



Put me in, coach

Some lawyers are finding personal and professional benefits from one-on-one coaching

By Amy Jo Ehman

Harley Sinclair was in a slump. He was losing enthusiasm for the law, feeling a little tired in his area of practice, and worried that he wasn't as happy as he should be. And to top it off, revenues were down.

After 20 years of practising law, Sinclair — a founding member of Godinho, Sinclair, a small securities boutique in Vancouver — was seriously contemplating a change. Then he met Irene Leonard King, and change is what he got.

Two and a half years later, Sinclair is enjoying his practice, spending less time at work and making more money than ever. "She helped me focus," he says. "She helped me set higher goals than I would have otherwise set for myself."

Leonard King is neither a marketing guru nor a financial whiz. She is Sinclair's personal coach. She's the independent voice that challenges him to step back, consider his priorities, and act to achieve them. Personal coaches, already widely accepted in corporate boardrooms, have finally advanced into the world of law.

"To draw an analogy," says Sinclair, "think of a football player or a baseball player. They all have coaches. The real stars are the players, but they need coaches to help them achieve their very best."

Leonard King was a sole practitioner in Seattle when she heard about coaching. She was so impressed, she changed careers. Formerly a lawyer in British Columbia, and author of *Create The Practice You Want: The Law Practice Development Workbook*, she coaches lawyers in Canada and the United States.

"My purpose in life is to transform the practice of law, one lawyer at a time," she says. "As a coach, I can help them be more passionate about their work, so that when they get up in the morning, they love going to work."

A coaching relationship begins with a two- to three-hour meeting in which the coach and client get to know each other and explore the client's goals, priorities and roadblocks. That's usually followed by weekly half-hour conversations, often over the phone. Costs vary: the initial session may range from \$300 to \$500, followed by sessions costing anywhere from \$250 to \$600 per month. Some coaches offer free sample sessions.

Unlike a therapist who looks to the past, or a counsellor who offers advice, the personal coach focuses on the present, and urges clients to find solutions themselves. Coaches ask challenging questions:

What do you want in life? What does success look like to you? What's holding you back? What will you do to make that change?

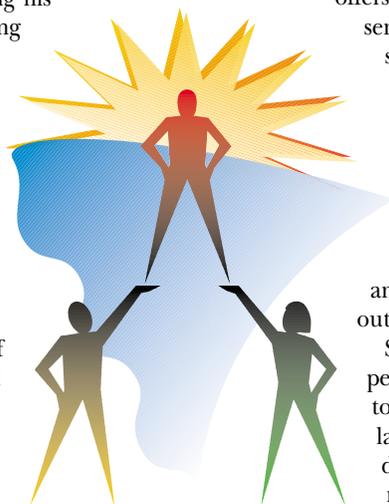
"I like to think of it as a personal listener," says Cheryl Stephens, another former lawyer now working as a coach in Vancouver. "The coach isn't giving you a plan or an answer. The coach is helping you work it out yourself."

Stephens says lawyers are good at solving other people's problems, but are often too independent to seek help themselves. "I've worked with some lawyers who felt they wanted to give it up and do something else," she says. "What they didn't realize is that there are things that give them satisfaction in their practice. We build on that."

Renee van Kessel was dissatisfied and was about to change jobs. As a lawyer on Bay Street in Toronto and later as counsel in a government department, she knew her life was out of balance, but didn't know how to fix it.

"The last thing I thought I had time for was the luxury of having something like a coach," says van Kessel. "Given the pace here [in Toronto], the last thing lawyers do is take care of themselves."

But van Kessel found herself briefly between jobs this past



Un coach pour vous inspirer

De plus en plus de juristes recourent avec bonheur à un guide professionnel.

L'engouement pour le *coaching* gagne progressivement le monde juridique.

