Perceptions of Contributions of Business Coaches to Female Entrepreneurial Success

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Approval Page

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Abstract

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Although coaching has seen tremendous growth and success, it is still regarded as controversial because there is no governing body that oversees coaches or the coaching industry. In this manner, the industry has not achieved uniformity, therefore is under much scrutiny with regards to the validity of the industry as a whole. With female entrepreneurship on the rise, many industry personnel are hiring business coaches to teach them the business building skills they need to start their solo ventures. This study aimed to understand the perceptions of the one-on-one business coaching experience from the perspective of the client. Because there seemed to be no empirical evidence regarding one-on-one coaching and female entrepreneurs, the purpose of this case study was to relate the experiences of women online entrepreneurs who had undergone one-on-one business coaching to build their brands. Quantitative elements were documented during the course of the study when appropriate, but the focus was primarily on perceptions of how one-on-one business coaching could contribute to success.

By surveying female online entrepreneurs who had experienced one-on-one business coaching, women considering entering the world of solo ventures and business building could empirically see evidence of the effects of one-on-one coaching. Business coaches who served this population were also be able to use this research as a tool that enabled them to develop useful coaching curricula in their own practices, particularly as it served female entrepreneurs. This research also added to the body of literature regarding both coaching and women entrepreneurs in the online space, because the relationship between the two had been under represented.

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In closing, I would like to dedicate this work to those who believe that they were meant for more. Remember, your dreams are your responsibilty.

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Chapter 1: Statement of the Problem

The Topic

When individuals think of a coach, there may be an automatic association to an athletic coach. But there are many different types of coaches, the definition of which can be hard to come by due to this broad landscape of coaching practice (Salter, 2014). For the purposes of this work, a coach was defined as an expert in a particular discipline who offers guidance and mentorship (Conolly, 2016). Thus a coach can assist in any area of specialized interest from athletics to zookeeping. At the time of this writing, coaching was the second fastest growing industry in the United States of America (Bueno, 2010; Gillentine, 2008). As reported in a 2012 International Coaching Federation study, North America boasts the highest concentration of professional coaches across the globe. Roughly 33%, or almost 16,000 coaches, are located in North America alone. These coaches are earning annual revenue of close to three quarters of a billion dollars for their practice. Personal and professional life in the 21st century often require elements that are not taught in traditional education curriculum (Ellsberg, 2011). Navigating through components of self-awareness, personal growth, spirituality, emotional intelligence, and similar characteristics are important aspects of leadership, decision making, and success (Shelon, Dunning, & Ames, 2014; Ugoani, Amu, & Kalu, 2015). In order to better navigate through these areas of need, people are seeking personal coaches to fill in the gaps where they believe schooling has inadequately prepared them (Ellsberg, 2011). There are multiple genres of coaches including health and wellness, life coaching, leadership coaching, and there even exists coaching for coaches (Bueno, 2010). The topic of this study focused specifically on business success coaching, or executive coaching to female entrepreneurs.

Research Problem

Although coaching has seen tremendous growth and success, it is still regarded as controversial because there is no governing body that oversees coaches or the coaching industry. In this manner, the industry has not achieved uniformity (Charan, 2009). The International Coaching Federation is the oldest and largest coaching association, but even they do not have complete control of the industry (Bueno, 2010). Some of the most successful coaches like Tony Robbins and Gina DeVee have independent certification programs that are not ICF approved. There are a plethora of schools and organizations that offer additional certification programs in the field. Many of these certification programs are presented with a premium price tag and extensive training, but an actual certificate is not technically required to begin a coaching practice, and the number of different certifying bodies also poses an issue (Scoular, 2009). To this extent, anyone can be a self-proclaimed coach. Because there is no universal governance, licensure, or accountability, many have speculated the validity of the profession, and those considering hiring a coach are often offered a caveat emptor (Coutu & Kauffman, 2009).

The second aspect of this study explored female online entrepreneurs who had hired a one-on-one business coach to build their business. Female entrepreneurship is on the rise (Zarya, 2015). The United States Census Bureau's Survey of Business Owners in 2012 reported that the percentage of women business owners increased across ethnicities. Women entrepreneurs have even been credited with being the key to sustained growth of the American economy (Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation, 2014). Coaching has been around for centuries, however, although evidence of coaching benefits exists, there is a lack of research that connects these two fast growing areas: business coaching and women entrepreneurship. Thus, the problem addressed in this study was the lack of

empirical evidence of one-on-one business success coaching for the female online entrepreneur.

Background and Justification

Since the late 1940s, the influx of women in the American workforce has continued to climb (Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation, 2014). Today, women make up a large portion of the workforce, roughly 47%, according to the US Department of Labor (2012). Further, the increase of women as business owners and entrepreneurs has been steady (US Census Bureau, 2012). However, entrepreneurship is not always an easily navigated road. It requires an element of business savvy that other professionals outside of the business world may not have. Many times those in service-based industries wish to transition from corporate to private practice. Social workers want to become private counselors, teachers wish to open a private tutor center, and healthcare professionals wish to go into business for themselves. The education required to obtain such professions often does not include elements of business that would allow these individuals to confidently pursue solo ventures. They need support and the right tools that provide direction for their business (Audet & Couteret, 2012). This is where individuals seek to hire a business coach. As stated, the coaching industry is rapidly growing, and likely has not seen the zenith of its heights as an industry. Empirical evidence shows the benefit of coaching, the growth of female entrepreneurs, and even the benefit of coaching for women entrepreneurs in general (Laukhuf & Malone, 2015). However, there is no empirical evidence that examines the facets in the online space. Society has not seen yet hit the apex of the digital revolution (Schmidt & Cohen, 2013). This is an issue because as the topic is being studied there will likely be changes that occur simultaneously.

Deficiencies in the Evidence

Audet and Couteret (2012) documented the use of executive coaches among entrepreneurs but further deficiencies exist because there is paucity in empirical evidence that supports the experience of one-on-one coaching, specifically as it relates to the female entrepreneur. For anyone working with a coach, results can be observed both qualitatively and quantitatively. For example, athletes who have great coaches can quantitatively measure their progress in terms of numbers related to such areas as (a) speed increases, and (b) jumping higher. There also exists the qualitative aspect to the coaching experience that measures feelings, confidence levels, perceptions of self, and contributors to success. Previous literature documented outcomes for business coaching, but it appears that this type of coaching is more prevalent with more clout in a large corporate setting. Horn, Elliot, and Forbringer (2010) noted that it is the world's largest corporations that utilize coaching for the benefit of their leaders. Horn et al. mentioned General Electric and Goldman Sachs specifically. Interestingly, literature does not seem to explain why executive coaching is used primarily in large company context. Audet and Couteret (2012) suggested that further research be conducted regarding coaching and novice entrepreneurs, the main focus of this study. As a Life and Business Success Coach, the researcher experienced many of the issues pertaining to women entrepreneurs addressed. Women want to start a business and have no idea where to begin because their previous education did not prepare them for such a task. Even high-ranking university business programs do not typically include components of self-awareness and intuition, two aspects that have been documented to be critical in leadership (One Hundred One Coaching, 2010). In addition, many believe that in order to start a business they would either need to obtain another degree or bring on a business-savvy partner who

is familiar with such dealings. Often, women have never even thought of hiring a coach. While testimonials and referrals from credible clients can certainly help boost confidence in hiring a high-powered coach for assistance, concrete data and empirical evidence would likely serve this population well. Therefore, extending research in the area of coaching to this particular group of entrepreneurs seems highly relevant.

Audience

By surveying female online entrepreneurs who have experienced one-on-one business coaching, women considering entering the world of solo ventures and business building in the digital space can empirically see evidence of the effects of one-on-one coaching. Business coaches who serve this population might be able to use this research as a tool that hopefully enables them to develop useful coaching curricula in their own practices, particularly as it serves female entrepreneurs. This research added to the body of literature regarding both online coaching and women entrepreneurs online because the relationship between the two has been under represented.

Definition of Terms

As per Creswell (2015), certain terms within research may be unfamiliar to the reader. For the purpose of this study, the following terms are defined.

Coach. The term refers to a person who serves as a mentor in a particular area of specialization. The role of the coach is to help accelerate the client's progress towards their ultimate goal (Conolly, 2016).

Business Coach. The term refers to a business coach as one who works with a client to achieve specific goals with regards to business and enterprise.

Client. For this study, the term refers to a client as the person who solicits the services of a coach to achieve a particular goal.

Entrepreneur. The term refers to individuals who start their own company and practice niche marketing strategy to satisfy a need in the current market who are considered entrepreneurs (Garfield, 1989).

Online Entrepreneur. The term refers to an entrepreneur who conducts their business primarily on the Internet using digital mediums.

Intentional Change Theory. The term refers to a theory founded by Boyatzis (2006) which posits that people learn only what they wish to learn.

Qualitative Research. The term refers to a research technique whereby data are collected and analyzed in an effort to explore and gain an understanding of social trends, problems, opinions, or experiences occurring in the world (Creswell, 2016).

Phenomenological Research. The term refers to a qualitative research process where the subjects' lived experiences are explored and then described (Edmonds & Kennedy, 2013).

Purpose of the Study

Because there seemed to be no empirical evidence regarding one-on-one coaching and female entrepreneurs, the purpose of this study was to understand the experiences of women entrepreneurs who had undergone one-on-one business coaching to build individual brands. Quantitative elements were documented during the course of the study when appropriate, but the focus was primarily on perceptions of how one-on-one business coaching can contribute to success.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Chapter 1 described the nature of the problem and the lack of data that support one-on-one coaching among female entrepreneurs. The review of the literature provided in this chapter is a compilation of research stemming from online and virtual libraries made available through the local university Library, Research, and Information Technology Center. It served to introduce the theoretical framework for this research and explore a history of coaching and female entrepreneurship.

