with 36.7% between the ages of 45-54, 31.5% were aged 55-64, and 21.9% were between 35-44 years (only one coach was under 25). The majority of respondents resided in the United States (55.2%), followed by Canada (25.6%), and the United Kingdom (4.6%). The remaining 14.6% resided in Bahrain, Belgium, Denmark, Egypt, France, Germany, Israel, Japan, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Singapore, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Turkey, and the United Arab Emirates.

The majority of respondents held a college degree or equivalent (87.3%) with a substantial number having completed a graduate degree (45.7%). Please refer to Figure 1 for further education information.

Coaching Professionalism

The majority of respondents had been CPCCs for a fairly short period of time with 16.4% having been a CPCC for less than a year, 30.9% for one to three years, 32.7% for three to seven years, and 19.5% for more than seven years. This is representative of the coaching professional as many coaches are new to the coaching industry. In addition to their CPCC certification, half of the respondents held additional coaching credentials (notably, 55.7% held an ICF credential either an Associate Certified Coach, Master Certified Coach, or Professional Certified Coach designations). Only 7.6% reported working towards an additional coaching credential. Thirty percent reported having no additional certification other than their CPCC designation.

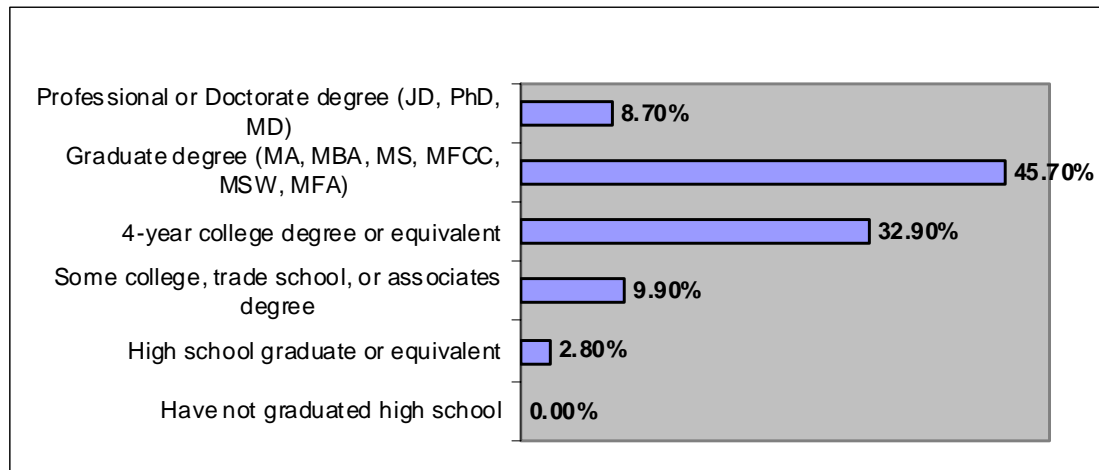


Figure 1. Highest Level of Formal Education Among CPCCs Surveyed.

Because the CTI website was used for coach recruitment, it was not surprising that 75.9% of respondents belonged to CTI as their professional coaching organization. A majority of the respondents also belonged to the ICF (69.2%) and membership within various regionally-formed or “local” ICF chapters was also fairly high (39.7%). A minority of coaches (25.5%) have also served in a formal role with a professional coaching organization (e.g. board of directors, local chapter host; 74.5%). A third of respondents (38.7%) have attended at least one ICF conference.

The majority of respondents did not have any formal training in recognizing issues of mental health (63.4%). However, 96.5% of respondents did feel comfortable referring clients to other services and 79.5% of respondents have referred clients to other services (e.g. psychologist).

Over half of the respondents have paid money to receive coaching (58.3%). At the time the survey was completed, 37.4% of respondents had a coach to whom they paid money to receive coaching and 12.1% had a coach with whom they bartered to receive coaching (e.g. they coach each other).

Coaching Career

Virtually all respondents came to the coaching profession from a prior professional background (98.9%). Previous professional backgrounds included consultants (29.4%), educators (19.5%), and the helping professions such as counsellors or social workers (16%). The majority of respondents considered themselves part-time coaches who also had another profession or business (46.8%) and 36.6% considered themselves full-time coaches. A large percent of part-time coaches were also consultants (49.1%), formal educators such as teachers and professors (20.8%), and helping professionals (e.g. psychologist, counsellor; 15.6%).

