

Five *Surprising* Truths About Becoming a Coach.

For the secretly (or not so secretly) coach-curious.



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BEFORE YOU BEGIN

So you're coach-curious...

Most of what people think they know about being a coach is half right, at best. And those half-truths keep people who would make amazing coaches from even exploring the option (or even admitting to themselves they might like to).

So before you decide whether this whole “becoming a coach” thing is really a possibility for you, let’s run a quick diagnostic on what you actually know about the field.

This quiz has five questions. No tricks, but a few of the answers might surprise you. Each answer follows the question on the next page, so do yourself a favor: pick your answer each time before you peek.

Either way, you’ll walk away with a clearer picture of the field, the work, and what kind of opportunities are out there to make coaching part of – or all of! – your career.

Let’s get into it.

A QUICK HELLO

Hi, I'm *Kara*.



I'm a Master Certified Coach, the founder of the Socratic Coaching Academy, and the host of the top-ranked UnF*ck Your Brain podcast (50 million downloads and counting). I'm also the author of *The New York Times* bestseller, "Take Back Your Brain."

In a previous life, I was a women's rights attorney and an academic. I have a degree from Yale and another from Harvard Law School, and I was on the path to becoming a law professor before I left it all to do this work.

Since then, I've coached thousands of women all over the world, built a company that has generated more than \$28 million in revenue, and spoken everywhere from white shoe law firms to tech giants.

I bring all of that into how I think about coaching: the academic rigor, the legal training, the feminist theory, the decade of working with real human beings on the messy stuff of their lives. So when you read what comes next, you can trust that the perspective is reality-based, the science is real, and the takes are mine.

Now, back to your quiz.



QUESTION 1

Which of these things do you need to become a coach?

- A. A B.A. in Psychology.
- B. An M.A. in Psychology.
- C. An MBA.
- D. A coach certification.
- E. None of the above.

ANSWER 1

Q1: Which of these things do you need to become a coach?

The correct answer is E. None of the above.

Surprised? Most people are. There is no licensing body, no required degree, no government-mandated credential to call yourself a coach. Depending on your relationship with the rules, that can sound either thrilling or terrifying.

But that does NOT mean you should just hang out a shingle after listening to a couple of podcast episodes. Not needing a license is not the same thing as not needing training. If you want to be a coach who actually helps people (and gets paid well to do it), you want a certification that teaches evidence-backed tools, not just ~vibes~. Coaching is a real field with real science behind it, and the difference between a properly trained coach and one who's winging it shows up in every session, every client outcome, and eventually, every bank statement. Pick a training program that's rigorous and taught by someone with a lot of coaching experience. Your future clients and your future self will both thank you.

QUESTION 2

What do coaches do in a session?

- A. Tell their clients what to do.
- B. Give their clients advice.
- C. Help clients understand their thoughts and feelings better so they can change them.
- D. Encourage their clients to tune into quantum vibrations.
- E. Tell clients all of their thoughts are made up.

ANSWER 2

Q2: *What do coaches do in a session?*

The correct answer is C. Help clients understand their thoughts and feelings better so they can change them.

Yes, fine, sometimes coaches do tell clients all their thoughts are made up. (Because most of them are, I don't make the rules!) But that's not a complete approach to coaching.

A coach helps a client examine the thoughts, beliefs, and assumptions driving their current outcomes, and then helps them build the capacity to think differently so they can act differently and create different results in their life. That's what creates real change.

Most of us were taught to try to manage our time, money, calendars, relationships, and careers by changing our circumstances. Almost none of us were ever taught how to examine the thinking running underneath all of those things. A coach helps their clients understand the unconscious thoughts and feelings that are motivating their behavior so that they can actually change them. If you have ever sat across from someone who was suffering and wished you had something more useful to offer than "I'm so sorry, that's hard," coaching is what you've been looking for.

QUESTION 3

What is the most important skill, trait, or experience a coach needs to do a good job?

- A. Varied life experience so they can relate to a variety of clients.
- B. Deep academic expertise in their area of coaching.
- C. A graduate degree in clinical psychology or a Master's of Social Work.
- D. Genuine curiosity and interest about other people's thoughts and feelings.
- E. The motivational skills to get clients to do what they should.

ANSWER 3

Q3: *What is the most important skill, trait, or experience a coach needs?*

The correct answer is D. Genuine curiosity and interest about other people's thoughts and feelings.