Theoretical Framework

Although many theories can apply to coaching, coaching is an area where theory is superseded by actual practice in the field (Joo, 2005). Further, the theories being applied generally depend on the purpose of the coaching sessions. For example, health and wellness coaching may employ the social cognitive theory to initiate change in the client's eating habits. Relationship coaches who find a niche in conflict resolution may borrow applications from emotional intelligence theory to serve their population. For the purpose of this research study, the Boyatzis (2006) Intentional Change Theory was used. Boyatzis (2006) developed this theory out of scarcity. While theories existed regarding cognitive behavior, self-awareness, and education, there was paucity of framework that could produce actual results on separate levels, especially with regards to training and coaching. Boyatzis explained that individuals learn only what they wish to learn. Meaning, a person can go through the process of learning a particular something, but undergoing the process itself is not enough for actual learning to take place. Learning only occurs when the individual has a vested personal interest in learning the material. Therefore, according to Boyatzis (2006), as it applies to coaching, any habituation must

begin with the person's desire to make the change. It is interesting to note that this desire for change may not be evident on the conscious level. Some people do not become aware of their desire to make changes until certain life events serve as triggers (Boyatzis, 2006). The Intentional Change Theory uses 5 Processes that must be followed in order to create lasting change. First, Boyatzis (2006) stated that there must be the discovery of the ideal self and a personal vision. This step begins with gaining clarity of who the person desires to be in the future. This step will include goals and desired achievements. The second process requires gaining clarity about where the person is today, this is his or her real self. This is often challenging for the individual because it requires much introspection and honesty about individuals' strengths and weaknesses. Difficult as it may be, this element of self-awareness is critical to bridging the gap between the real self of today and the ideal self of tomorrow. Third, individuals would need to create an action plan or an agenda of how they plan on going from point A, that is the real self, to point B, the ideal future self. The individuals must determine what steps are needed to take in order to initiate movement from the real self to the ideal self. The Step 4, as explained by Boyatzis (2006), requires putting the action plan into motion and experimenting with new habits and behaviors. An individual in this phase would learn and then put action steps into use to see how it works. This can include all aspects of the person including mental, physical, and emotional changes. The Step 5 in the Intentional Change Theory requires getting help and developing relationships that will serve as a support during the process of change. This theory, and the steps outlined, served as the foundation exploring the outcomes of one-on-one business coaching in this study.

History of Coaching

The emerging field of coaching is a potpourri of multiple disciplines, but

naturally, the word coach is most likely associated it with athletics. Those particular types of trainers date back to the very first Olympic Games in Ancient Greece where specialists were paid to train competitors in an specific athletic event (Carpenter, 2004). The actual term coach can be traced back as far as the 1500s when, according to Witherspoon and White (1996), the word referred to a horse drawn carriage used for transportation. Thus, the origin of the action word, to coach, essentially means carrying a person from a point of origin to a desired destination (Witherspoon & White, 1996). Coaching can be seen throughout history in the form of apprenticeships and mentorships, but with regards to organizational and executive type coaching, these types of coaches emerged in the mid1900s and were originally referred to developmental counselors (Audet & Couteret, 2012; Kampa-Kokesch & Anderson, 2001). Interestingly, these developmental counselors, or coaches were individuals with psychology backgrounds who found their niche in the business world by helping executives (Kampa-Kokesch & Anderson, 2001). According to Sherman and Freas (2004), this may have been a reaction to a need for high-level executives to effectively exhibit more people skills in their leadership. Later, in the 1980s, coaching grew even more and began to take on many different forms to include all aspects of life, not merely athletics and executives (American Management Association, 2008). Since then, the coaching industry has only increased with the International Coach Federation estimating nearly 50,000 worldwide coaches in existence in 2012.

Types of Coaches

Being an effective coach requires more than just lesson plans. It is a profession that demands expertise and specialized knowledge that supports a client from going from one place to another (Conolly, 2016). Because of this, a coach can come in many

different forms and offer support in many different disciplines. It is important to note that the term coach is not transferable. An individual may be a very skilled leadership development coach, but not a very good entrepreneurial one. Coaches typically have one area of specialization that they offer to support their clients. Although coaches can be found who specialize in almost any practice, they will generally fall under four categories: athletic coaching, life coaching, health coaching, or business coaching.

Athletic Coach. Sport is a fairly common part of American life, thus athletics coaches may be the most commonly known coaches (Misasi, 2016). Alongside elite athletes, it is not uncommon to find a coach who has helped guide them to greatness, and the coach plays a very important role in the athlete's success (Heller, Gilson, & Paule-Koba, 2016; Noble, Vermillion, & Foster, 2016). These types of coaches are charged with having keen knowledge and expertise in the field of athletics, particularly one sport, or one area of discipline within a sport (Salter, 2014). According to Misasi (2016), athletic coaches have to navigate the process of leading the athlete to perform as the coach sees fit, while also allowing the athlete to have personal satisfaction in his or her achievements.

Life Coach. Life coaches are a relatively new genre of coaches that made its full introduction into the world in the 1990s (Jarosz, 2016). It has since gained popularity and has grown into a $2 billion dollar industry, at the time of this writing, and, according to the Global Coaching Study conducted by the International Coaching Federation (2012), it generates over $700 million dollars of revenue in North America alone. Life coaching separates itself from traditional therapeutic type disciplines in that the goal is not necessarily to offer advice, but rather offers methods whereby the clients discover their own answers and their own solutions (ICF, 2015). Life coaching is more geared

towards motivational change and behavioral modifications that will allow the clients to set and achieve personal goals (Jarosz, 2016). These goals are usually that of a personal nature such as finding love, releasing fear, or achieving career goals. The International Coaching Federation (2015) offered a more concrete definition stating that a life coach works alongside clients to inspire maximizing potential through analysis using critical and creative thinking.

Health Coaching. These types of coaches specialize in the areas of health and wellness. According to Gerencher (2012), they are generally healthcare practitioners such as nurses, social workers, and dieticians. The goal of this type of coach is to address specific health needs of their patients and clients.

Business Coaching. This is the type of coaching this study explored further as it related to female entrepreneurs. Business coaching can also be referred to as Executive Coaching, and has been defined in many ways. One of the earliest journal articles to discuss executive coaching specifically was Kilburg (1996) who stated that coaches are sought out by clients to enhance managerial skills within their organization. Much of the early literature also places emphasis on coaching practices and techniques used during the course of the consultancy, not necessarily coaching outcomes or how effective the coaching sessions are (Kilburg, 1996). The articles published between 2001 and 2007 tended to place weight in their definition on the process of coaching. For example both Joo (2005) and Blackman (2006) made specific mention of the process that a coach and client must undergo in order to achieve desired results that came in the form of behavioral change and increased performance. Along with relationships, researchers also highlighted the importance of a collaborative effort between coach and client to produce results (Baron, Morin, & Morin, 2011; Joo, 2005; Motsoaledi & Cilliers, 2012; Stelter,

2007). Recurring elements to the definitions provided by Kilburg (1996); Cilliers (2005); Joo (2005); and Baron, Morin, and Morin (2011) all use the word relationship between coach and client in their definitions. Some other words found in literature used to define coaching included leader and leadership, self-awareness, change, learning, goal setting, and effectiveness (Schutte & Steyne, 2015). Therefore, drawing from already existing literature, business coaching is defined as a one-on-one, collaborative effort between coach and client with the intent to instill behavioral change that improves the overall effectiveness of a leader within the organization by learning techniques that include self-awareness and goal setting. It is important to note that the definitions of business coaching found in literature lean very heavily towards executive coaching in large organizations. This definition may or may not hold for smaller start-ups and solo ventures. Further, none of the research insinuates gender specificity.

Business Coaching in Literature

While it is difficult to pinpoint the precise point in time when business and executive coaching began, the concept of coaching has been around for centuries (Kampa-Kokesch & Anderson, 2001). In the academic research world, professionals agreed that business coaching is still new and needs time for further research and development (Schutte & Steyn, 2015). Over a decade ago, Sherman and Freas (2004) explained coaching as "the Wild West of yesteryear, the frontier [executive coaching] is chaotic, largely unexplored, and fraught with risk, yet immensely promising," and not much has changed since then (p. 82). Although there were not large amounts of empirical research on the topic, the benefit of what did exist lies in that much of the research available was still applicable for this particular research study. The problem, however, was such that the research still remained dearth. Joo (2005) revealed that of the

78 articles published about executive coaching until 2005, only 11 of those were published in peer reviewed, scholarly journals. Ten years later, Schutte and Steyn (2015) revealed that in 2014 the number jumped to 42 academically published articles regarding the subject of executive coaching since the first one emerged in 1996. The list of articles provided by Schutte and Steyn (2015) did not indicate that any of the articles published between 1996 and 2014 were female entrepreneur specific. Although the gap in existing literature had been significantly filled since the previous comprehensive literature review conducted by Passmore and Gibbes (2007), there was still a shortage in the amount of active researchers in the field of executive coaching (Schutte & Steyn, 2015). Further, it was only in the last 10 years or so that researchers had begun to delve into actual coaching efficacy versus coaching technique, which seemed to be the emphasis of earlier studies (Bowles, Cunningham, De La Rosa, & Picano, 2007).