Harley Sinclair, avocat au sein d'un cabinet de Vancouver spécialisé en valeurs mobilières, en a découvert les vertus auprès de Irene Leonard King qui, depuis deux ans et demi, lui dispense son éclairage. « Elle m'a aidé à me concentrer et à me fixer des objectifs plus ambitieux. » Avant de rencontrer Irene, Sinclair était las de son secteur de pratique. Il accusait une baisse de revenus et avait le goût de tout lâcher. Plus maintenant.

D'autres, comme Renee van Kessel, une ancienne praticienne de Bay Street passée au secteur public, et Linda Robertson, première vice-présidente et secrétaire générale de

l'Insurance Corporation of British Columbia, ont aussi tiré grand profit du recours à un *coach* personnel. Tous rapportent des changements notables : un meilleur équilibre dans leur vie, une motivation et un plaisir renouvelés, une satisfaction plus grande dans leur travail.

Pourtant, le *coach* n'est ni un thérapeute ni un motivateur. Son rôle consiste à offrir un point de vue indépendant, à mettre en question les priorités du client, à le forcer à prendre du recul, à se fixer des objectifs et à travailler pour les atteindre.

Qu'attendez-vous de la vie? À quoi ressemble le succès pour vous? Qu'entendez-vous faire pour éliminer ce qui vous retient? Voilà le

type de réflexion dans lequel un *coach* vous engage. Il ne donne pas de réponses, il vous aide à les trouver vous-même. « En tant que *coach*, je peux aider les avocats à se passionner davantage pour leur travail », affirme Mme Leonard King.

Habituellement, une première rencontre avec un *coach* dure deux ou trois heures pendant lesquelles les parties apprennent à mieux se connaître et explorent les buts, les priorités et les blocages du client. Généralement, des conversations hebdomadaires d'une demi-heure suivent, souvent au téléphone. Le coût? De 300 \$ à 500 \$ pour la rencontre initiale; de 250 \$ à 600 \$ par mois par la suite.

summer, so she booked an appointment with a coach. In just two months, she had zeroed in on her priorities, created a better balance between work and home, and learned to say "No."

"I needed [my coach] to call me on the rug," says van Kessel. "To hold a mirror up to me. Now I'm generally more efficient and productive. It means that I'm not carrying it home with me anymore and affecting my home life or my sleep or my health."

Her coach, Deborah Colman, says clients like van Kessel already have their own solutions, but don't realize it. A coach helps them to draw these insights to the surface.

"We don't know what we don't know," says Colman, who came to coaching from the field of health care. "The purpose is to become more conscious. It's about waking up, taking control and being a leader in your own life."

Coaches challenge their clients to take steps from week to week that lead them in the right direction. "It's not enough to have these profound insights," says Colman, "How are you going to incorporate that into your life?"

Lawyer Linda Robertson had just taken on new responsibilities, and she needed leadership training. As a member of the executive at the Insurance Corporation of British Columbia, she had assumed the portfolio of Senior Vice-President of Human Resources. At her boss's suggestion, she met with a coach, but decided it wasn't for her.

"We didn't click," says Robertson. "I think you have to click with your coach. If you don't think that person and you are going to make progress, you're wasting your money."

Later, she met another coach who specialized in leadership and human resources, and felt instantly comfortable. They talked monthly for two years, until Robertson assumed her current position, Senior Vice-President and Corporate Secretary. She says the advantage of coaching, particularly at the executive level, is privacy.

"You can talk about situations you are struggling with that you might not want to discuss with your colleagues, and get some good honest feedback. Private, experienced advice."

While all conversations with a coach are confidential, they are not subject to the protection of privilege, even when the coach is a lawyer, too. And the coaches point out that they can't help everyone.

"You can't coach someone who isn't open to change," says Stephens in Vancouver. Nor do they coach people with mental

health issues, such as thoughts of violence or suicide, unless the client is also receiving therapy.

"I don't coach dysfunction," says Colman in Toronto. "I coach healthy people." •

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