

Accreditation in Coaching?

Is there a need for accreditation in the coaching industry? If so, what are the criteria? Who should the guardians be?

Accreditation of professionals is an age-old practice. If you had wanted to establish yourself as a blacksmith in the lovely town of Stratford-upon-Avon around the time when William Shakespeare lived (late 1500's), I guess four of the most important criteria would have been: Who taught you your trade? How long had you been at it? What did your clients think of your work? And, last but not least, the size of your forearms.



Except for the forearms, I think it would be safe to assume that the aforementioned criteria would apply to the profession of coaching today, as to many other professions. Within most industries our 'blacksmith' criteria don't pose too many problems in recognising professionals; for example, within law, medicine, engineering etc. Now, don't get me wrong - even within these industries there are difficulties, but probably less so than in coaching. Let's take engineering as an example: irrespective of the level of accreditation, in South Africa there are four levels. Except for the first two, from the 3rd level you need a BTech degree or

CATEGORY	ACADEMIC QUALIFICATION	MINIMUM EXPERIENCE
Professional Engineer	BSc(Eng)/ B Eng (4yrs)	3 years
Professional Engineering Technologist	BTech (Eng)	3 years
Professional Certificated Engineer	Government Certificate of Competency for Engineers, Mine Managers, Marine, Electrical and Mechanical Engineers	3 years in responsible position - 1 year must be as the engineer appointed in terms of an applicable Act
Professional Engineering Technician	N Dip	3 years

diploma which is 3 solid years of study after that depending on the level you need to work to 3 years under an registered engineer, then you had in a portfolio of evidence with recommendation of the engineer under which you worked. Finally, you do an interview in front of the Engineering council of South Africa. Different countries may have other processes, but they are more or less the same. As I said – it's not a flawless process, but it's good enough. (see image from ECSA website)

So that brings us back to the question: do we need accreditation in coaching? I would say that accreditation makes sense. Our problem in the coaching industry, however, is that we can't agree on who the guardians should be; Is it the academics, is it business, or is it the worldwide or regional organisation that is the biggest and markets themselves the best? Selecting the guardians is critical because the guardians set the accreditation criteria. Currently, the topic of debate is what level of academic study and how much experience is required to accredit a coaching practitioner. Of these two requirements, the hottest topic is academic qualification levels. Again, this criteria is not an exact science in other fields either. Having a master's degree in psychology does not automatically make you a brilliant therapist, nor a four-year degree at a university an excellent engineer. But let's be honest, we don't want someone with a 70-hour or even 220-hour certificate of engineering signing off the final clearance on the production and design of a new Boeing or Airbus.. That's 44 days at a university or technical college, doing 5 hours per day.

Now I am not saying that there is no place for someone with 70 hours of coach training and good amount of experience to obtain accredited recognition in the field of coaching. In all professions there are levels of entry and expertise - and rightly so. For a small business, you may only need a bookkeeper with a basic amount of bookkeeping knowledge and experience; a Chartered Accountant with completed articles and board exam would be overkill. But when Amazon prepares their annual financial statements, they don't put a bookkeeper in charge.

So where is this going wrong for coaching? I believe that intentions are good and in most cases accreditation bodies try their best. The presenting problems and possible solutions can be complex and I will share my views on those I see as most prevalent at this stage. Firstly, we have the semantics: when can we call someone a Master or a Professional in the coaching field? I think if we are brave, we can go to the fields of medicine, engineering or accounting and learn about this from them. The second problem is that we have proceeded down a road driven by profit. I'm not referring to the income due the accreditation bodies; they really don't get rich out of this and in many cases their work really is a labour of love. It is more a case of, "if you give me a 'stamp' of approval' as an Accredited Master Coach from the 'XYZ' Universal Body of Coaches then my business client will believe that I am an excellent coach and then I can charge this fee". The third problem is that if the people who set the criteria for a field wherein they themselves practice commercially, they will be hard pressed to set that criteria higher than their own.

We are now at the stage where some of the worldwide bodies in the coaching industry are viewed as 'throwing their weight around' by telling some of the most respected universities and academic institutions in the world that unless they give their nod of approval, their degrees and programmes will not be recognised.

These are only some of the problems. You may agree with me or you may not. One thing is certain though: this is not a debate that will resolve itself soon. In the meantime, perhaps I could study to become a blacksmith. At least I have big forearms.



References for article.

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