Entrepreneurship

Entrepreneurship is not merely a recent trend. Prior to the industrial revolution, the majority of working men and women were entrepreneurs of some sort (Carlen, 2016). Individuals learned a trade, a skill, or a craft, usually from their parents, and then made a living exchanging the goods and services of said craft in their community (Carlen, 2016). With the industrial revolution came incorporation and salaried positions. People abandoned their family businesses in favor of this lifestyle (Carlen, 2016). But entrepreneurship never went away completely. There were, and still are, many who would prefer to take the risk of innovation and forsake the traditional workweek and the security of a steady paycheck to start their own business (Goffee & Scase, 1987). The word entrepreneur is of French origin and Herbert and Link (2011) believed French economist Richard Catillion to be the first to provide a definition. Herbert and Link

(2011) noted that Catillion suggested entrepreneurs were those who participated in the exchange of goods and services for profit. In more modern times, exploration of entrepreneurship began in the late 1940s when Schumpeter and Chandler founded a Harvard Business School journal titled Explorations in Entrepreneurial History. To Schumpeter (1947), exploring entrepreneurship in history would lead to better understanding of subsequent times in economics, and contemporary scholars would agree (Herbert & Link, 2011). The 1960s moved away from exploratory endeavors into entrepreneurship with regards to the economy and seemed to focus primarily on the Chandler (1962) organizational theories and the evolution of solo entrepreneurship into collaborative ventures. This organizational model continued on into the 1970s with the Galambo (1970) works into the same subject matter.

Researchers in their literature showed many definitions of entrepreneurship. Cunningham and Lischeron (1991) explained that there may be a bit of a debate between what constitutes as an entrepreneur versus a small business owner, which makes research on the subject of entrepreneurship challenging. What academics do agree on is that a person who acquires a company, or works for one, is by definition not an entrepreneur (Cunningham & Lischeron, 1991). Perhaps the simplest of these definitions would be the Blanchflower and Oswald (1998) definition that stated, "The simplest kind of entrepreneurship is self-employment" (p. 26). Because one solid definition of entrepreneurship is difficult to ascertain based on literature, some have attempted to define entrepreneurs based on characteristics entrepreneurs tended to display. Brachert, Hyll, and Titze (2017) believed that the characteristic of being an open risk-taker was a critical quality amongst entrepreneurs. Brachert et al. (2017) noted in their study that this risk-taking factor often increases with the self-employed status of entrepreneurship. This

concept of risk taking agrees with Cantillion's explanation of entrepreneurship, because he believed that entrepreneurs needed to operate in areas of many uncertainties (Herbert & Link, 2011). Vuleta (2017) pointed out two more very interesting traits of entrepreneurs that included endless hopefulness and unfailing stubbornness. Vuleta explained that these two characteristics work in tandem and are necessary to handle the ebb and flow of entering solo ventures. This concept matched Picken (2017) who stated that the qualities of a successful entrepreneur are often different than that of a successful CEO who works in the traditional sense. For the purposes of this study, the Garfield (1989) simple definition was most appropriate. Garfield stated that individuals who start their own company and practice niche marketing strategy to satisfy a need in the current market are considered entrepreneurs.

Growth of Female Entrepreneurship

Although there was historical evidence to support centuries of working women, it was not until the 1950s and 1960s that women began entering the workforce in the United States in droves (Harris, 2003). Further, women entrepreneurs were not recognized until decades later. According to Jennings and Brush (2013), although female entrepreneurship had been studied for over 30 years, the first scholarly article published on women's entrepreneurship was not published until 1976. Oddly, the amount of published scholarly research highlighting women's careers in entrepreneurships has been declining since the 1990s even though the growth of women entrepreneurs has continued to increase (Jennings & Brush, 2013). Although scholarly research has declined, the statistics have not gone completely unnoticed. News outlets from Forbes to Fox to Fortune have all published online content regarding the rise of female entrepreneurs. According to the 2014 State of Women-Owned Businesses Report, commissioned by

American Express OPEN, women-owned businesses have grown by 68% from 1997-2014. American Express's 2015 Report showed a 74% increase from 1997-2015. This was an average of just under 900 new women-owned business ventures commencing everyday, and the statistics indicated that the numbers may continue to climb in the near future.

Women have traditionally struggled with receiving equal pay for equal work. At the inaugural debut of the Equal Rights Amendment in 1923, Alice Paul stated, "We shall not be safe until the principle of equal rights is written into the framework of our government" (p. 34). Progress has been made, however areas of inequality still exist. Pay inequality and gender pay bias are widespread issues that are evident in many sectors of the workforce (Lovewell, 2013). Generally, women receive about 80 cents to the dollar when compared to that of their male colleagues (Siniscalco, Damrell, & Nabity, 2014). Although there have been efforts made to diminish the gap, there still exist disparities in this area. Hence, some researchers have attributed the inequality in the workforce as a reason for the major growth in female entrepreneurship in recent years (McBride, 2015). For women, this freedom has been praised and some have cited its benefit to the United States economy. The Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation (2014) indicated that women entrepreneurs could be a key factor in sustaining economic growth in this country, with over 9.1 million women-owned businesses in existence in 2014, making it the largest growing sector in the business world (Laukuff & Malone, 2014). However, some are not convinced of its benefits. Founder of Women Online, Aarons-Mele (2014) stated that women entering entrepreneurship and leaving corporate America can be alarming because solo ventures are murky and the majority of those who tread the waters fail. Instead, Aarons-Mele (2014) indicated that organizations should begin to

analyze reasons why women are leaving and create strategies to encourage them to stay.

Benefits of Coaching

This consistent exit of women from the corporate world to the entrepreneurial one shows a great need for more coaches and mentors, the lack of which serves as a barrier to entry for women who desire to pursue entrepreneurship (EMKF, 2014; Laukhuf & Malone, 2015). This notion is also supported by the literature where it is evident that although executive coaching has been cited as popular and valid, its popularity exists mostly in larger organizations and not directed at small solo ventures. With female entrepreneurship consistently rising, it would be of high benefit to explore the existence of empirical evidence that offers any conclusion, positive or negative, regarding coaching of women entrepreneurs. In general, the benefits of coaching, in other capacities, have been documented for decades, but not with regard to this particular subject matter, hence, the purpose of this study. Generally, literature supported causation between executive coaching and desired outcome within an organizational context. A survey report released in 2008 by the American Management Association Institute for corporate productivity suggested that companies who utilize the skill of a coach within their organizations are more apt to reveal the use of coaches in their strategy, and they report growth in areas like revenue and customer satisfaction as a result of a coach. Vidal-Salazar, Vilchez, Cordon-Pozo (2012) stated that coaching proves to be a very effective tool in business. One reason being, much of what happens on the job is not taught in traditional education avenues. This on-the-job type training is better achieved with the use of a coach that demonstrates knowledge in that particular field (Vidal-Salaza et al., 2012). The Vidal-Salaza et al. study measured the outcomes of 40 small enterprises that were divided into two groups. One group received coaching and the other did not. The coached group

revealed a definite increase in productivity of the organization, and cited that business coaching was integral in that outcome (Vidal-Salazar et al., 2012).

According to Green (2014), only about 10% of startups will succeed. The high failure rate could be attributed to many factors. It was suggested, however, that employing a business coach could mitigate several, if not all, of those factors. There were multiple reasons for a business beginner to benefit from coaching, but Boss (2015) outlined four. The first two go hand-in-hand. Coaches can be used to brainstorm and serve as a soundboard. A high-powered executive coach can ask the right questions and help steer the client in the right direction (Bank, 2015). A coach can also hold the client accountable for goals and actions (Bank, 2015). It is one thing to have strategies in place, a whole other thing to actually put them to work. One of the most sought after reasons for bringing a coach on board is the ability for the business coach to offer training and guidance in that area of specialized interest (Bank, 2015).

It is important to note that online entrepreneurs have the ability to seek out online coaches. Virtual mentorship is a popular method of coaching in the digital age (Laukhuf & Malone, 2015). The goal of the coach and client relationship remains the same; it is merely the medium by which the relationship is carried out that differs. Instead of face-to-face interaction, these coaches and clients choose to meet in the virtual space using platforms such as Skype, Zoom or the like, which allow for conversation in real time, even with video capabilities. Some of the advantages of e-learning and e-mentoring, as noted in literature, would include flexibility (Kyrgidou & Petridou, 2013). According to the Kyrgidou and Petridou (2013) study, using the online space to facilitate coaching still allows the client to receive the necessary mentorship required in order to enhance knowledge and develop skills that would increase entrepreneurial success. Through the

online learning platform, women can now learn from their desired coach without the hindrance of distance (Laukhuf & Malone, 2015).