Respondents fell predominantly into two age group categories when reporting when they started their coaching training: 35-44 years (35.3%) and 45-54 years (37.2%). The majority of respondents earned money as a coach for two to five years (34.7%), 23% earned money for coaching for less than two years, 29.6% earned money as a coach for five to ten years, and only 11.8% for 10 to 15 years. The estimated personal income (in US dollars) from coaching-related services in the last year ranged primarily

from less than \$10,000 to between \$30,000-\$39,999 with 58.2% earning less than \$30,000 and 37.1% making less than \$10,000.

The most common coaching-related activities over the last six months reported by participants included one-on-one coaching (98.6%) and team or group coaching (55.7%). Figures 2 and 3 explain the full distribution of reported coaching-related activities in the last six months.

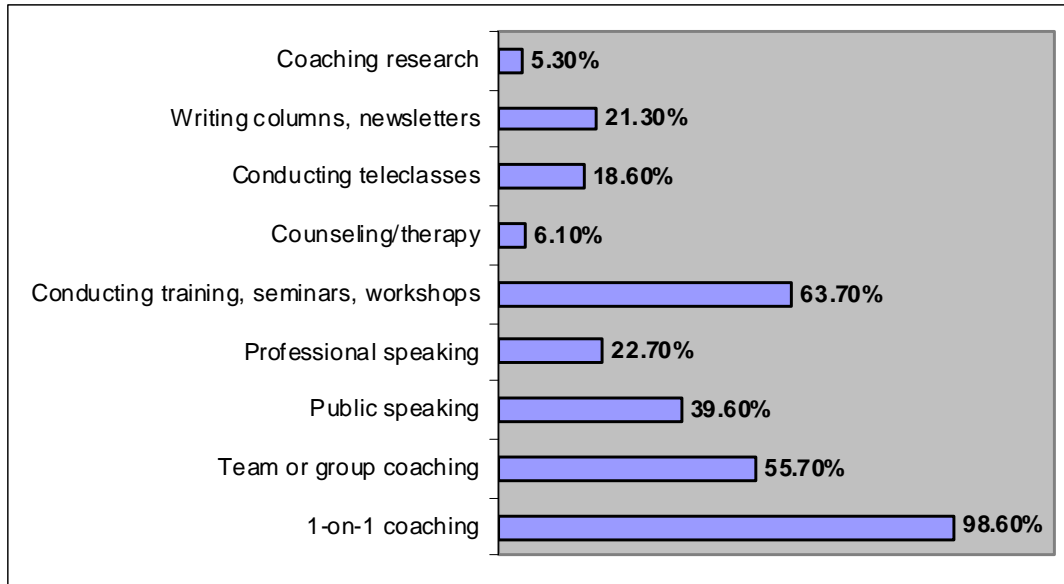


Figure 2. Results of the Distribution of Coaching-Related Activities Engaged in the Last Six Months

