

Why Coaching?

How has academic coaching evolved? What's the difference between ordinary tutoring and professional academic coaching? When should one hire an academic coach? Is an expert academic coach worth the extra cost? Isn't tutoring enough? Which is the best choice in my particular situation?

Academic Coaching is a rather new specialty in the field of private practice education, and the term "academic coach" is still unfamiliar to many people. The purpose of this article is to clarify the distinction between ordinary "tutoring" and academic coaching, and to help answer these common questions.

How has academic coaching evolved?

Until fairly recently in the course of history, private tutoring was the way most education happened, the primary means by which critical knowledge and skills were passed from one generation to the next. Whether the subject matter is hunting mammoths, learning Latin, sewing a dress, playing piano, passing the bar exam, or mastering basic algebra, nothing can beat one-on-one private instruction with an engaging, expert private teacher. Indeed, it's been said that the best possible educational setting is "you, Aristotle, and a log."

Since the 1980's, the tremendous expansion in the private practice education industry in America has been followed by a stratification of private teachers into two main levels: average tutors, and "super-tutors" or "coaches." Gradually, the best private tutors were distinguished for their greater ability to produce results and for succeeding with students whose situations were too difficult or complex for other tutors to handle. Some of these "super-tutors" or "coaches" began to provide value and benefits extending well beyond simple help with basic skills and home work, including thinking, learning, and productivity skills, assisting with learning differences or disabilities, personal mentoring, and other support elements critical to enduring, broad-based academic and personal achievement.

What's the difference between ordinary tutoring and professional academic coaching?

In general, a tutor is someone who answers questions on a particular academic subject or course with which one is having trouble. Tutors are qualified to address deficiencies in students' understanding of course content, concepts, and basic skills, and to remediate these deficiencies. Tutors are often part-timer teachers, college students, or others who maintain a small private teaching practice to "make extra money" but have another primary source of income to fall back on.

An academic coach does these things also, but goes well beyond simply giving direct instruction on basic skills and course content. Unlike tutors, academic coaches also address contextual factors that play a key role in scholastic success and achievement and that may be critically impacting a given student's academic experience. Just as an athletic coach directs, instructs, tracks, and focuses each player's performance on the sports field, an academic coach provides leadership, specialized training, accountability, and regular, individualized feedback and support to make the most of each student's academic potential and optimize scholastic performance.

In addition to teaching or reviewing specific course content, an academic coach also works comprehensively with student, parents, teachers, and other professionals to address and manage the totality of issues affecting the student and the problem he or she is having in school. An academic coach inspires and encourages students to reach for their own personal best, provides additional instruction in organization, course work management, and study skills, and promotes self-confidence, self-discipline, integrity, efficiency, and productivity. Furthermore, academic coaches also prepare students to manage their time, tasks, and goals, introduce and reinforce broader learning and thinking skills (e.g. harnessing the power of questions, information installation and

recall, etc.), give personal support, and help students to enjoy the process of learning and take pride in their work.

Whereas a tutor merely teaches, an academic coach is part teacher, manager, mentor, organizer, cheerleader, taskmaster, counselor, resource expert, learning specialist, educational consultant, and motivational speaker! Academic coaches generally have greater expertise and better training in their specialty, possess superior communication skills, and have more private teaching experience than do ordinary tutors, and are devoted, full-time private educators who have chosen academic coaching as their professional career. While tutors focus on the "little picture," work on short-term issues, and offer simple fixes, academic coaches focus on the "big picture," work on both short and long term problems and solutions, and utilize comprehensive, multidimensional approaches to provide extensive, long-lasting benefits and catalyze maximum success for their students.

All coaches are tutors – but not all tutors are coaches!

When should one hire an academic coach?

To clarify the distinction between tutoring and academic coaching, consider the following analogy. A motor scooter is fine for short trips around town, when you won't have much to carry, or anything really demanding or difficult to accomplish. But when the trip involves carrying cargo or traveling longer distances, or when greater comfort, speed, or safety is desired, an automobile is a better choice.

Likewise, the services of a skilled academic coach are not always required. If understanding of subject content in one particular course is all that's lacking, the problem is not too severe or complex, and time is not an issue, tutoring may be all that's needed to achieve the desired result. But when a student's problem in school is complicated by other factors such as lack of organization, discipline, confidence, or motivation, when learning differences or disabilities, past history, being extremely behind or ahead of grade level, or emotional or family issues play a significant part in the problem, or whenever greater speed and distance is desired in the accomplishment of academic goals, hiring a professional academic coach is called for.

Is an expert academic coach worth the extra cost? Isn't tutoring enough? Which is the best choice in my particular situation?

Since academic coaches have better training, more experience, and greater skills than ordinary tutors do, and since they offer a broad array of additional educational support services that the average tutor is not qualified to provide, fees for academic coaching are normally higher than those typically charged by ordinary tutors.

The scooter/auto analogy aptly applies here, as well. Although it may be possible to carry a heavy load over great distances on a scooter, it isn't advisable. Likewise, whenever a learning challenge is of sufficient importance, difficulty, or complexity, the extra cost involved in hiring a professional academic coach is usually justified.

In fact, considering the very positive effect it can have on lifetime potential earning power and net worth by opening doors to a better education at higher quality schools and colleges, professional academic coaching can be one of the smartest investments one can make!

Why coaching?

In short – because it works!