Conclusion

One of the main characteristics negatively ascribed to coaching is that it is just a fad and will soon pass. There have certainly been times where coaching was not as effective. Human Resource Management International Digest (2013) noted one such case. An United Kingdom financial-services organization understood the benefit of coaching; therefore, instead of doing away with the coaching practice altogether, they simply revamped the coaching methods with a few tweaks. They reduced the number of coaches from 50 to 12 within the organization. Having too many coaches was too widespread for the size of their company. Narrowing it down to only 12 allowed the 12 coaches to be better matched with the employees and the organizational desired outcome. Much of coaching occurs in that sense. Ashley-Timms (2012) noted that the continuous process of coaching should be met with clarity of direction for both the coach and the client, and the benefit of executive coaching can only be realized if and when the purpose and goal of the coaching is specified on the front end. Despite failed coaching attempts and the criticisms regarding lack of centralization and standard, the outcomes have been documented and reveal that coaching has its benefits across disciplines. From life coaching, to health and wellness, to business, it is a practice that can provide measurable and substantial results that are undeniable. The American Management Association (2008) suggested that coaching will continue to grow. They forecast that as the baby boomer generation in the workforce is replaced with Gen X and Gen Y, the leaders would need to be trained accordingly. According to the American Management Association (2008), the rapidity of that need, in addition to the change in the global business climate,

are better met with coaching than traditional education, hence the necessity for executive and business type coaching. The literature reviewed focused mainly on observing executive coaching within a large organizational context, but coaching can cover a vast amount of topics and thus should continue to be researched (Schutte & Steyn, 2015). Women-owned businesses are being launched at a rate faster than ever, almost 900 business every single day (EMKF, 2015). Many of these women are leaving corporate America, and have no experience in solo-preneurship (Aarons-Mele, 2014). This would be a prime reason why coaching female entrepreneurs would make sense. Further, there lacks empirical evidence to explain the outcomes of such a specific type of coaching. In order to shed light on this topic, this research sought to apply a more narrowed focus to business coaching and observe outcomes of female entrepreneurs who had experienced coaching.

Research Questions

The research questions guiding this study are:

1. What are the experiences of female online entrepreneurs who have undergone one-on-one business coaching to build their brand?

2. What are the clients' perceptions of their virtual one-on-one coaching experience?

3. In what ways did the experience contribute to or support their efforts towards full-time entrepreneurship?

Thusly, the approach more appropriate in this instance was a qualitative research method.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

With female entrepreneurship on the rise, and coaching being the fastest growing industry in the United States, it is interesting that here exists paucity of empirical evidence studying the relationship between the two. This study aimed to understand if there was a symbiotic relationship between the two phenomena. This study sought to explore the perceptions of success and achievement as a result of experiencing one-on-one business coaching. The purpose of this exploration was not only to do a deep dive into the nonquantifiable aspects of entrepreneurial success, but also to explore how the coaching process allowed clients to experience the process through the theoretical framework of Boyatzis (2006) Intentional Change Theory. There were quantifiable results achieved as a result of their mentorship, such as income enough to leave their corporate careers in lieu of full-time entrepreneurship, but this study sought to explore beyond the mathematically significant data. This research was designed to determine how clients perceived the experiencing coaching in this area of specialized interest allowed them to go from one place to another in their business.

Participants

According to Creswell (2015), the intention of qualitative research is to investigate central phenomena. In order to do a compendious exploration, the researcher should opt for a purposeful sampling of individuals who can best represent the central phenomenon being explored. Each qualitative study differs in number of participants (Creswell, 2015). With case studies, the number of individuals beings reported on can range from 1-40 (Creswell, 2015). Larger samplings are not always best because, as per Creswell (2015), collection of qualitative data is very time consuming and additional data

on additional participants can prove to be unmanageable while also not necessarily providing any additional insight into the central phenomenon. Thus, the researcher believed that collecting a sample of five individuals for this study would allow for adequate responses to the research questions.

Because the study was used to understand a particular phenomenon, it was important that the researcher carefully selected candidates who exhibited the same overall characteristics, or purposeful sampling (Creswell, 2015). In this case, the criteria for inclusion for the participants in this study were that they were full-time female online entrepreneurs. Meaning, they were online entrepreneurs and online business owners outright, without a traditional nine to five, 40-hour workweek job that provided supplemental income. The women chosen for this study were those who had received one-on-one coaching from a business coach, and resigned from their places of full-time employment within the last 5 years. The purposeful sample of participants were recruits from Facebook Groups dedicated to female entrepreneurs. There were no restrictions on industry or type of online entrepreneur other than being female.

Instrument

The instrument used in this study consisted of six, open-ended interview questions adapted from the White (2013) dissertation in which she investigated the health-coaching phenomenon. The White original study was geared towards exploring perceptions of health coaches and weight loss, a different topic than this study. Thus, because this question focused on business coaches, the terms health coaching and health coach were changed to business coaching and business coaching, respectively. Any questions addressing the health coaching industry specifically were not included because they are not appropriate for this study (see Appendix A Interview Guide).

Prior to conducting formal interviews with participants, the interview questions were piloted to determine gaps and weaknesses within the interview design (Glesne, 2016). This was necessary because accurate insight into the lived experiences of the participants could only be obtained by the researcher's ability to successfully ask the right interview questions (Colaizzi, 1978). The pilot study was not to gather data for the research study. Instead it was used to identify if the information being collected with the interview questions was enough to answer the research questions posited in this study. Candidates for the pilot study were solicited in the same manner as formal interviewees for this study, through Facebook Groups. Pilot study participants were not allowed to participate in the formal study, nor were their answers included in the final data.

Research Design

Qualitative Methodology. Qualitative research methods are used when the study is nonexperimental (Creswell, 2015; Edmonds & Kennedy, 2013). Quantitative methods allow the researcher to explore beliefs and experiences of the individuals that are not procurable through conventional quantitative methods of inquiry (Hill, 2012). Because this research sought to understand perceptions of a particular experience, a qualitative design was more appropriate.

Phenomenology Approach. According to Edmonds and Kennedy (2013), there are five forms of qualitative research: ethnography, grounded theory, narrative approaches, phenomenological approaches, and case study. A phenomenology approach was most appropriate for this study because the philosophy of phenomenological research allowed an open investigative approach of a people who had undergone a particular experience, or phenomenon (Glesne, 2016). As per Marshall and Rossman (2011), phenomenologies assumed that the participants of the study were able to narrate the story

of their shared experiences. Creswell (2016) also noted that phenomenologies work best with a small number of participants from a homogenous population. The researcher was then tasked with exploring this small population through interviews and other observation methods in order that the researcher might understand their lived experience and report on any similarities and differences (Glesne, 2016). The research questions in this study focuses specifically on the lived experiences of female entrepreneurs who worked with business coaches.

Data Collection Procedures

Institutional Review Board (IRB). The researcher began this study by seeking approval from the university's IRB. The researcher completed and submitted all required documentation and sought approval prior to beginning the research process. The researcher also provided the IRB with a copy of the informed consent document that was sent to each participant in the study. Once IRB approval was procured, the researcher informed the dissertation chair and awaited permission to proceed with the study.

Prescreening. It was important to the research of the study that the participants be individuals who had undergone and experienced the phenomenon of one-on-one coaching. In order to ensure this, the researcher contacted each potentially viable candidate via Facebook Messenger for a prescreen. This allowed the researcher to ask initial questions and served only as a filter, making sure the individuals met criteria for inclusion.

Invitation, informed consent, and data collection processes. Once candidates for the study were selected and agreed to participate through Facebook Messenger, the participants were also emailed an informed consent form. This form was an important part of the research process because it was imperative. This form explained to the

participant the process and purpose of the study, terms and conditions of participation, and it also informed them of their protected confidentiality (Creswell, 2015). The form was emailed out to each participant using hellosign.com allowing for a digital signature. The participants also received a downloadable copy of their signed consent form through hellosign.com.

Once a form had been received, the researcher contacted each participant to schedule a 20-minute interview. Participants were allowed to choose a time convenient to them using calendly.com, an online scheduler, or any other method of choice that worked for both researcher and participant. Some opted to schedule their times directly inside of Facebook Messenger. When online scheduler was used, it sent out calendar links and reminder emails notifying the participants that their interview was forthcoming. The interviews themselves were conducted via Zoom. Zoom is a web-based conferencing system that allows for audio and video meetings. This platform was available on all operating systems and mobile devices making it easy for the researcher and each participant to meet at a designated time using a unique join link. The Zoom meetings were also recorded.

Interview approach. As stated, Zoom, an Internet-based conferencing software was used to conduct the semistructured interviews at the previously agreed upon time. The researcher used adapted interview questions from previous research. Each interview was recorded using audio and video software when applicable. To ensure anonymity of the participants, they each were assigned pseudonyms for themselves and their business names when appropriate. Their pseudonyms were Participants One-Five.

It was important that the researcher asked open-ended research questions during the interviews. This followed the protocol for qualitative research, and allowed the

participants to give answers from an authentic place (Creswell, 2008). While the Interview Questions were structured, and each participant was asked the same set of questions, the researcher intended to use follow-up questions and probes as needed in order to seek clarity when it was called for.

Data analysis procedures. Each audio and/or video interview was recorded using Zoom's internal software, audio recorded, and transcribed verbatim using Rev.com, a paid transcription service. Each participant was given a password protected file on cloud based Google Drive. Participants were granted access to their interviews and they were asked to confirm their accuracy within 7 days of the date received. Participants were also allowed to add to or clarify any statements made in their interview that may have seemed ambiguous or ill representations of their true thoughts and opinions. The researcher asked that any additions or retractions be made within 7 days of receipt of transcript. As stated, the Research Questions for this stud were as follows:

Research Question 1. What are the experiences of women entrepreneurs who have undergone one-on-one business coaching to build their brand?

Research Question 2. What are the clients' perceptions of their one-on-one coaching experience?

Research Question 3. In what ways did the experience contribute to or support their efforts towards full-time entrepreneurship?

