

The best business coach

How to choose the right business coach for you.



Julia Chanteray

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Choosing the right business coach for you is an important decision. It's a big investment of your money, and, more importantly, the right business coach can have a huge impact on your business.

You might end up working with me as your business coach, or someone else entirely. That's fine, to be honest, I'm not the right person for everyone.

Julia

www.thejoyofbusiness.co.uk
Julia@thejoyofbusiness.co.uk



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Here are some objective (well, as much as I can be) thoughts on how to choose the best business coach for you, the person who is going to help you to make the big changes you want to see.

How to rule out the obvious cowboys who are going to rip you off, or waste your time.

- **Have they run a business before ?**

A ex-bank manager, academic, or somebody without substantial business experience who has just done a coaching course won't have the real world experience to be able to help you with the practical, tactical aspects of developing your business

- **Are they actually a business coach?**

Unfortunately, there are lots of people calling themselves business coaches (or executive coaches) who aren't really business coaches. They're life coaches, who can help you to get clarity about what you want overall from life, but don't have specific experience in business. It can be a good idea to do some life coaching sessions (or counselling) before business coaching so you're ready to start working on the business with a clear head.

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- Are they running their own business well? Do they walk the talk?

If someone has an out of date website, doesn't ever respond to emails, or keeps messing you about for appointments, this is a sign that they aren't managing their own business well. And if they can't run their own business, are they in a good position to help you?

- Are they up to date?

Business is a fast evolving field. What worked 5 years ago, might not work today. 5 years ago, I was advising people that Facebook was probably a waste of time for selling business to business. This was true 5 years ago, but now, Facebook's powerful advertising and the change in demographics means that it can be really useful for B2B business development.

Your business advisor needs to be on top of this. They need to be up to date about online marketing, international business, management theory, team development, VATMoss, all that stuff. Part of their job is to help you to negotiate the tricky paths of business, and to reduce your learning curve, so you don't have to learn everything from scratch.

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Make sure that the business coach you choose checks all of these boxes. Then you can choose the one that's going to be right for you.

- **Can they talk about marketing and finance?**

Some people specialise in finance and don't understand too much about marketing. Some people have lots of expertise about marketing or processes, but wouldn't be able to help you understand your P&L or set gross margin targets. A good business coach will be able to do both.

- **Do they have experience in your sector?**

This won't always be the case, especially if you're working on something very unusual. But it's worth asking, because somebody good will have enough experience to have worked in an area that is at least similar to yours. And it's important that your business coach understands the culture and the way things work in your sector.

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Let's think about the process:

- **Are you going to get enough help?**

You don't want to spend all day, every day with your business coach. After all, you've got a business to run, not just talk about it. But you do need to get enough time to talk through what's going on in sufficient detail. You don't just want an inspirational chat once a month, you're paying good money, and you want to be able to ask for help with what's on your mind right now.

Make sure that you get (at least)

- One regular meeting a month – I insist on two meetings a month, so there's enough momentum built up so we can make progress, and not just spend time catching up on what's happened between meetings.
- Phone and email support in between meetings
- Ongoing support, not just ad hoc meetings

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- Can you talk to them first?

You definitely need to be able to talk to them first, not just email or book online, for a free consultation. And this should be a bit more than a 15 minute chat on the phone, they need to be able to talk in depth about where you are in your business and explain how they can help. Or not.

Face to face or Skype?

You might find the right person for you, but they're 50 miles away. Or 100 miles away. Or in a different country.

I recommend opening up your choice of business advisor by looking further afield than your local area, and seriously thinking about talking to them over Skype. I'm based in Brighton, and I see clients in London, Manchester, Brussels and Portugal. And I work with clients less than 10 miles away in Worthing and Shoreham who I talk to on Skype, because it's more time efficient for them than coming to my office.

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- Who's going to be right for you?

Do you prefer a very structured approach, or more informal?

Some advisors, especially those working through the franchises like Shirlaws or Action Coach, work in a very structured way, with lots of forms and questionnaires. Some people love this, and feel that they benefit from a logical process. It might be right for you, if this is the way your brain works.

Others (like me) work in a more informal way, allowing you to get everything that's worrying you out on the table, and asking lots of questions. This can be especially useful if you have been bottling up problems or if you don't know where to start with what's going wrong with the business.

One word of warning with more informal coaches. Make sure that there is a logical process behind all of this, or you can end up just going for a nice chat, with no clear action plan. I've worked with clients who have previously used less experienced business coaches, and they've told me that they enjoyed the first few sessions where they got everything off their chest, but didn't end up with anything like a clear strategy to move forward or take action.

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- **Do you share their values?**

One of the trickiest areas I advise my clients about is what's the right thing to do in a particular situation. This comes up more often than you might think – is it okay to keep sending emails to a prospect if they haven't come back to you, should I sack a non-performing member of staff, is it fair to put my prices up for existing customers?

If your business advisor doesn't have similar values to you, you might not be satisfied with their answers to these kinds of questions.

It is also helpful if they have an awareness of different cultural values, and how to handle these, especially if you are doing business internationally.

- **Do you warm to them?**

It's very important to choose a business coach that you can get on with, and who you can trust. You're going to be spending some very intensive time with them after all. But don't just pick the one that you like the most – this is your business adviser, not your best mate for going to the pub with.

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- The ultimate question – is it going to be a good investment for you?

Business coaching fees vary from £100 to 5k per month, so partly this is going to be what you can afford, but the important thing is whether your investment is going to make more money for you.

If you would like to talk about whether my business coaching is the right option for you, get an idea of my way of working and if I know my stuff, let's get together for a coffee and chat.

I love to talk about business, and I would like to find out about what is going on with your business and how I can help. I'll give you an honest assessment of whether [business coaching](#) will help your business, if you'd be better off with one of my [programmes](#) instead, and you'll be able to make up your own mind as to whether I'm the right person to have on your side to help build your business.

Here's how to set up a time to meet...

[Request a Coffee + Cake](#)