If you're waiting for your CV to be impressive enough before you start, you can stop now. The single best predictor of coaching effectiveness has very little to do with academic background, life experience, or how many TEDx talks you've given on resilience (I've given zero TEDx talks, for the record). The most important skill or trait in coaching is finding other people's thinking genuinely interesting.

Coaching is curiosity-driven work. The coach who can ask a real question and actually wait for the answer, who can sit with a tangled knot of thoughts without getting impatient, who can find her thousandth client just as fascinating as her first will outperform the coach who has the most ideas about what her clients should think, feel or do every time.

Curiosity is also the antidote to a lot of coach-curious self-doubt. You don't have to have it all figured out. You just have to be the kind of person who really wants to know what's going on inside someone else's head.

QUESTION 4

What are the models for incorporating coaching into your career?

- A. Becoming an entrepreneur and starting a coaching business.
- B. Working as a full-time, part-time, or contract coach in another coach's business.
- C. Working as an in-house coach in a non-coaching-focused business or corporation (an independent primary school, a global bank, or anywhere in-between).
- D. Integrating coaching tools into an existing role mentoring or leading employees to improve morale and performance.
- E. All of the above.

ANSWER 4

Q4: What are the models for incorporating coaching into your career?

The correct answer is E. All of the above.

This is the answer that catches the most people off guard, because on social media what you see most are individual entrepreneurs who have started a coaching business. And that makes sense, because those of us who took this path have to advertise to find clients and social media is one place we can do that.

But that's not the only way to be a coach. You can coach part-time or full-time inside someone else's coaching business – I employ three full-time coaches on my team.

You can work as an in-house coach at a company that wants to invest in its employees' development, whether that's a school, a law firm, a bank, an architecture firm, a software company, or any other kind of business.

Or you can integrate coaching tools into a job you already have, whether that's managing a team, running HR, mentoring junior colleagues, or teaching your kids how to manage their thoughts and feelings the way you wish someone had taught you long ago.

QUESTION 5

What is the most important thing many coaching certifications do NOT teach?

- A. Trauma-informed techniques.
- B. Tools for neurodivergent clients.
- C. How to build confidence in yourself as a coach.
- D. Evidence-based cognitive tools.
- E. Somatic (body-based) practices.

ANSWER 5

Q5: *What is the most important thing many coaching certifications do NOT teach?*

The correct answer is **C. How to build confidence in yourself as a coach.**

Most coaching certifications cover at least some version of the other answers. Trauma-informed practice, somatic tools, evidence-based cognitive frameworks, and neurodiversity support are all increasingly common in good programs. (For the record, all four are pillars of the Socratic Coaching Method we teach at the Socratic Coaching Academy.) The piece other certifications don't teach directly is how to be confident in your coaching.

That matters because confidence in your coaching isn't a personality trait you either have or you don't. It's a skill set. A confident coach knows how to handle whatever walks through the door. She has a process to fall back on when a client throws her a curveball. She can coach herself through her own brain drama when a session feels like it didn't help much or a consult ends in a no.

That confidence allows you to stay focused on your client rather than spinning into mental drama. Which means that your coaching stays clean, your clients get what they need, and you show up as the coach you want to be.

WHAT'S NEXT

The Future Coach is here.

If anything in this quiz surprised you, intrigued you, or made you wonder whether maybe (just maybe) you've been wrong all this time about what becoming a coach would actually look like, there's a podcast for that.

It's called The Future Coach. The show I needed when I spent years joking about quitting law to "become a life coach on the internet," instead of actually doing it.

Smart, honest, clear-eyed episodes about what coaching really is, who makes a great coach, and how to build a real career out of this work in a rapidly changing world. Whether you want to start your own business, coach inside someone else's, or bring coaching tools into a job you already have.

A few of the early episodes worth queuing up:

- What life coaching is and isn't (and what coaches actually do)
- Who makes a good coach (the answer is going to surprise you)
- Ways to use coaching in jobs that aren't "being a coach"
- Why human coaching will be more in demand than ever in the age of AI
- What to look for in a coach certification, and who does and doesn't need credentials

Find The Future Coach wherever you listen to podcasts. Subscribe so you catch the episodes that build on what you just read, plus everything else we'll be putting out for the secretly and not-so-secretly coach-curious.

I'll see you in your headphones.

Stay curious,

Kara