Qualitative methods of inquiry to collect data. Upon receipt of data, the researcher analyzed the data using a color-coding process to reveal emergent themes and relationships between the participants' responses. In qualitative research, coding refers to categorization of any emergent themes, ideas, patterns, and processes that may result from the data collected (Glesne, 2016). These themes, ideas, patterns, and processes

were then used to make inferences regarding similarities and differences of the lived experiences of the participants (Glesne, 2016). The analysis was expected to reveal similar trends and recurring patterns among the female entrepreneurs selected to participate. Samples of coding process were included in the Appendices of this study (see Appendix B). The specific method of coding used was Colaizzi's (1971) method. Colaizzi's method was chosen because it was believed that it is the researcher's duty to release preconceptions and personal desire to control the narrative of the research (Colaizzi, 1978). As a coach herself, the researcher must absolutely adhere to this philosophical perspective. By bracketing these assumptions, beliefs, and attitudes, the researcher can proceed with the study without bias that may influence the outcome (Colaizzi, 1978). Colaizzi's (1978) seven-step process is as follows:

1. The researcher is first to read and reread each individual participant's transcript in order to get an overarching idea about the entirety of the content.

2. The researcher will then identify and extract statements of significance with regards to the phenomenon being researched and the research questions.

3. The meanings of each statement should be constructed. This will require much intuitive insight from the researcher.

While video was not a requirement to participate in this study, video of each interview was taken when allowed by participant. This way, the researcher had the ability to view footage and evaluate any significant body language. According to Mehrabian's seminal work of 1971, 93% of communication is nonverbal. Therefore, video was able to play a heavy role in the data analysis because it was the researcher's goal to not only listen to or read the words, but also to observe the participant's nonverbal signs as well.

4. Examine data again and assign each constructed meaning into a categories or clusters of emerging themes. It was important to note that the researcher must constantly refer back to the original answers to ensure no data were left out and the themes were authentic and within context of the participants' original responses. Contradicting themes still needed to be included because they were representative of the lived experience.

5. The final findings of the study should be unified into a comprehensive description of the phenomenon. Colaizzi (1978) noted that this exhaustive description should culminate from the previous 4 Steps of the analysis process.

6. The exhaustive description is then to be broken down even further into a more concise, more concrete statement of the fundamental structure of the phenomenon being researched.

7. The final step is to validate the findings by returning back to the participants to confirm that the analysis of the data accurately represents their experience.

Ethical Considerations

IRB Guidelines. In research, there are often ethical risks. According to Creswell (2013), qualitative research can have greater ethical risks because of the direct involvement required to conduct the study. Researchers and participants have an almost shared responsibility in the outcome of the research. To alleviate risks, the researcher maintained guidelines as set forth by the Institutional Review Board, which aimed to protect human subjects.

Informed Consent and disclosure. All participants were notified of the objective of the study prior to the study through the Informed Consent document. This document explained the purpose of the study, how it would be used, and that participation would not be solicited under coercion and that the interview was 100% voluntary. Participants

were also given free will to opt out of the study at any time. Participants received a copy of the consent form via email, and a copy was also uploaded into their private, password protected Google Drive folder for their review at any time.

Confidentiality. The participants' identities were protected and confidentiality and anonymity of participants ensured by assigning pseudonyms to the individuals as well as their businesses. All data were coded and analyzed during the data analysis portion of the research study. The data were analyzed for emergent themes against each other and those themes were reported on as a whole, instead of by individual to create a more comprehensive overview, thus no one participant should be easily identified using these methods (Creswell, 2013).

Trustworthiness

Member checking. It is important that the researcher ensure data collected during the study and the analysis of said data represented true findings. Creswell (2015) noted that credibility of research findings can be established by checking the accuracy of data collected with the participants. T he researcher intended to utilize member checking to do this by giving participants' access to the video file, audio file, and transcription their interview to ensure accuracy. As stated, during the data collection process participants were asked to confirm their accuracy within 7 days of the date received. Participants were also allowed to add to or clarify any statements made in their interview that may seem ambiguous and they were allowed to offer further clarity of their questions in writing within 7 days of receipt of the aforementioned files.

Triangulation. The researcher also used triangulation to corroborate the data collected. Triangulation occurs when all data are analyzed and used as evidence to support overarching themes (Creswell, 2015). By doing this, the researcher used the

participants' answers as multiple sources to reinforce emergent ideas.

Limitations

Creswell (2013) stated that case studies involving interviews can present limitations. This study only reported on the experience from the clients' perspectives, without direct input from the coaches themselves. This study also did not include the exact coaching processes, which contributed to the clients' experience. It did not account for or include the details of the coaching calls, just an overall experience based on the clients' perceptions.

The size of the sample could be another limitation, because five participants would not likely reach the point of true saturation. These five experiences might not be transferable to all online entrepreneurial experiences. The participants on this study were found on Facebook. Thus, it did not allow for inclusion of the experiences of other entrepreneurs who perhaps did not use this platform.

Threats to Validity

There may also have been threats to validity in this research design. While Maxwell (2004) identified five major threats: descriptive validity, interpretation validity, researcher bias, theory validity, and reactivity, in this particular study, the most prevalent threat was researcher bias. The researcher had been on both sides of the equation with regards to this particular phenomenon and experience. The researcher was a business coach, and worked with a business coach when starting her own business. Thus, the researcher's experience could be deemed as a potential bias. However, the researcher understood that everyone's experiences and perceptions can be different and therefore did not allow her own experiences to guide this study. Therefore to manage any potential, subconscious bias, the researcher used a structured interview system and asked the same

research questions to each participant using Colliazi's (1978) bracketing technique to identify personal feelings regarding the phenomenon prior to conducting interviews.

Summary

This chapter discussed the rationale for choosing this research design and qualitative methodology. Chapter 3 also described the researcher's chosen sampling and criteria for inclusion regarding the participants of this study. As evidenced, appropriate data collection approaches were taken and ethical considerations were used in order to protect the anonymity of the participants of this research. This chapter outlined the ways in which the researcher chose to analyze the data collected.

Chapter 4: Findings

Introduction

This study used qualitative inquiry to understand the experiences of women entrepreneurs who had undergone one-on-one business coaching to build their brand. Further, the purpose of this exploration was to do a deep dive into the nonquantifiable aspects of online entrepreneurial success as well as to explore how the coaching process allowed clients to experience the process through the theoretical framework of the Boyatzis (2006) Intentional Change Theory.

The researcher chose a qualitative phenomenology approach because it allowed the researcher to objectively dive deep into a people who have undergone a particular experience, or phenomenon (Glesne, 2016). The participants of this study were able to narrate their shared experience of receiving one-on-one business coaching. Creswell (2016) also noted that phenomenologies work best with a small number of participants from a homogenous population. For this study, the researcher selected five participants who met the following criteria: full-time online entrepreneur, female, and who had undergone a one-on-one business-coaching program. The interview consisted of six structured questions. Participants' responses were recorded and transcribed for analysis.

The researcher conducted a pilot study prior to recruitment. This allowed the researcher to gauge whether or not there were gaps and weaknesses in the interview design. Based on the pilot interviews, it was anticipated that the original questions were sufficient in gleaning answers to Research Questions of this study. Participants were solicited and Participation Consent documents were obtained.

Background of Participants

The five women selected for this study where those who had received one-on-one

coaching from a business coach, and who resigned from their places of full-time employment within the last 5 years. This was a purposeful sample; all participants recruited were from Facebook Groups dedicated specifically to female entrepreneurs. In selecting the participants, there was no restriction on the type of online entrepreneur, meaning, the participants came from a variety of industries, as noted. The participants also varied in race. Two participants were Caucasian, two were African American, and one Asian. Privacy and confidentiality were maintained throughout the entire process. Names were not used, and each participant was assigned a number according to the order in which each individual was interviewed. This section highlighted their backgrounds and provided additional insight into their industries.

Participant 1. Participant 1 was an online Psychic Medium. She provided clarity and healing to those who sought guidance from their spirit guides and loved ones. She originally had no intention of becoming a full-time online entrepreneur, but her business grew in such a way that it made financial sense to explore that possibility.

Participant 2. Participant 2 was a Digital Marketing Strategist. She herself was a coach of sorts because she helped business owners build an online presence so that they could use the online space to gain clients. She built her business out of necessity because she could not find a full-time job after graduating from college with two degrees.

Participant 3. Participant 3 used the title Abundance Coach. She helped women learn the power of investing in themselves in order to be spiritually, emotionally, and financially successful. She was also a motivational speaker, and hosted annual events that empowered women.

Participant 4. Participant 4 was a Certified Life Coach who transitioned into somewhat of a Business Coach herself. She supported females and helped them curate a

business that was successful and also personal. Recently, however, she had chosen to take a break from her coaching practice to open up an online toiletries shop for men.

Participant 5. Participant 5 considered herself a Brand Therapist. She supported transformational leaders in their efforts to become well known and recognized as experts in their industry by creating personal brand profiles that were in alignment with each individual's strengths and beliefs.

Presentation of Findings

The Research Questions guiding this study are:

Research Question 1. What are the experiences of female online entrepreneurs who have undergone one-on-one business coaching to build their brand?

Research Question 2. What are the clients' perceptions of their virtual one-on-one coaching experience?

Research Question 3. In what ways did the experience contribute to or support their efforts towards full-time entrepreneurship?

