Coach Training for Pastors

The future of pastoral ministry will be a very different landscape than what it was during the 20th century. The signs are already there. I believe that “blended income streams” will become the norm, not the exception, and that just as the apostle Paul was a “tentmaker” in the first century, more and more pastors in the 21st century will be finding themselves tentmakers. That is, 100% of their income will be derived from sources outside the church.

While some consider this an exciting development, this reality is already creating anxiety for some pastors who have no idea what they would do without the support of a full time salary and benefits package. For those who believe they are called to pastoral ministry there are, I believe, ways to expand their skillset and vocational toolbox through becoming trained as a coach.

Consider this:

1. **At a minimum, coaching training will greatly enhance one’s ability to do pastoral ministry.** The model of the pastor being the one who attends to everyone’s needs, is at the beck and call of congregants 24/7, and works more hours per week by default than what we normally think of as “full time” is, fortunately, become more and more a thing of the past. What is beginning to get more airtime is the Reformation-era notion of the “priesthood of all believers,” wherein all members of the body of Christ have ministries, not just the pastor.

Coaching training helps pastors immensely by giving them the skills to help others take responsibility for their own lives (and their ministries), helping them learn how to lead with questions—not statements or demands, and by providing a version of very effective pastoral care that isn’t traditional “pastoral counseling” (and the various pressures, assumptions and pitfalls that go along with that).

Even if a pastor doesn’t pursue coaching as a vocational option, or income supplement, it is one of the best investments of time and energy he or she can make toward more effective, impactful ministry.

This isn’t a consulting group on how to be a better pastor. It is professional training on how to do what you do with a “coach approach.” It is intentional and rigorous, and will equip you to demonstrate the “core competencies” required of professional coaches by the International Coach Federation.

2. **Coaching training will also open up the possibility of pursuing an additional income stream** in a way that is very much in keeping with pastoral work. A large number of pastors are already doing pastoral ministry with a coaching approach
Whether they know it or not, or are already well suited for becoming competent at the “core competencies” of coaching.

While making a living at coaching is not a snap, neither is it impossible. Having left full time pastoral ministry in the PCUSA three years ago, I know this for a fact. Becoming trained as a coach not only greatly enhanced my approach to being a pastor, it set me up well for additional work in the church, and in the business world.

The SeattleCoach Training Program is extremely well suited to work with those in the church who wish to enhance their ministry effectiveness, and/or become credentialed, practicing coaches themselves. Patty Burgin and Tom Patterson both have decades in various incarnations of church ministry, and understand well—and have a heart for—those who are living out the joys and challenges of pastoral ministry, as well as the trends now taking shape for its future.

Excellent coaching is like grace: Rarely intrusive, usually disruptive, more nuanced than announced, and just as much about “how” as “what.”

My Story – Tom Patterson, D.Min., ACC

After 20 years of ordained ministry in the Presbyterian Church USA, I reached a point as Head of Staff of a medium-sized church in the Seattle area where I was experiencing new challenges in my leadership position. Looking back on it now, I can see fairly clearly that it was a combination of things—some of it my own doing, and some of it not.

I reached out for some help in navigating this difficult time, and got connected with a fantastic coach. I wasn’t altogether sure what coaching was, but I was motivated enough to give it a whirl. In very short order, I recognized that the specific kind of help my coach gave me was exactly what I needed. She helped me determine whether I wanted to “show up differently” in my role, or begin to devise an exit strategy and follow-up plan. As it turns out, we worked on both.

During this time, my coach identified in me the strengths and aptitudes she thought I had that might make me a coach, and, in fact, suggested that my approach to leadership had probably always been a “coach approach.” I had to agree with her (now that I knew what coaching actually was), and I then engaged in professional coach training as part of my exit strategy/follow-up.

In 2009—following the completion of my training—I applied for, and received, professional coach accreditation through the ICF (International Coach
Federation). At the beginning of 2010, I left my position at the church, and began my own coaching practice. Three years later, I remain thrilled with the decision I made, and with the life-changing assistance my coach provided.

I am still involved in work with the Presbyterian Church, occasionally filling a part time/short term pastoral need, being a guest preacher, coaching pastors and middle-governing body leaders, and consulting with churches, but my main focus is now individual and group coaching (primarily in the business world).

Coaching has given me an invaluable set of tools that not only dovetail beautifully with my background in pastoral ministry—especially in terms of equipping and empowering others for ministry, but also provide as a source of income that is in keeping with my gifts, and meeting real needs. I’ve also discovered that my pastoral ministry background is not only not a hindrance in coaching business people, but a huge asset. The business community needs coaches who know how to listen, ask great questions, make courageous observations, champion discouraged people, and provide positive, encouraging accountability in the process.

I’m convinced that the future norm for pastoral ministry will be bi-vocation, tri-vocational, or all out “tent-making.” I hear this from others across the church, and I know there is much anxiety among pastors about “what else they would do” should outside sources of income become a necessity. Coaching is not only a fantastic way of getting even better at what you do in your pastoral setting, but is a way for you to expand your horizons...re-discover your growing edges...and reinvigorate your professional/vocational experience.

For the first time since our launch in May 2008, SeattleCoach will host a Coach Training Cohort that will be intentionally focused on ministry leaders. We are set to begin in June 2013. I will be the Mentorcoach for this cohort and our plan is to host a portion of this program on-site in Seattle, WA, and the rest via phone and web-conferencing. Meeting times will be determined in advance by the availability of cohort members.

For more information, check out The SeattleCoach Pastoral Coach Training Cohort, and then be in touch. We look forward to hearing from you.

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