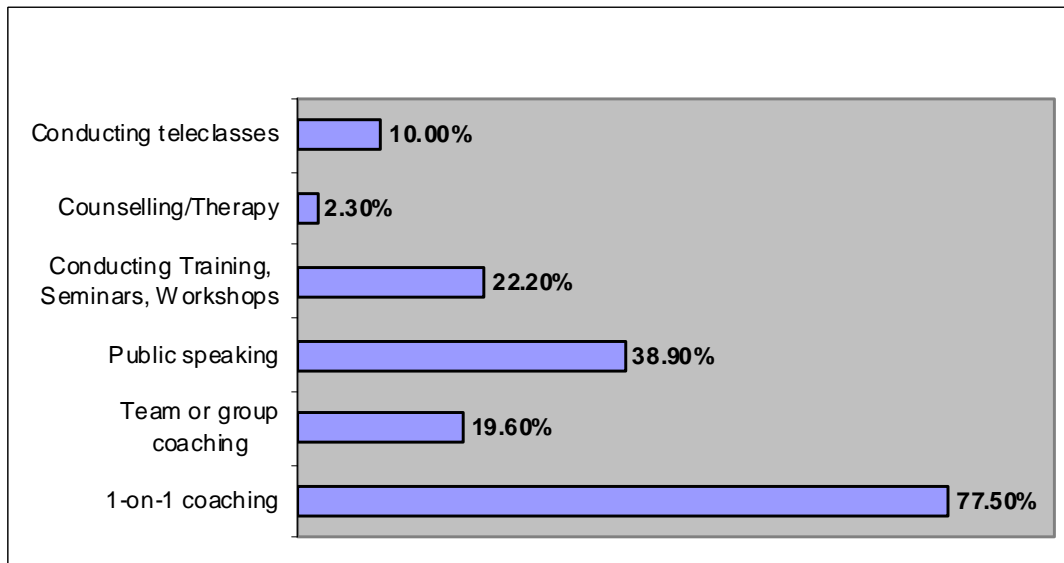


Figure 3. Results of the Distribution of Unpaid/Pro-Bono Activities in the Past Six-Months Coaching

Coaching Processes Used

The results in this section refer to how CPCCs structure their coaching sessions with their clients. Respondents primarily coached clients who lived in their same country (69.8%) and locally (within the same city/state/province of residence) (65.8%), followed by international clients (48.5%). Individual coaching sessions lasted predominantly 30 minutes to one hour (56.9%), followed by one-hour in length (37.5%). CPCCs typically worked with clients for 6 to 12 months (40.3%), followed by 3 to 6 months (29.0%).

The majority of respondents reported conducting their coaching over the phone (94.0%), followed closely by in-person (78.3%). Some CPCCs also used email or instant messaging (19%) and Internet video conferencing (24.2 %) to coach clients.

Just over 35% of CPCCs spent an average of two to five hours per week coaching clients, with an additional 32.4% spending five to ten hours per week, 19.8% dedicated 10-20 hours per week to coaching clients. Slightly more than a third (31.3%) of CPCCs coached four to six clients per month, and just under a third (28.6%) coached seven to ten clients each month.

Just over one third (31.7%) of respondents' indicated that they *sometimes* use other methods/models with their CPCC skills and 34.4% reported they *often* use additional methods/models. Many of the "additional" methods/models identified by respondents were derived from pre-existing psychological therapies, including but not limited to Gestalt therapy, Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT), Positive Psychology, and Rogerian counselling techniques.

Coaching Practice

Owners or partners of a coaching practice - The majority of respondents considered themselves self-employed and sole practitioners (74.9%). Of the small number of self employed CPCCs with others working for them (3.6%), only 5.0% had another employee also working as a coach, the majority of self-employed CPCCs worked alone in their coaching business (88.4%). The majority of coaches had owned their business for between 1-6 years (77.1%) and it took 3-6 months to 1-2 years to secure ten clients. Please refer to Figures 4 and 5 for additional information on how long CPCC have owned their business and how long it took to secure ten clients.