Guided by phenomenological research inquiry, structured interviews of participants provided answers to the aforementioned Research Questions regarding (a) experience of online business coaching, (b) clients' perception of the coaching process, and (c) also supported the phenomenon of business coaching and contributions of success into full-time entrepreneurship. The findings of this study indicated that participants' perceptions of coaching were quite different from beginning to end. In the onset, many of them revealed their doubt and unfamiliarity with online business coaching. All of the five participants hired coaches for very similar reasons and gained quite a bit of knowledge after the coaching process was over. Further, they also revealed that there were elements to the business coaching experience that had nothing to do with actual

business tactics and strategies. Data analysis of interviews regarding the experience of online entrepreneurs who had worked one-on-one with business coaches revealed four emergent themes: skepticism, desire for business growth, need for proof of success, self-awareness, and investment. These emergent themes were clustered together from subcategories gleaned from the participants' interviews and consisted of shared experiences from their previous business coaching experiences. In addition to the main emergent themes, there were several subcategories, as outlined in the Table.

Table

Clusters of Emergent Themes

Emergent theme	Subcategories
Skepticism	Overrated Money Grab Unfamiliarity
Desire for business growth	Financial Goals Support in Execution Speed
Proof of success	Evidence of Expertise Testimonials Transparency
Self-Awareness	Mindset Fear Alignment
Investment	Time Money

The goal of this study was to relate the experiences of women online entrepreneurs who had undergone one-on-one business coaching to build their brand and enter into a space of full-time entrepreneurship. As a result of the data analysis, the

following themes and subcategories emerged, relevant to their experience.

Theme 1: Skepticism

Participants were asked what their perceptions were of online business coaching prior to actually pursuing or receiving coaching for themselves. The main theme that emerged from this part of the process was skepticism, with 4 out of 5 of the participants expressing this perception. There was a lack of familiarity with the process, which led many of the participants to believe the industry as a whole was too good to be true. Participant 1 stated that she believed it to be a money grab:

> I thought it was a money grab, because when I first . . . When I saw what women were charging, for me it was all about the money and all of my money blocks came up, because I just couldn't believe that people were charging the kind of money. I saw a lot of the Internet marketing side of things. It felt to me just very disingenuous . . . it felt like a big scam, a big scheme.

Participant 5 went as far as to say that she believed the whole business-coaching phenomenon was complete bullshit. She went through an extensive training program to become a life coach, yet there were all of these women online claiming to be business coaches, charging thousands of dollars for their services, but had no formal training, causing her to be distrustful of industry as a whole.

Other participants' skepticism came from a lack of familiarity with the process. Participant 2 explained how the world of online coaching was completely new to her prior to her seeking out her own coach. Participant 3 felt that business coaching was overrated and unnecessary to her since she came from a multilevel marketing background and already understood basic business practice. Participant 3 stated:

I felt that it was overrated in the beginning. I'm going to be totally honest.
Because I was thinking to myself I don't need no one to teach me how to do
business. I had a successful business prior to the business that I have now . . . I
was in Mary Kay for a while and became one of the elite directors in the company
. . . Becoming a Lifestyle and Abundance Coach, I'm thinking to myself I don't
need no . . . I know the ropes.

The interviews revealed that, for many of them, they each experienced some level
of skepticism prior to choosing to pursue a business coach. Some of even believed the
entire system was a swindle for money, while others were skeptical because of lack of
knowledge of the industry as a whole. Ultimately, this was not enough to hinder them
from pursuing a business coach.

Theme 2: Desire for Business Growth

While the majority of the participants were skeptical about the process, all of the
participants explained that their reason for pursuing a coach was because they had a
desire to grow their online businesses. They simply realized they needed a coach to
achieve that. Many of them were not familiar with the process, or what it would take to
reach a level of success that would allow them to leave their corporate careers for good.
They believed that finding a good business coach would give them the tools they needed
to achieve financial success, gain more clients, execute action plans, and grow their
businesses quicker than if they had to do it alone.

Financial goals. Achieving financial success was one of the subcategories that
emerged for many of the participants during the interview process. Participant 5 stated
that generating revenue was a key reason for her decision to pursue an online business

coach. Participant 4 stated affirmatively that she pursued a business coach to get clients.

Participant 3 believed:

> In order to truly elevate in this industry, you have to have a coach. There's just no
>
> if, ands, or buts about it. Yes, there are women who are doing it, but they're going
>
> to hit glass ceilings. They're not going to catapult into that quantum leap of
>
> making that six or seven figure income without a coach.

Support in execution. In order to grow their businesses, all of the
participants expressed that execution and taking action was key. They felt that a business
coach would give them necessary support and strategies to be able to do so. Participant 1
had very little business sense prior to becoming an online entrepreneur. She stated that
she was a person who needed a coach because she prefers the one-on-one support.
During the interview, she mentioned how she likes to "have somebody that's holding me
and supporting me and teaching me, so that I don't have to figure it all out on my own."
Participant 2 believed that having someone who could relate their experiences of starting
an online business would help her. She stated that she desired to work with a coach "who
could share with me their experience, so that I could avoid any pitfalls that they had."

Further, this personalized support was the major element of the coaching
experience that led to full-time entrepreneurship, according to the participants.
Participant 2 believed that the coach's championing of her success was a contributing
factor to her being able to quit her corporate job. She said her coach was able to relate to
her entrepreneurial journey. She recalls her coach being the one to say:

> Look, I get it. I know how you feel. I was there. But, this is how I pushed
>
> through that and I see that in you. Just seeing a potential that I know is within me,

but it's laying dormant and it takes a coach to dig that out of you. I look at a

coach as a miner digging the diamond out of your soul or out of your potential,

out of your gifts, your talents. God's given all of us a gift or a talent to use.

Participant 4 had a similar experience. She shared:

I think it was a push. Like, You could do this. I'm on your side. I will help you .

. . I will be that person pushing you up the hill when you don't feel like you could

go. That, alone, is the biggest thing about coaching, I think, for me.

Speed. One of the subcategories that emerged regarding business growth was the

participants' desire to do this quickly and their belief that hiring a business coach would

allow them to achieve that desire. Participant 2 stated that she "wanted to short cut my

success. I didn't want to waste a lot of time." Participant 5 said that she was "ready to

get some support to get moving, and accelerate the process."

Although skeptical in the onset, each of the participants had business growth

goals that they believed required some coaching to achieve. They acknowledged that

monetary goals and obtaining clients would happen faster if they had the support of a

business coach, providing reason enough to set aside any skepticism and hire a business

coach.

Theme 3: Proof of Success

As noted, the clients' precoaching perceptions of business coaches and the

business coaching industry involved skepticism. Because of this, it appeared that prior to

choosing to hire their specific business coach, the clients needed evidence, or some sort

of proof of the legitimacy of the coach and their process. When asked if there were

particular reasons for selecting an individual business coach, Participants' answers

typically fell under one of the three sub-categories: evidence of expertise, testimonials, and transparency.

Evidence of expertise. Before signing up to work with a coach, some of the participants explained the need to see evidence of the coach's expertise. They wanted to know if the coach had the knowledge in the area of specialized interest in which she claimed to be coaching. This was a key factor for Participant 4 who recalled that, "She had a sense of authority within her Facebook group and within her Facebook posts that I felt a sense of authority." Further, Participant 4 explained that in order to hire a coach it was important that the person being hired as a business coach needed "to know business. They need to have had a business before."

Testimonials. Testimonials from previous clients were additional methods used by the participants. They appreciated seeing the social proof and Participant 4 used these "success stories" as a deciding factor. Participant 5 appreciated testimonies from people she knew personally, stating:

> The business coach, I selected her because she actually had proven results. She had testimonies. I know several of her clients that are really making some money. They're personal girlfriends of mine, so I knew they weren't pulling my leg. You know what I'm saying? When you actually know the person? Because a lot of times online . . . This is the problem with online. You look at it you're like, Yeah, they're just pulling your leg. They just saying that because they want you to buy, but when you know the person that they're actually coaching, it's way different. You know what I'm saying? So, the trust factor was there.

Transparency. Not all participants mentioned this concept directly but, based on their other responses, the researcher believed that this was a critical element needed when

choosing a coach. Participant 2 stated how much she appreciated when her soon-to-be coach was transparent about the behind the scenes elements of her business, revealing how the money was actually being made. Participant 4 stated that her coach "broke down the numbers, so I saw what the numbers that she had, and that's what a big part of my decision of choosing to work with her." Participant 4 also went on to say this was so important to her that she makes sure that she practices this in her business as well so that her "audience continued to see that [she] had that transparency."

For Participant 5, transparency appeared in the form of personal connection and resonance. Participant 5 was the type of entrepreneur who used a level of new age spirituality in her business, and alignment was an important factor. Getting on the telephone to have a conversation with a coach prospect allowed her to have personal time to ask questions about the process. She stated that there was an instant ease of connection as soon as they got on the phone and the answers provided by the business coach "reaffirmed what [she] was thinking." Meaning, this coaching relationship would be a good fit.

Because of their desire to grow in business, and realizing that acquiring support from a business coach may be the best answer, the participants needed to set aside skepticism and find a well-suited option. The three methods listed, evidence of expertise, testimonials, and transparency, were used by the participants to build the trust required to hire the coach of their choice.

Theme 4: Self-Awareness

In analyzing the data, the researcher found that each of the study's participants experienced a sense of self-awareness in one way or another. For Participant 1, she stated that during the coaching process she learned a great deal about herself, what she

desired in a coach, and what to look for when should she ever felt the need to hire another. Participant 2 echoed that sentiment because her initial business coaching experience left her needing a bit more, as she noted:

> I didn't find that it was as direct as what I was expecting. I was hoping to get a, Here's where you're starting. This is what you need to do in order to get to this place. I felt like it was a little bit more, This is everything you need, now you've got to figure out how to pull it together to get what you need out of it. So that was sort of the difference between what I kind of expected and what I got . . . It was a 12-month program. Around the 3 or 4 month mark, I decided that I wasn't going to get out of that quite what I was expecting. I could use it to sort of supplement everything else I was doing . . . I just started looking for personal weaknesses and then I hired (another coach) based on that.

