

## Psychotherapy and Coaching: Benefits, Similarities, & Differences

As a psychotherapist and executive coach, I am often asked about the differences between therapy and coaching. As the mental health field continues to evolve, I have found there are blurred lines and often a lack of understanding about the overlap and distinctions between these two disciplines. To that end, I will shine a light on the benefits of therapy and the benefits of coaching, and the similarities and differences between these practices. Given the many specializations of both therapy and coaching, this article will speak to the general practices of each line of work.

To begin, I'll briefly define each area of work. As generally defined, **psychotherapy**, aka "talk therapy," is a treatment focused on relieving emotional distress and helping clients to heal emotional wounds. Psychotherapy is a collaborative treatment between an individual, couple or family and a licensed mental health professional.

A therapist provides a supportive environment for clients to talk openly about their innermost feelings and thoughts with an empathic objective professional. People seek out therapy to reflect on and seek support on a myriad of issues including anxiety, depression, relational issues, loss, trauma, physical health conditions.

**Coaching** is generally defined as a practice intended to unlock a client's potential to maximize or attain a goal, competency, or performance objective. Coaching goals are growth-focused and often related to work, personal relationships, or attaining a desired life dream. A coach provides a supportive environment for clients to talk openly with an objective professional and get feedback or direction to reach desired life or work goals. People seek out coaching to make career changes, advance job competencies, navigate life transitions, increase self-confidence at work, improve work relationships, and/or improve communication skills with colleagues.

### BENEFITS OF THERAPY AND COACHING – WHAT DO YOU NEED HELP WITH?

Therapy may be most helpful when...	Coaching may be most helpful when...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>You want to alleviate emotional distress that is consistent and causing upset and discontent</li> <li>You want to feel happier and less of an unsettled feeling in a partner or familial relationship</li> <li>You feel "stuck" in a life situation and finding your way out feels daunting and causes anxiety</li> <li>You are faced with a mental or physical impairment and need support to process feelings and adapt</li> <li>You want to develop stronger coping mechanisms to manage emotions</li> <li>You want to understand and put meaning to past life events and/or relationships</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>You want to feel more satisfied and less conflicted about a work situation or career focus</li> <li>You want to make a change in your life and feel stuck or lack clarity and need some guidance</li> <li>You want to develop key competencies at work and need guidance or 1-1 training</li> <li>You want to navigate your organization to advance your career and need an objective lens</li> <li>You want to overcome challenges with interpersonal or organizational dynamics at work</li> <li>You want to make a job change or career shift and need tactical and emotional support</li> </ul>

### SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THERAPY & COACHING

There are many similarities and differences between therapy and coaching. It's important for practitioners, as well as clients, to understand the similarities or overlap between the disciplines and to be clear on the distinctions.

#### There are many similarities between therapists and coaches. Both:

- Help clients live more happier and satisfying lives, personally and/or professionally
- Offer support, validation, and an empathic ear to clients and their life situations
- Act as a sounding board to listen to clients' problems and reflect back what they hear
- Ask open-ended questions to probe and understand client's thoughts and feelings
- Explore themes of behavior (to differing degrees)
- Invite and encourage client's active effort for making change
- Celebrate with the client as they make positive behavior change or life transitions/growth

**There are also many differences between therapy and coaching. These include:**

	<b>THERAPY</b>	<b>COACHING</b>
<b>FOCUS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Therapists treat mental illness and emotional distress, helping clients examine internal and relational experiences. Therapists are trained to look for deeper patterns of behavior and work to “hold” a client’s emotions as they explore them for deeper meaning.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Coaches help people make behavior or changes in life to achieve goals, i.e., life transitions, career change. Coaches will validate emotions and how they impact a client. Coaches are typically trained to understand how behaviors affect actions in life.</li> </ul>
<b>OUTCOMES</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Therapy focuses on past and present to help clients understand themselves with greater depth and heal internal discontent. Clients may develop deeper levels of self-awareness, new perspective, make new meaning to past experiences, learn coping mechanisms, and develop a greater sense of self.</li> <li>Therapy often leads to personal growth, improved relationships, or life changes.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Coaching aims to help clients focus on making change and achieving future goals. Through coaching, clients may clarify their vision, specify goals, reflect on behavior patterns, learn new ways of acting and thinking, and pursue change and goals to achieve greater satisfaction in life.</li> <li>Coaching can lead to growth and attaining personal ambitions or achieving focus or change.</li> </ul>
<b>APPROACH</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A therapist will be a sounding board, and help clients to reflect on thoughts, feelings, and perspectives. They typically do not share opinions. A therapist will seek to understand the depth of your emotions. Therapists are trained in varied ways, i.e., with a psychoanalytic or cognitive behavioral lens. Many therapists use an eclectic approach.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A coach will be a sounding board, reflect back, and offer suggestions to help you gain clarity. A coach may be more forthcoming to share opinions and advice. A coach seeks to understand your goals and how you feel about them, and help you pinpoint barriers. Coaches are trained in varied ways, i.e., with a holistic or goal-focused approach, or combination.</li> </ul>
<b>TRAINING</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Therapists are licensed mental health professionals who have pursued 2-5 years of graduate studies as well as clinical supervision for several years. Training parameters vary by discipline. Therapists may specialize their approach with specific training, i.e., CBT/DBT, psychoanalysis, art therapy, trauma work, eating disorders, or substance misuse.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Coaches usually (not always) pursue coaching training for a few months to a few years and may pursue supervision also. Coach training programs may focus on executive coaching, career counseling or health coaching. Coaches may specialize their approach with continued training, i.e., personality assessments, sales coaching, nutrition, or mindset coaching.</li> </ul>
<b>LICENSING AND CERTIFICATIONS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>State Education departments oversee licensing requirements for therapists (i.e., clinical social workers, marriage and family therapists, psychologists) to legally practice. This includes state-governed exams for licensure.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>There are numerous types of coaching certifications. While there is no coaching license or state governing board for coaches, The International Coaching Federation (ICF) is a respected entity providing parameters.</li> </ul>
<b>CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Therapists pursue post-graduate training to deepen their skills and knowledge. They may pursue focused training on areas of interest, i.e., substance use, eating disorders, trauma work, or couples therapy.</li> <li>Continuing education is a requirement for license renewal for therapists.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Coaches pursue additional training to continue to hone their coaching capability, i.e., certifications in emotional intelligence, work styles assessments, entrepreneurial coaching, executive coaching, or intuitive coaching.</li> <li>For some coaching credentials, continuing education is required to renew the credential.</li> </ul>

**About the Author**

**Joanne Bobes, MA, LCSW**, holds a master’s degree in Organizational Psychology as well as a master’s degree focused on clinical Social Work (MSW). She began her career working in corporate leadership development, designing competency-based leadership assessments and training, coaching mid-level management to higher levels of success and creating succession planning programs. Given her enjoyment of coaching and training, Joanne pursued clinical training to expand her ability to help people grow personally and professionally. Her dual lens in business and clinical practice differentiates her practice. Clinically, she works with individuals, couples and families. As a coach, she works with clients across business sectors. Joanne is licensed in both New York State and California, and coaches clients globally. Website: [www.JoanneBobes.com](http://www.JoanneBobes.com)