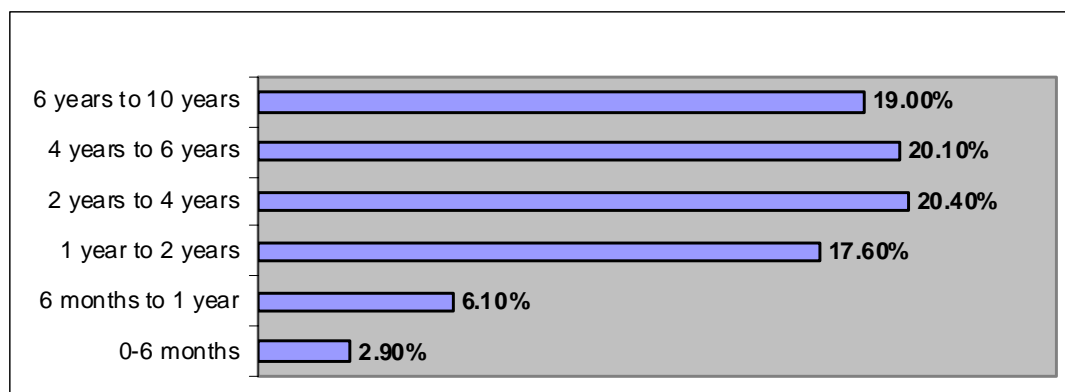


Figure 4. Results of How Long CPCCs Have Owned Their Business

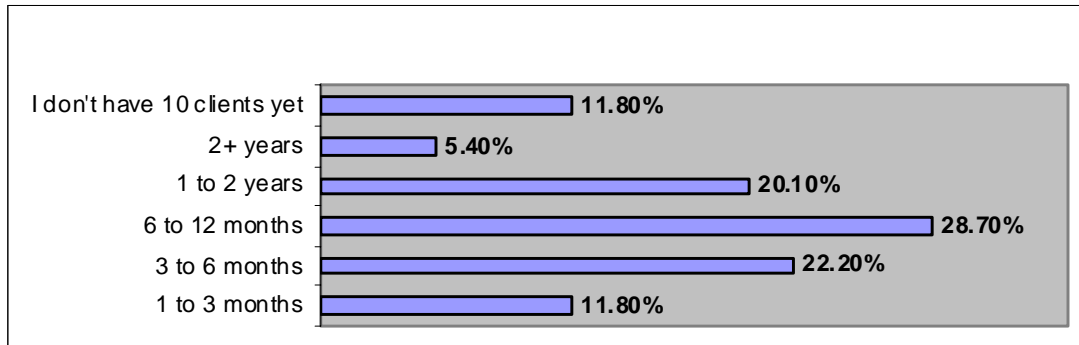


Figure 5. How Long it Took to Secure Ten Clients

Just over half (53.5%) of CPCCs who started their own company had a background in business training (ranging from a Business Administration degree to a short course such as the Business Builder course offered through CTI) while 46.8% did not. The majority of respondents did not take a business training course to start their coaching practice (74.7%). From those who did engage in a training program or come from a business background, 43.3% found the training *very useful* when starting their business, 17.2% found it *useful*, and 11.6% found it *slightly useful*.

Coaching referral services offers clients and coaches the opportunity to search online for a coach that fits the criteria they require (e.g. location, fee schedule, etc.). Thirty-nine percent of CPCCs who owned their own business did find ICF referral services *useful*, while 41.0% and 66.9% found referrals from other professionals and referrals from clients respectively, as *very useful* in bringing in new clients. Other popular recruitment techniques included offering a free coaching session (33.2%) and creating a business website to attract clients (23.0%).

Owners or partners of a coaching practice spent an average of 11-20 hours per week (23.7%), 6-10 hours per week (23.0%), 2-5 hours per week (23.0%), and less than two hours per week (18.2%) engaged in coaching business-related activities. As well, 73.7% spent less than \$200 per month on coaching marketing as a means of finding new clients, whereas 20% spent \$200-\$499 per month on marketing. During the past 12 months, CPCCs worked with clients on a sliding scale (53.0%), *pro bono* (53.0%), and used a barter system (35.4%).

CPCCs who owned their own business often priced their session by the hour or session (62.8%) or by month which included a set number of sessions (49.6%). Other CPCCs charged by the project (e.g. workshops or series of sessions for employees for a pre-determined fee; 34.3%) or by a monthly retainer fee (10.6%). CPCCs hourly rate ranged with the largest number of respondents having charged \$100-\$149 (US) per hour (41.2%). Only 4.7% charged \$300 or more, while 14.1% charged \$200-\$299, 17.6% charged \$150-\$199, 10.6% charged \$75-\$99, 9.4% charged \$50-\$74, and only 2.4% charged less than \$50/hour. More than half of respondents' (51.5%) coaching companies' estimated gross sales or revenues (in US dollars) in the past year was less than \$30,000 with the majority making less than \$10,000 (30.2%). Only 12.6% earned more than \$100,000 from coaching.

Internal coaches (coaches who are employed by an organization to work with individuals inside the organization) - Internal coaches worked predominantly with mid- to upper-level managers (55.6%), followed by non-supervisory professionals (22.2%), and management or executive teams (16.7%). Only 5.6% worked with top-level executives. Please refer to Figure 6 for a detailed summary of internal CPCCs' yearly salary.

