



Why hire a coach?

By David B. Glover

Rather than tell you why you should hire me as your coach, I'll share with you why I hired a coach for myself.

In 2006, I fell short of my sub-nine hour goal at the Quelle Challenge iron-distance triathlon in Roth, Germany. In spite of a renewed focus on training, I did not achieve the breakthrough race that I hoped to achieve. Reflecting back, I also realized that I had been racing on a performance plateau for several years. My own efforts to improve my performance were not successful – I needed a change in perspective and in my training routine.

There were three criteria that I used to evaluate a prospective coach. I suggest that these criteria are perhaps universal to any successful client - coaching relationship: (1) Trust, (2) Specificity, and (3) Objectivity.

With the recommendation of a friend who was being coached by him and after meeting him in person, I hired top Germany professional triathlete and coach Olaf Sabastchus to be my coach.

Here is how I applied my criteria:

(1) Trust

I am an experienced and successful Ironman-distance triathlete having had raced more than 20 races in the ten years before I met Olaf. In hiring him as my coach, I had to be prepared to "throw away" my own biases, opinions and past experiences to follow the training plan and recommendations that Olaf prescribed. Essentially, I had to take a "leap of faith." My trust in Olaf as a coach was based on his own results at the Ironman-distance, his reputation, my friend's recommendation and meeting him face to face. If I can't trust my coach or will continually second-guess and question what he is telling me, then why hire a coach at all?

(2) Specificity

I went to Olaf with a clear goal: I wanted a coach who would help get me to a higher level of performance in Ironman-distance triathlons. I had been

consistently hitting 9:15 - 9:45 hour races the past few years with one 8:57 in 2002 at the inaugural Blue Devil Triathlon. I also wanted a coach who could "walk the walk" with consistently fast times at the Ironman-distance - Olaf's PR is 8:07 at Ironman Austria. Plus, I wanted a coach to whom I could ask questions about pacing, nutrition, etc based on his own experiences versus someone who took their answers from a book. The workouts that Olaf gave me were specifically designed to enable me to achieve my Ironman-distance race goals and were grounded on real world results, not just theory.

(3) Objectivity

As a triathlon coach myself, I can most easily look at what one of my client's is doing and say "Do more of this" or "You're doing too much of that," etc., than I can look objectively look at my self. As human beings, we can rationalize anything and I tended to rationalize what I "should be doing" to what I "felt like doing." Although this approach may not necessarily bring poor results, I was not improving so it did not bring optimal results. A coach also serves as a "sounding board" for training, issues and questions.

The three criteria served as the foundation for what I wanted in a coach, but there are some other factors that should be considered when choosing a coach:

- Level of interaction and type of interaction with the coach: How much interaction do you expect from your coach? Do you prefer to communicate by email, phone or in person? Are you or the coach expected to initiate communication? Generally speaking, the more interaction, the higher the cost of coaching services.
- Coach's experience: Has the coach worked with athletes with similar goals and experiences to your own? Does the coach have the knowledge and resources to provide you with the information that you need?
- Personality match: Is the coach someone you can talk to easily and understands your goals, motivations, communication style, etc?

Truthfully, coaching is not for everyone nor is every coach right for every person. As the athlete, you still have to do the workouts consistently and you're the one who is actually racing, not the coach. The coach should help you get to where you want to be with the understanding that you, not the coach, are ultimately responsible for your performance.

The final question that I asked myself before I hired Olaf was: "How much is it worth to me to beat my 8:57 Ironman PR?" For me the value was priceless. In 2007, I went 8:51 at the Quelle Challenge. The money I spent on coaching was money well spent.

Author of *Full Time & Sub-Nine: Fitting Iron Distance Training into Everyday Life*, David dabbles extensively in endurance sports as a professional triathlete, coach, writer and race director. He has helped hundreds of individuals through coaching, educational seminars and eBooks. As an athlete, his accolades include an 8:51 Ironman PR and being the 2007 inductee into the Vineman Hall of Fame. For more information about David, please visit: www.davidglover.net. For more information about his business coaching services, please visit: www.enduranceworks.net.