Thus, her sense of self-awareness was similar to Participant 1 in that she was able to figure out what kind of coaching structure would work best for her moving forward.

Participants 3, 4, and 5 had gained self-awareness that was a bit more personal as opposed to Participant 1 and 2 experiencing professional self-awareness. Participant 3 candidly stated that "growth is not comfortable," and this growth is very much a part of the coaching process. In order for them to reach new levels in their business, coaches often asked them to operate differently than they had in the past. Participant 4 summed it up:

> When you're going through any type of business growth, like it really brings up a lot. Especially, for women. Self-worth, and this, the act of being responsible for things is really . . . All of these things, other than just straight marketing, came up.

Participant 5 found fast success with her business coach, but then realized that business came to a sudden halt after only a few weeks. She recalls, "It went on a standstill because I had [personal] lessons I needed to learn."

Investment

The final theme to materialize during data analysis was a sense that their decision to participate in one-on-one coaching was an investment of both time and money. The cost to sign up for a coaching program can be quite pricey and can depend on many factors. Participant 2 was the only participant to mention the monetary value of her 12-month coaching program during the interview. She revealed that she paid $8,000. Participant 1 admits that these high-ticket prices can be a turn off. However, from believing that coaching to be a "money grab" in the beginning of her journey and prior to obtaining coaching herself, she now encourages other aspiring entrepreneurs to not be afraid of such an investment, even if it ends up being one that they may later regret, as she noted:

> I would say the biggest thing for me is to not be afraid to make a bad investment, because out of the quote, unquote bad investments I've made, I've almost learned more [and in that way] they can be more beneficial.

Participant 2 affirmed the need to invest in an individual's business in general, including hiring coaches and consultants because, as she stated:

> There's not a magic button. There's no magic pill. You also have to look at a business like a business. It's going to have expenses. It's something that, it does require investing, but it's important to just kind of look at it as what it is. It's a business and it's not a hobby.

Thus, the participants in this study believed that working with business coaches, at least

at the very beginning of an individual's entrepreneurial journey, was a necessary

investment. It was an operational cost just like any other.

Summary

This study was designed to understand the experiences of women entrepreneurs

who had undergone one-on-one business coaching to build their brand. The participants

of this study included five full-time online entrepreneurs of different niches. The analysis

of the participants' data resulted in the emergence of five themes.

This chapter included a summary of the participants' backgrounds and the

findings of the study in accordance with results ascertained during data analysis. It was

interesting to note that while the participants came from a variety of personal and

professional backgrounds, as well as different entrepreneurial industries, their

experiences working with business coaches were quite similar, and they shared many

commonalities in the lived experience. The findings of this study indicated that prior to

pursuing a one-on-one coaching program, there was a level of skepticism held due to lack

of understanding and experience with this field of work. The participants also shared

common reasons for deciding to work with a business coach. Generally, they had a

desire to grow their online businesses. The participants also revealed that because of

initial skepticism, evidence of proof of success was an important factor in the decision to

hire a coach, and that decision was one that contributed significantly to their ability to

leave previous corporate careers and pursue online entrepreneurship full-time.

Throughout the coaching process, they learned about business and online strategies, as

well as growing in the area of self-awareness. Despite prior doubts regarding business

coaches, each Participant believed that the coaching they received was an investment, and

one that all online business owners should consider obtaining. These results will be

further examined in Chapter 5, which will present an indepth discussion of the findings.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Overview of the Research

The purpose of this study was to understand the perceptions of the one-on-one business coaching experience from the perspective of the client. Through qualitative methodology, using interview protocol, the researcher sought to explore the phenomenon of online entrepreneurs who had worked with one-on-one business coaches in their pursuit of full-time entrepreneurship. The investigation was designed to explore female entrepreneurs' perceptions regarding if and how enrolling in a business-coaching program contributed to their successful transition from previous 9am-5pm type jobs to becoming online entrepreneurs. Female entrepreneurship was on the rise, yet published scholarly research highlighting this phenomenon hds been declining since the 1990s (Jennings & Brush, 2013). This study sought to add more recent empirical data to the body of literature concerning this topic. Chapter 5 summarizes the findings and gives insight into how the study answered the original Research Questions. This chapter also provides implications of these findings and recommendations for future research.

Summary of Findings

The Research Questions in this study were designed to understand the experience of female online entrepreneurs who had undergone one-on-one business coaching. The study was guided by the following central research questions:

Research Question 1. What are the experiences of female online entrepreneurs who had undergone one-on-one business coaching to build their brand?

Research Question 2. What are the clients' perceptions of their virtual one-on-one coaching experience?

Research Question 3. In what ways did the experience contribute to or support their efforts towards full-time entrepreneurship?

In order to gain answers to these Research Questions, the researcher conducted structured interviews with questions that allowed the five participants to articulate their experiences of the coaching process. Through analysis of the data, the researcher summarized their lived experiences in five emergent themes: skepticism, desire for business growth, evidence of success, self-awareness, and investment. The themes that emerged seemed to be chronological in nature. In other words, from introduction to the world of business coaching, to personal pursuit, and final thoughts regarding the process, it appeared that the participants experienced each of these themes in succession.

Research Question 1. What are the experiences of female online entrepreneurs who have undergone one-on-one business coaching to build their brand? Based upon comprehensive data analysis, findings suggest that there are similar perceptions held for the duration of the experience. Interestingly, each of the participants assumed a level of skepticism in the onset. Interviews revealed that they were quite leery of the business coaching industry as a whole, even those who were looking to become business coaches themselves in a certain capacity. Although similarities of skepticism emerged, data revealed that the skepticism was rooted in different areas of doubt. For some, it was seen as a get rich quick money grab, for others it was simply their lack of knowledge of the industry. Based on this study, no formal all encompassing reason could be concluded as to why this skepticism existed, only that it did.

The research also indicated that female online entrepreneurs despite initial skepticism pursued a coach when they realized they needed one. Thus, the level of doubt held in the beginning seemed to be overshadowed by their personal desires. The

researcher extrapolated that there were some aspirational elements to what the coach offered, especially the potential for financial success, which was attractive to the participant. These financial desires to gain more clients, increase income, and leave their corporate jobs then propelled each of them to pursue a coach. Another reason participants decided to work with an online business coach was because of the level of support a coach was able to provide them. For the once aspiring, now legitimized full-time entrepreneurs interviewed in this study, it was evident that this was a critical factor. They were looking for a coach that could offer assistance with business processes and procedures as related to launching an online business and achieving financial success enough so that they were able to replace their income with that gained from being an online entrepreneur.

Further, the data revealed that an aspiring entrepreneur would hire a coach only after they were able to see some proof of the coach's success. The reason for this was likely because of their initial skepticism about the online business coaching experience. Prior to being hired, the coach must establish themselves as an expert in their field. The coaches' personal successes were not enough to indicate that their processes were transferable to others. It was important that the coaches provided social proof in the form of previous client testimonials and transparency with regard to their business practices.

Research Question 2. What are the clients' perceptions of their virtual one-on-one business coaching experience? As indicated by the findings, the overall perception of the business coaching experience was a positive one. The participants felt that their business coaches were able to offer business support in the form of strategy, marketing tactics, and procedural next-steps types of instruction, which was the very reason why they were hired. The participants also indicated that encouragement was something that

their business coaches also provided, and they believed that to be a vital piece to their entrepreneurial success puzzle. This encouragement was extremely instrumental to helping the participants overcome self-doubt, fear, and uncomfortability in this new space.

Secondly, the coaching experience allowed the women to gain a level of self-awareness they did not once have. Although the participants indicated that they received encouragement, throughout the process, some realized that their initial business coaches were either not enough, or did not have the capabilities of handling all of the extracurricular issues that sprung up as a result of growing a business. Entrepreneurship was not always an easy road to navigate and business knowledge was not all that was needed to do so. Women needed to be encouraged, empowered, and supported, but all of this must be done relative to the individual. There were many different styles of learning and leadership. The data indicated that these were two elements that must be considered in a coaching relationship.

Research Question 3. In what ways did the experience contribute to or support their efforts towards full-time entrepreneurship? As a result of this study, it was concluded that participants believed coaching to be an absolutely necessary part of business growth, and critical to the pursuit of full-time entrepreneurship. Participants were all in agreement that their business coach afforded them the opportunity to venture into full-time online entrepreneurs because of the coaches' personal support, knowledge regarding the online business building process, and ability to convey that to the client. However, it was important to note that everyone's first business coach was not the one that always resulted in success large enough to leave corporate America. After overcoming skepticism, realizing the need for a coach in order to meet certain goals,

hiring one, and then going through the entire process, the findings indicated that to online entrepreneurs, hiring a coach was considered an investment, like any other, and an essential expense that occurred in business. Some investments pan out, and some simply do not. Data analysis of this study revealed that even though the first coach may not be the best one, to those in the online space, it was still considered a good investment because of what could be gleaned from the experience. To the participants, even if the only thing they learned was that this was not the right coach and coaching style for them, that was enough to be considered a positive return on their investment.