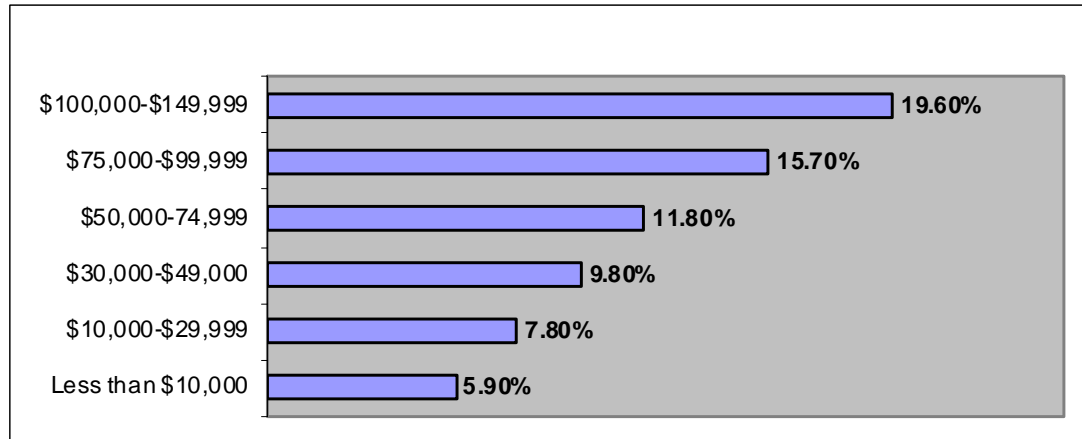


Figure 6. Current Annual Salary of internal CPCCs in USD

All CPCCs (regardless of whether they owned their own practice or were considered internal coaches) - Coaching effectiveness tools are instruments used to assess how well the coaching sessions are meeting the needs of the client. When asked if coaching effectiveness tools were available, 39.8% reported they would *likely* use them in their practice, 37.0% reported they would *absolutely* use them, 19.4% were *not sure* if they would use them, and only 3.7% reported they were *not inclined at all* to use them. There were very few measures of effectiveness used by CPCCs. However, informal client feedback was used *very often* (50.2%), while systematic interviews (40.1%), quantitative measures (49.6%), periodic performance measures (41.3%), and client satisfaction surveys (36.8%) were *very seldom/not at all* used. When asked through an open-ended question what they would need more of in their practice, the most common answers were clients and marketing training.

Eighty-seven percent of respondents did not participate in any formal coaching-related referral service. Of those who did participate in a formal coaching referral service, 42.4% participated in the ICF coach referral services and 48.6% participated in the CTI coach referral service.

Thirty-nine percent of CPCCs reported that they *sometimes* seek out and read published coaching research, whereas nearly a quarter (24.8%) reported they *often* do this, and another 10.4% indicated they *very often* search for this information. About another quarter (23.7%) of respondents indicated they *seldom* consume coaching-related research. For those who did read coaching related research, over half (55.5%) *sometimes* found this information changed what they did in their practice, and another 6.5% and 1.1% reported that they *often* and *very often*, respectively, found this information changed their practice. Meanwhile, over a third (36.8%) stated they *rarely* integrated coaching research into their practice.

Coaches' Clientele Profiles - Half of the respondents indicated they *very often* worked in the area of personal/life coaching (53.5%), followed by executive and corporate coaching (23.1%), and career/transition coaching (21.9%). CPCCs *very seldom* worked in the areas of internal coaching (63.9%), non-profit coaching (41.2%), and executive and corporate coaching (23.4%).

Personal coaches (coaches who work with clients outside of a work setting but from their own practice) typically worked with adults aged 36-55 (93.9%), followed by adults aged 25-35 (47.8%), adults aged 56-70 (33.6%) and young adults aged 18-25 (21.0%). Personal coaches worked primarily with individuals seeking personal growth (79.3%), and they reported *sometimes* working with people experiencing career issues (56.0%), spiritual crises (55.5%), relationship issues (53.7%), and people with health issues (48.0%).

Business/Executive coaches' target audience were individual professionals or executives (28.7%), followed by large companies including Fortune 500 (more than 1000 employees; 23.6%), mid-size companies (100-1000 employees; 16.7%), small businesses (20-100 employees; 12.6%), start up companies and entrepreneurs (1-5 people and/or employees; 14.9%), and not-for-profit organizations (3.4%). The group or individual most often targeted for coaching were management or executive teams (28.7%), followed by mid- to upper- level management (27.7%), and the business owner or partner (22.9%).

