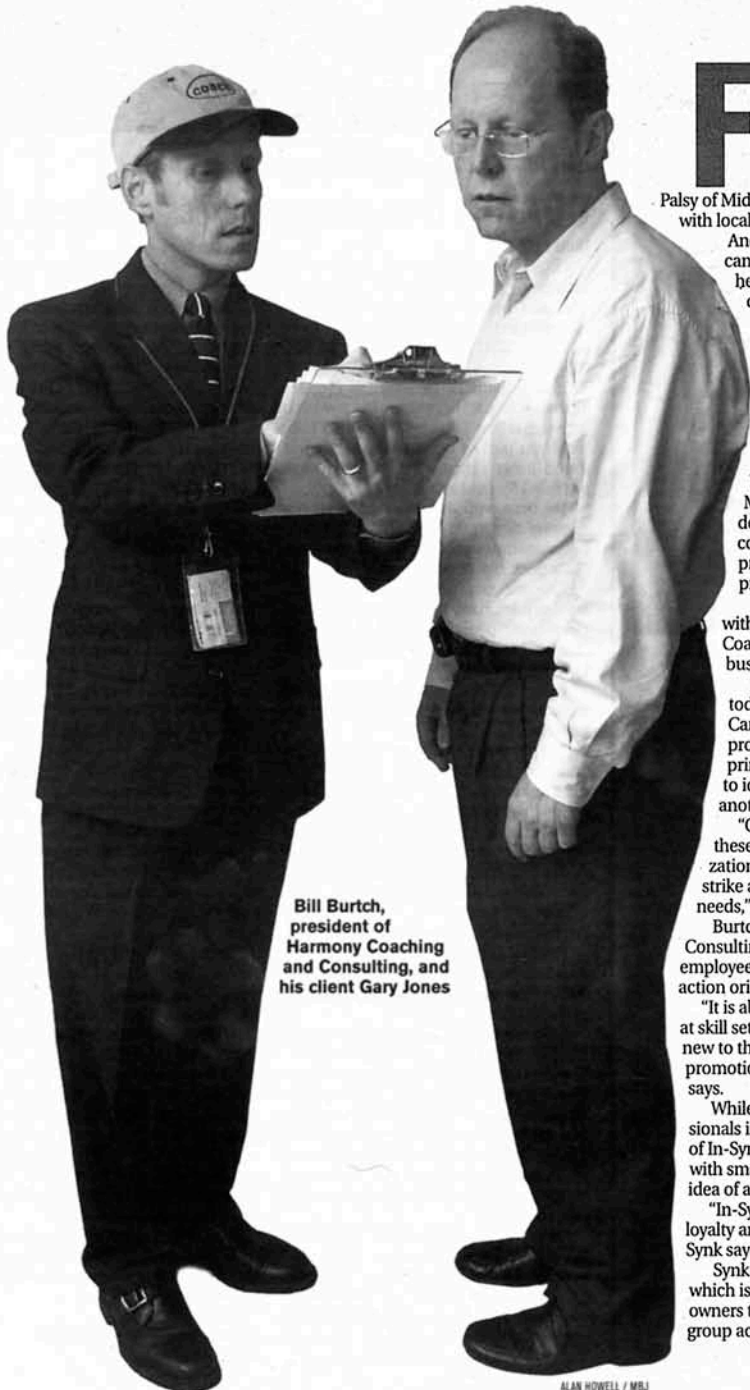


# Special:

## Career training

### Career coaching: Coaches help pros reach higher



Bill Burtch, president of Harmony Coaching and Consulting, and his client Gary Jones

BY KAREN MAYER

**F**aced with an overwhelming schedule, lack of time and stress, Diana Reid, president and CEO of the United Cerebral Palsy of Mid-South, decided to cancel her appointment with local business coach Bill Burtch.

Another professional might have accepted her cancellation, Burtch did not. He encouraged her instead to keep the meeting, and she didn't regret following his advice.

"I was stressed trying to get everything done and thought canceling was best," Reid says. "In fact, at that moment is when I needed the coaching the most. That one hour helped change my thinking and let me see my work differently."

Although coaching has been in existence for years, the practice of hiring a business coach is gaining ground in Memphis. But what exactly is coaching? The definition varies depending on the type of coach asked and what type of coaching they practice. They all agree, however, on the basic principles.

This type of coaching has nothing to do with sports, and coaching is not therapy. Coaching addresses the "people" side of business.

