

FINDING A CAREER COUNSELOR/COACH

I often get requests from clients, friends and colleagues for advice on finding a career counselor outside of the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area. In the post-pandemic era, most career professionals, myself included, are happy to work remotely. But sometimes you want someone who is in your geographic area. Here is my suggested process for finding a local career counselor that suits your needs.

DETERMINE WHAT YOU WANT CAREER COUNSELING TO DO FOR YOU.

Do you just need help getting a resume polished up by next week, or are you looking for help finding a more satisfying career? If you can quickly and clearly articulate, in either an email or voicemail, what you are hoping to get out of career counseling, you are likely to get faster and more helpful responses from the people you contact.

ASSEMBLE A LIST OF COUNSELORS/COACHES

Once you know what you want to get out of career counseling, assemble a list of local counselors from the following sources:

1. Google. Most private practice career counselors now have a website, so google terms like “career counselor”, “career consultant” and “career coach” AND your geographic location to see who emerges. Review the websites, and contact any counselors that look like a good fit for your needs.
2. NCDA.org. The National Career Development Association (NCDA) lists two types of career counselors in their database. Certified Career Counselors (CCCs) have to go through an application process demonstrating that they have met certain professional development goals. Global Career Development Facilitators (GCDFs) have had to take a course and pass an assessment to obtain this designation. This database is searchable by state.
3. NBCC.org. The National Board of Certified Counselors (NBCC) has a function called “Counselor Find” that allows you to search by specialty—career—and location. All Nationally Certified Counselors (NCCs) must have completed a master’s degree in counseling or a related program, such as counseling psychology, and have passed the National Counseling Examination (NCE).

4. Local College Career Centers. If there are colleges or universities in your area, you can check with the career counseling center to see if they have a list of referrals. They often keep such lists, and these lists often reflect people with significant career counseling experience, including former employees of the center. For recent college grads looking for a counselor that knows their market, this is a potentially excellent source of referrals.
5. Friends and colleagues. It never hurts to ask around to see if anyone you know has used a career counselor that they like. There is nothing better than that personal assessment: "You'd really like her!"

When a counselor appears on more than one of these various listings, that tells you that they are credentialed, have been in business a while, and that they are actively engaged with their professional community and networks. But there are plenty of excellent counselors that you will only find through their website or a personal referral, so don't discount anyone who looks like they might help you.

RESEARCH YOUR LIST OF COUNSELORS/COACHES

Almost everyone has a website, LinkedIn profile or listing on PsychologyToday.com or another website. You can tell a lot about the fit from just reading through this information. Identify 2-3 counselors who seem like a good fit.

INTERVIEW 2-3 COUNSELORS/COACHES

Contact at least two of the people on your list. You can make the initial contact via email, but I think it is critical that you spend a couple of minutes on the phone with each counselor so that you can get that gut sense of whether the counselor is a good fit. You don't need a half hour, and please don't take too much of their time. Just explain what you need help with, and ask the counselor how he or she would work with you. After conversations with several counselors, you will have a pretty good sense of who you want to work with.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

How much does career counseling cost?

Rates will vary from counselor to counselor and location to location. Don't be afraid to ask: "What do you charge?" Counseling is an investment, and you are entitled to know how much that investment is likely to be.

Does insurance cover career counseling?

No, career counseling is not covered by health insurance.

Is career counseling worth the cost?

Obviously, I think it is, or I wouldn't be in the business. It is an investment—you will pay out of pocket and up front to work with a private practice career counselor or coach. Here are just some of the ways good career counseling can pay off:

Shorter job searches. People working with career counselors often hunt more efficiently, and therefore land a new job sooner. Shortening a job search by even one week will usually pay for the cost of counseling.

Better offers. Clients working with a career counselor are coached and encouraged to negotiate offers. Some clients who get job offers while working with me often discover that they have paid for my services just by the increased salary they are able to negotiate. One client, whose results are NOT typical, more than doubled her salary in three years while working with me. Now, she gets the credit for being a stellar candidate, but she understood that she would never have asked for those levels of compensation without support.

Less down-time and shorter detours. Every career goes off track at some point—a bad boss, a lay-off, a divorce, a bout of depression. Most people will get back on track eventually, but people working with counselors often get back on track more quickly.

Maximizing educational investments: I always tell people that career counseling is far cheaper than graduate school, because too many people go to law school or graduate school hoping for career enlightenment. That's a very expensive way to find your purpose in life. Working with a career counselor can help you figure out whether you need a graduate degree, which graduate program will best serve your career goals, and how to position yourself from day one of the program to extract the maximum career advantage. I have had many clients discover that they didn't need more education to start on the career that they loved, saving them untold thousands of dollars.

Clarity: It is hard to put a price on clarity of purpose, because in many ways it is a priceless thing. To know what your gifts are and what you were meant to do with them is knowledge beyond price.