CPCCs (regardless of whether they identified themselves as personal or executive coaches) worked *very often* with their clients on clarifying and pursuing goals (63.3%); living a balanced life (49.7%); managing their time, energy, and resources (44.4%); interpersonal or relationship issues (43.3%); communication skills (37.1%); and leadership development (31.3%). They *seldom/not at all* worked on globalization and/or merger and acquisition issues (68.6%), company loyalty (51.1%), increasing sales and/or revenues (40.5%), and career transition (39.3%).

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to develop a comprehensive, applied coaching profile using a global sample of English-reading and -writing Certified Professional Co-active Coaches (CPCCs). As the coaching industry advances, and with full knowledge that there are over sixty different coaching training schools, it is important to develop a common knowledge base about coaches and particular schools/systems of coaching to track trends and understand who these coaches are in order to forward research that reliably evaluates coaching services. In creating a profile of CPCCs, we adapted a previously developed and utilized questionnaire (Grant and Zackon, 2004) to specifically target one school of coaching, but it can be used and adapted for other coaching schools by other researchers in order to profile the profession in all its complexity.

The survey utilized to explore CPCCs and their coaching practices was pilot tested with three distinct groups of professionals and academics to ensure CPCCs were provided with relevant questions and numerous response options to garner the most accurate and robust information possible. The survey was easily uploaded using SurveyMonkey, LLC. Utilizing an online survey provider allowed the researchers to contact CPCCs from around the world (respondents resided in 21 countries) in an attempt to garner a comprehensive profile. In addition, the questionnaire provided the researchers with an abundant amount of information needed to compile a profile of CPCCs. It should be noted that the response rate was approximately 30%, which is considered a good response rate for such surveys (Bickman and Rog, 1998) and is higher than comparable surveys (Gale et al., 2002; Liljenstrand and Nebeker, 2008).

With respect to our findings, most CPCCs made it clear that online coaching referral systems are ineffective and they are not being used. CPCCs received their clients mainly from current clients or other professional referrals which is similar to the findings of Brooks and Wright (2007) and Grant and Zackon

(2004). This profile identified a gap between the referral resources available and their accessibility. Perhaps clients who are dealing with personal issues would prefer knowing from a friend or a respected professional that they are being referred to an effective life coach rather than inputting personal information into a generic website. In addition, the referral sites may not ask questions that are specific enough to meet the needs of clients. Moreover, prospective clients may not know about the existence of online coaching referral systems. This information could ignite coaching organizations to ameliorate their service to attract the attention and meet the needs of clients.

Using this study's survey, we learned that close to 90% of CPCCs had a college degree or equivalent and over 40% had completed a graduate degree. In addition, these coaches tended to be educated in helping professions such as social work, consulting, psychology, and teaching. This is an important point because these results align with the findings from Gale et al. (2002), Grant and Zackon (2004), and Brooks and Wright (2007) which illustrate that the coaching industry is attracting trained individuals who view coaching tools as more beneficial or an adjunct to tools learned in their primary or formal education or profession.

Coaching is cross-disciplinary in nature, and Grant and Zackon (2004) claim that this is both a strength and liability as it pulls from a variety of different experiences and expertise that can enhance and strengthen the profession. At the same time, it can detract from standardizing the term "life coach" and "also means that defining the field of coaching is fraught with complexity" (p.12). Work is underway through professional bodies – such as the ICF – to define core competencies across all coach-training schools/programs that must continue in order to build credibility within the profession and to the public that the profession serves.

Scope of professional practice is an increasingly important aspect in the domain of coaching. Among our important profile findings is the fact that over 60% of CPCCs are not trained in identifying mental health issues. The lack of mental health training for coaches has been an area of concern in the literature for quite some time (Berglas, 2002). At the same time, even though CPCCs were not trained in this area, they felt comfortable referring clients to additional mental health services. CPCCs reportedly are conscious to not jeopardize their clients' safety or well-being and instead, most are comfortable to take the necessary steps to get the help their clients needed. Although CPCCs do refer clients to mental health services, it is imperative and ethically necessary in service of clients that coaches remain confident in their ability to identify clients who need additional, perhaps complimentary services. Training schools need to consider incorporating this type of scope of practice training into their curriculum.

