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Providing the Playbook

What are your values? Where is your life going?

If those two questions have been keeping you up at night, you may consider speaking to a life coach to help you find the answers.

According to the International Coach Federation — with 11,000 members, the largest worldwide organization of life and business coaches, “Coaching is an ongoing relationship which focuses on clients taking action toward the realization of their visions, goals or desires.”

Similar to an athletic coach, who knows the strengths and abilities of his players and shows them strategies to succeed, a life coach works with people to understand what they value most and to make decisions based on their strengths.

Locally, life coach Sue McMahon says, “My job is to hold up a mirror and show them the values in their life.”

For instance, she cites one client who was afraid to ask his boss for a raise, but who was a skydiver on the weekends. She pointed out that, indeed, he was not afraid of risk — taking risks is something he values — and if he could take the risk of jumping out of an airplane, he could probably approach his boss.

Ms. McMahon, 48, says her clients are looking for fulfillment, balance, joy, empowerment and less stress — a “life that’s more aligned with who they are as a human being.

“It’s about everyone finding the life that works for them and to stop looking for happiness in all the wrong places,” she says.

A life coach for the past four years, she began her career as a nurse, but wanted to connect with people in a different way. A certified professional coach, she also does group sessions and public speaking. She was recently named co-chair of ICF’s Ethics Committee.

A pretty woman with large brown eyes and an easy smile, Ms. McMahon meets with clients in her offices on

Talmadge Road, or consults with them by telephone. She states that one of her philosophies of coaching is, "Life is short. Where are we going?"

She says that each of us is naturally creative, resourceful and whole, but that people need the courage to trust their instincts to take the next steps in their lives.

Because coaching is relatively new, there are no licensing requirements for coaches, although the ICF does credential coaches who have passed the organization's requirements. These include:

- A number of hours of coach-specific training
- A number of hours of coaching experience with clients
- Satisfactory completion of oral exam
- Agreement to adhere to the Code of Ethics as outlined by the ICF

Coaching differs from therapy in that therapy looks at the past causes of present behavior. According to the ICF, coaching concentrates primarily on the present and future, not on the past or on the past's impact on the present.

Coaching uses information from the client's past to clarify where the client is today. It does not depend on resolution of the past to move the client forward.

This type of help doesn't come cheap.

Ms. McMahon charges \$400 a month, which includes two hours of coaching per month, as well as unlimited client support. Coaching, however, can cost upwards of \$1,000 per month, depending on the type of services required and the expertise of the coach.