



Facing change? Get a coach

By Lesley Ann Beck, Berkshire Eagle Staff

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Life coach Millie Calesky takes careful notes during her telephone meetings with clients.

"Change takes work," says life coach Millie Calesky. And if you want to make a change — start a new business, earn an advanced degree, meet sales goals or tough deadlines — this coach will coax, cajole and commiserate, helping you do the work to make those changes.

Life coaching is a relatively new field. A trained coach can help clients reach success through careful listening, evaluation of challenges, time management, setting priorities, helping to focus actions,

offering encouragement and providing feedback. It is not therapy — this is action-oriented advice.

"My two most important tools are asking the right questions and listening," Calesky says. "And I feed back to people what I hear them say."

Based in Hinsdale, Calesky embarked on her successful coaching career seven years ago. The road she took to finding coaching was a convoluted one.

"Life coaching didn't exist," Calesky says, "when I graduated in 1970 from McGill in Montreal — which is where I'm from."

Calesky graduated with a degree in English, although she started in pre-med. With a love of math and science, and an equal affection for the intuitive and the artistic, she went back and forth, she said. She became a registered nurse. She taught middle school English in New York City for three years. She worked for Planned Parenthood. She also worked for a time in medical sales, where, she said, she learned to work on her own and to be a self-starter.

Calesky feels that her years as "a career eclectic" serve her well in her coaching. Because of the wide range of skills she gained in her jobs, she realized she was good at working with people — but didn't want to become a therapist.



Millie Calesky pauses during a call.

Photo by Susan Slattery/Special to The Eagle

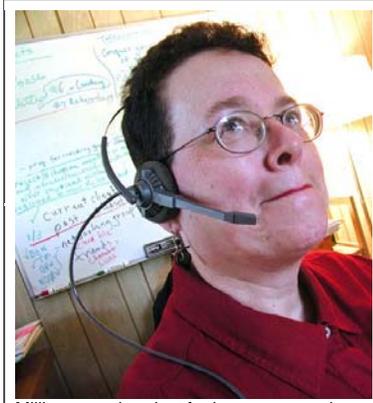
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As a coach, Calesky says, "The focus is on helping people create a vision and get past whatever is standing in their way."

When Calesky left medical sales, she had no "next step" planned, so she hired a coach. "I knew I needed to move forward," she says. The coach suggested she start her own business. So she went to Berkshire Enterprises to learn how to be an entrepreneur. While in the program, she checked out several coach training programs and it seemed a perfect fit.

Calesky says, "I always wanted to help people, be a mentor."

Calesky chose Coach University, a virtual company headquartered in Steamboat Springs, Colo., for her training. The coach training programs are conducted by telephone. Coach U offers several levels of certification through the International Coaching Federation.



Millie uses a headset for her many coach calls.

"The more I tried it, the more it totally clicked for me. It was absolutely right for me."

Calesky put together a business plan and, she says, "my vision started to gel." Calesky finished the Berkshire Enterprises program in 1998 and has been coaching ever since.

As a professional coach, Calesky has continued to develop new skills. "You have to be always marketing yourself. I've had to put a lot of energy into marketing. I learned how to network and I've become a public speaker. I had to develop language to teach people about coaching. And I've developed workshops. The latest frontier is

writing. I've been doing some articles about coaching."

Calesky works with 20 to 25 clients at a time. She meets with them, by telephone, two to four times a month. For individuals, Calesky's fees are \$250 to \$450 per month depending on the number of meetings the client needs. Calesky maintains e-mail contact with her clients in between phone meetings.

Most coaches, including Calesky, charge a flat monthly rate, which includes the phone meetings, e-mails and looking over the client's materials, such as new brochures, business plans, etc.

The minimum commitment is three months. "It takes time to get a measurable result," Calesky says.

She offers a free introductory consultation, which many coaches do. Clients can get a sense of what coaching is about and whether or not they would be comfortable with their coach.

Most coaches work by telephone, and each call lasts from 30 or 40 minutes to an hour. Calesky says the phone works very well.

"It saves time, it's very focusing and the meeting is more condensed — there are fewer distractions."

She works with a headset and is very conscious of the time. She always finishes one meeting at least five minutes before the next one so she has time to stretch in between.

Calesky's day starts early. She rises and meditates, then writes in her journal. She starts coaching at around 8 a.m. She does most of her coaching between 8 and 1, with some work in the evening.

She's a morning person. "My energy is best then — I have some clients as early as 7. I have to be very focused in order to do my work."

Calesky is careful not to take on too many clients. "The danger is ending up working all the time. Unless it's a speaking engagement or an article due, I don't work on the weekends."

Calesky takes her own advice to heart. "You have to have balance — I have to be a model."

She often works with individuals who are starting private practices for the first time, such as a psychotherapist. She has helped many people start new businesses — she has a client who wants to be a publisher, and another who wants to be a property manager.

A number of clients have small businesses and need help — a photographer, a lawyer, an artist — and she often helps people who are stuck with their Ph.D. dissertations.

Asked about her clients' success rate, Calesky says, "I do have an attachment to having my clients achieve what they set out to do." She feels she has a high success rate, although with some clients who have ongoing concerns, rather than a specific goal, it is harder to measure.

"For many people it's concrete. Complete the dissertation. Stick to a schedule. But for some people it's very challenging.

"For others, my work is very short term. I had one woman who needed one consultation. Not everyone needs ongoing work."

Calesky does have two clients she's worked with for more than four years. "As long as there's progress, that's fine," she says. There has to be ongoing growth or change, Calesky says, or the client is not being served.

In a recent article, Calesky wrote, "Coaching provides the structure, guidance and encouragement that can help to make goals achievable."

It has worked for Calesky and it works for her clients.

"As a business and life coach," Calesky says, "I am a believer in the power of support."