Results from the survey highlighted that over half of CPCCs are part-time coaches. These results are similar to Gale et al. (2002) and Grant and Zackon (2004). While a private coaching practice may not encounter a steady flow of clients on a regular basis, CPCCs are still able to engage in a profession they enjoy while maintaining the security of a regular and stable income from another source of employment. This showcases the commitment on the part of CPCCs to continue following their passion for helping others in their lives, even if it is not enough to support fully the CPCC with daily life expenses. Perhaps until the coaching industry reaches some 'tipping point', life coaching will be a predominantly part-time profession.

The yearly income for coaching reflected the part-time nature of coaching and was comparable to the monetary values released in 2004 (Grant and Zackon, 2004). However, the reported values in the current study may still be lower than normal, possibly as a result of the economic downturn many countries experienced in the recent years preceding our data collection – especially the United States in

which many CPCCs reside. The results of the current study complement the statement made by Liljenstrand and Nebeker (2008) when they reported that the stereotype of coaching had shifted from a service need for ineffective employees toward a more pro-active focus on strengthening the effectiveness of successful employees. For CPCCs working within an organization, they are routinely working with mid- to upper-level management. This shift in image may assist all coaches in gaining overall recognition and status as a viable behaviour change service provider, especially for those working outside of the executive arena. It would be instructive to learn why individuals who have other professions and occupations decide to get trained as a life coach and pursue a part-time or full-time career in the field. This information could be useful in attracting potential coaches and serve as a building block to create more graduate level coaching programs.

CPCCs' primary professional coaching organization is the ICF. We suggest the main reason for belonging to the ICF is for professional credibility. Most CPCCs do not attend the annual ICF conference. Equally, most do not seek out new published research, and of those who do, very few actually incorporate that research into their practices. It is postulated that knowledge translation in the field of life coaching is under-developed and/or the limited research available is esoteric and does not apply to their coaching practice. For a profession to flourish, it must have a body of knowledge or evidentiary studies and for coaching, that body of knowledge is fledgling. At the 4th International Executive Coaching Summit in 2002, the continued trend of executive and life coaching being an unregulated profession and the need for credentialing of executive coaches was discussed and continues to be an area of concern for the coaching industry (Feldman and Lankau, 2005; Sanson, Atond-Thomas, and Guilday, 2003). However, programs such as the Centre for Coaching in Healthcare offered through the Institute of Coaching at McLean Hospital – which is a Harvard Medical School Affiliate, the graduate coaching programs offered by the Adler School of Professional Psychology, and the graduate work conducted at Canadian and Australian Universities such as The University of Western Ontario and The University of Sydney underscore how the body of knowledge for coaching is growing.

Recommendations and conclusions

This study establishes a solid platform for other coaching schools to research their coaches and for the survey used in this study to be applied and utilized by other organizational bodies such as the ICF. Moreover, given the lack of use of online referral services, perhaps researchers could create a client profile to increase the accessibility and matching between coach and client. With the strong emphasis in the literature regarding training coaches in identifying mental health issues in order to refer to a mental health specialist, it is recommended that CTI include a mental health component to their introductory courses and certification program. Given that the majority of respondents came from prior professional backgrounds, it is recommended that future research investigate how their prior professional background impacts their coaching practice. Because CPCCs are not accessing coaching research literature that may impact their coaching practice, it is recommended that the Co-active training model explicitly incorporates material teaching co-active coaches how to access, understand, and apply the coaching literature in their practice.

Life coaching is a dynamic and continually evolving profession. Through this survey we have learned about the previous training and education of CPCCs, their coaching career to date, how they attract clients, the type of clients they coach, and how they structure their practice. This information contributes to the growing body of knowledge needed to support and characterize the nature of the profession. As additional evidence emerges regarding the effectiveness of co-active coaching in facilitating health behaviour change, as it has in the health-related areas of obesity, smoking cessation,

and physical activity, it is important to have information about CPCCs to corroborate why this type of coaching is powerful in helping change clients' behaviours and lives. This study contributes to and encourages further research needed to advance the coaching industry.

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