Implications of Findings

Entrepreneurship, specifically female entrepreneurship, is on the rise, according to the 2014 State of Women-Owned Businesses Report commissioned by American Express OPEN women-owned businesses has grown by 68% from 1997-2014. American Express's 2015 Report showed 74% increase from 1997-2015. This is an average of just under 900 new women-owned business ventures commencing everyday, and the statistics suggested that the numbers would continue to climb in the near future. Moreover, this consistent exit of women from the corporate world to the entrepreneurial one shows a great need for more coaches and mentors, the lack of which serves a barrier to entry for women who desire to pursue entrepreneurship (EMKF, 2014; Laukhuf & Malone 2015). Providing empirical evidence regarding how coaching can contribute to entrepreneurial success is highly beneficial.

Aspiring online entrepreneurs. As per this study, it was evident that online entrepreneurs often experience a level of skepticism prior to engaging and enrolling in a one-on-one business coaching program. Aspiring entrepreneurs have goals, but their doubt stems from not knowing if a business coach can legitimately provide support

needed to achieve those goals. This study provided empirical evidence that support garnered and business strategies learned from undertaking an online business coaching program can lead to achievement of desired results, financial and otherwise. Through this research, online entrepreneurs may now know what type of evidences to look for when hiring a coach. In this study, the participants made mention of the fact that social proof played a role in allowing them to choose the coach with whom they worked. Evidence of their expertise through testimonials and transparency were major factors.

Online Business Coaches. This study benefited the online coaching industry in many ways. For example, simply understanding the process a person goes through from being a potential client to a paying one was important. The business coach could use the five themes identified in this study in their business practices. Online coaches have to constantly produce content in the online space in order to attract clients (Holliman & Rowley, 2014). If a business coach realizes that the first step in the process is generally skepticism, as indicated by this study, the coach would be able to address it in their content before it becomes an objection. In addition, business coaches who serve the population this study examined would also be able to use this research as a tool and enable them to develop useful coaching curricula in their own practices, particularly as it serves female entrepreneurs. This research indicated that self-awareness was something that coaching clients often experienced, yet business coaches were not always equipped to provide support in that area because it was more of a life-coaching role. Thus, business coaches may see the need to either further their training and certifications to address this. On the other hand, business coaches may want to stay in their field, but suggested or recommended that their clients seek support from other coaches in this area in tandem to growing their online business. A coach may also wish to bring in a

colleague who specializes in this area to assist their clients with these issues and insights as they arise.

Further, while there was documentation that provided evidence of success among large corporations who had used executive coaches, there was a paucity in empirical evidence that supported the experience of one-on-one coaching specifically as it related to the female entrepreneur (Audet & Couteret, 2012). Therefore this study shed light on the validity of the coaching industry as a whole, specifically as it related to female online entrepreneurs and online business coaches. This benefitted anyone interested in working in either of these two industries.

It is important to identify that the results of this study proved that learning styles and leadership styles matter, and they should be considered from both coach and client perspective prior to entering into a professional relationship. Andres and Akan (2015) indicated that learning style affects how student receives and retains information. Leadership style, or the behavioral approach, as described by Northouse (2015), affected how a leader influenced their followers. Coaches, in this regard, were leaders and they must remember to make note of clients' learning styles in order to support them in getting the best outcome.

Recommendations for Future Study

Varied setting. This research was limited to five female online entrepreneurs. Further research should be conducted to explore the lived experiences of other entrepreneurs who may not operate their entire businesses in the online space. Additional research in this area has the possibility to generate a more comprehensive analysis of similarities and differences amongst all types of entrepreneurs, not merely those who are digital.

It is important to recognize that not all entrepreneurs become successful, even those who have experienced one-on-one business coaching. According to Green (2014), only about 10% of startups will succeed. Although Boss (2015) suggested that employing a business coach could mitigate factors that lead to failure, the reality is, not all who experience one-on-one coaching will succeed. It would be beneficial to further this research and conduct a study on the lived experiences of those who hired coaches yet were not successful in their entrepreneurial journey.

Male entrepreneurs. Another area for supplementary research would be to examine the lived experiences of male coaches and male entrepreneurs. This type of study could generate more insight and offer a comparative inquiry regarding whether the same succession of processes are experienced by men. If not, the study would give insight into any differences between genders.

Deeper analysis of emergent themes. In this study, there were five major emergent themes extracted from the data. It would be interesting to do deep dive exploration into how each one plays a part in the journey to entrepreneurial success.

Limitations

During the completion of this research, a few limitations were identified that may require future research. Participation of this study was limited to five women who have undergone one-on-one business coaching to grow their businesses. Since receiving coaching, these women have left their previous full-time places of employment and replaced their income with monies earned an online entrepreneur. There is a chance that this small sample size can limit confidence in the research findings. Further, recruitment to participate in this study was done using a purposeful sampling technique on Facebook. Therefore, the data do not reflect the entire population of online entrepreneurs that this

study intended to reflect and could include areas of subjectivity. This study was limited
to the business coaching niche and not the entire coaching industry. Thus, the findings of
this study may not be transferrable to other sectors.

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Appendix A

Interview Guide

Interview Guide

1. I want to understand business coaching from your perspective: let's start with your understanding of business coaching. What were your perceptions of the field of business coaching before you sought one?

2. Can you give me a brief history of what led you to pursue a business coach? What specific goals did you have when beginning the process?

3. Is there a particular reason that you selected your business coach?

4. Tell me about your experience working with your coach?

5. At this time, you are a full time entrepreneur. What specific aspects of business coaching were critical to this outcome?

6. Is there anything else about your business coaching experience that you would like to share?

Appendix B

Coding Sample

Coding Sample

Participant	Question 1	Question 2	Question 3	Question 4	Question 4	Question 6
	I want to understand business coaching from your perspective: let's start with your understanding of business coaching. What were your perceptions of the field of business coaching before you sought one?	Can you give me a brief history of what led you to pursue a business coach? What specific goals did you have when beginning the process?	Is there a particular reason that you selected your business coach?	Tell me about your experience working with your coach?	At this time, you are a full time entrepreneur. What specific aspects of business coaching were critical to this outcome?	Is there anything else about your health coaching experience that you would like to share?
TWO	The whole world of online coaching was kind of new to me before I hired my first coach. Before I got a coach, I thought that a business coach would help me, obviously, set up some of the technical aspects, like business formation and making sure I had the right licenses and stuff like that. Also, kind of putting together the traditional things: a business plan, setting up a revenue plan, and marketing strategy, and all of those things that you kind of learn in college that's necessary to get a business going.	Surprisingly, it was because I had started ... I actually had reached out to a friend who was successful in business, and asked him if he would coach me. His response was right now he was working too hard in his business to take on anyone. I'd even offered to pay him. I was like, "Just let me know how much it will cost." I really wanted to hire him. Because he wasn't interested, I started looking for someone else, because my idea was I wanted to short cut my success. I didn't want to waste a lot of time. .	Honestly, I wanted to find someone who looked like me, who could share with me their experience, so that I could avoid any pitfalls that they had, being someone that was of my culture primarily because of the monetary [claims 00:03:15]. She claimed that she had sold a business and, I guess, sold it for a million dollars, or somewhere close to that. Anyway, a million dollar business. And that she had created several successful businesses. She broke down the numbers, so I saw what the numbers that she had, and that's what a big part of my decision of choosing to work with her.	I signed up for a .... Even though initially I wanted a one on one program. I ended up signing up for a 12 month group coaching program. I think, at first, I was a little bit disillusioned, because I, obviously, I wanted to get started as quickly as possible. I thought I was going to hit six figures in the first three months. The process was pretty much her teaching us, and bringing mentors as well, into the space about once a month, and kind of sharing with us their areas of expertise. I didn't find that it was as direct as what I was expecting. I was hoping to get a, "Here's where you're starting. This is what you need to do in order to get to this place." I felt like it was a little bit more, "This is everything you need, now you've got to figure out how to pull it together to get what you need out of it." So that was sort of the difference between what I kind of expected and what I got. . It was a 12 month program. Around the three or four month mark, I decided that I wasn't going to get out of that quite what I was expecting. I could use it to sort of supplement everything else I was doing. That's when I looked for ... I just started looking for personal weaknesses and then I hired (another coach) based on that.	The number one thing was not waiting for someone else to grant me success. Right? I had to focus on the goals that I had and then just start getting things going. Once I realized that if I just started things, then I could reach out and figure out what was going wrong, versus waiting for someone to tell me, "This is what you need." I was like ... That was a huge shift for me to just start going after stuff and honestly, starting to test everything. I started seeing what other people were doing and I just tested it instead of asking them, "Did this work for you?" And get no experience. I just tried it. I tested it. There's stuff that worked really well and there's some stuff that didn't work as well. As things evolved, I started figuring out my own system and I think another one of the things that allowed me to become successful and do what I did, was to continue to turn around and teach what I learned that was working for me. My audience continued to see that I had that transparency. They saw that I was maybe one to two steps ahead of them. But I continued to teach it and even had someone come to me and said, "I was going to work with someone who has lots ... A million dollar business coach,	Yeah, I guess just as an entrepreneur and working with coaches, just remembering that there's not magic button. There's no magic pill. You also have to look at a business like a business. It's going to have expenses. Most businesses, in the first couple of years, don't make a profit. With online businesses, you can quickly come in and make a profit, but you're still going to have expenses. Me, coming to that realization, helped me, because in the first year, I was able to kind of load up on those expenses required, in order to help me have close to 80% margin this year so far. It's something that, it does require investing, but it's important to just kind of look at it as what it is. It's a business and it's not a hobby.