"A coach meets a person where they are today, not yesterday like therapy," says Jeanne Carr, a managing partner of Team Trek. Carr, a professional development coach, works primarily with senior and executive level teams to identify strengths and help people reach another level.

"Organizations demand so much of people these days. We focus on the values of an organization to deliver better business results, but try to strike a balance between individual and business needs," Carr says.

Burtch, president of Harmony Coaching and Consulting, specializes in coaching corporate employees at all levels. He describes coaching as an action oriented process rather than clinical in nature.

"It is about professional development and looking at skill sets to help someone improve. Maybe they are new to the organization, maybe they are facing a big promotion, maybe someone isn't producing," Burtch says.

While Carr and Burtch deal more with professionals in large organizations, Michael Synk, owner of In-Synk Business Education and Coaching, works with small business owners, concentrating on the idea of alignment in organizations.

"In-Synk concentrates on the idea of customer loyalty and aligning business around customers," Synk says.

Synk also owns Inner Circle of the Mid-South, which is a confidential peer group for business owners that meets three hours each month. The group acts as much more than a sounding board.



ALAN HOWELL / MBA

Gary Jones, left, has a coaching session with Bill Burch.

## COACH: Even seasoned execs could use help

FROM PAGE 21

"Business owners need people to talk to about particular issues," Synk says. "Perhaps they are looking to solve a complex problem, or as the boss, don't have anyone within the organization to talk to."

Ham Smythe IV, president of Premier Transportation Services, Inc., which includes Yellow Cab and Checkered Cab, has been part of other peer groups but found Inner Circle a better fit. He has attended for over a year.

"As boss, you think you have all the answers or should have all the answers, but sometimes you don't," Smythe says. "In a peer group with similar owners or CEOs, you can deconstruct problems honestly. It's hard to fool yourself when faced with peers who can detect any amount of bull and hold you accountable for what you say."

Reid feels the same as Smythe and explains what she discovered through the process.

"Being a CEO with 20 years experience, I realized I had a lot of 'shoulds' in my thinking that were driving my interactions with my senior staff," Reid says. "By changing my mindset, I discovered that I didn't have to shoulder all the tough decisions by myself. By including them in the decision-making process, the dynamics changed. My staff developed ownership, and I didn't feel so isolated."

Finding success with a coach or peer group depends largely on honesty, trust and a willingness to take a long, hard look in the mirror.

Coaches employ everything from personality testing to soliciting feedback. The process requires analyzing management styles, ineffective work habits, weaknesses, strengths and anything else that is uncovered during the coaching process. A coaching relationship, however, is built on support and trust so it shouldn't feel intimidating or threatening.

"A client has to be willing," Carr says. "Coaching takes place in a structured process. A lot of groundwork is done and assessment can include 360 degree feedback from those above, below and beside you. People believe certain things or thoughts and are challenged to be in a

different way."

Smythe says the same principles apply in a peer group setting.

"For any coaching to succeed, honesty and trust must exist. The key to it all is the coach and the members of the group," Smythe says. "This differs from workshops or lectures in that as the individuals learn more about each other's business, the feedback becomes three dimensional. Someone might ask you about a problem you brought up in the past or why you aren't following through on something mentioned in a past meeting."

Synk believes that organizations are not as layered as in the past due to reasons such as cost and pace. The effect is that finding a trustworthy, reliable mentor within an organization is difficult and employees aren't as exposed to as much of the business.

"All the years I spent with Kelly Services, I knew (one) guy I could call any time and talk about anything openly," says Synk.

When hiring a coach, the professionals agree that clients need to find a coach that fits their needs, goals, business and style.

"Just like with other professions, if you make sense and have a phone line, you're in business. I always recommend people kick the tires. Come to a meeting," Synk says.

"I may not be the right coach for every person. You have to be comfortable," Burch says. "In my case, I offer a complimentary session to interested clients. Interview more than one coach and interview their clients."

Although the coaching industry is not regulated or coaching techniques standardized, the International Coach Federation sets a code of ethics and is recognized worldwide as the gold standard in certifications. The Memphis Coaches Network serves as a community resource and coaching network.

Coaches are enthusiastic about their work and the results. As Synk says, "It's very exhilarating. I stay motivated by seeing others succeed."

CONTACT freelance writer Karen Mayer at [ksomayer@msn.com](mailto:ksomayer@msn.com)