

What is coaching?

Reading and training work well for some ideas and techniques. They work especially well for when learning skills or techniques for solving technical problems. However, when dealing with other people and organizational dynamics, or when you're required to stretch your abilities in a very short amount of time, you might consider a personal coach. Coaches can add introspection, dialectic, goal setting, and shared personal experience to the learning process.

Coaching styles and arrangements vary. In a typical program, you meet with your coach one to four times each month, either in person or by phone. You can set up any arrangement that works for you. Remember that when you work with a coach, you're in charge. The coach is there to ask questions and provide guidance, you're the one doing the work and you're the one who knows how you best learn.

If you're considering a coach, here are a few things to think about:

- Recognize that you'll do most of the work.
- Know what you want to accomplish.
- Know the difference between a facilitator, a trainer, an expert, and a coach, and make sure what you need is a coach.

How does coaching work?

I coach software testers in the areas of performance, automation, and exploratory testing; test team and test project management; and technical leadership. I also coach individuals looking to get started in consulting (part-time or full-time) and who need help with developing products and services, marketing, developing a business structure, and dealing with difficult clients.

The majority of my coaching takes place in formal sessions that we setup. This time is structured to be most effective for you, to help you accomplish your goals. I prefer to meet face-to-face, but I recognize that doing so isn't always possible. With that in mind, it's not uncommon to hold phone meetings, Skype sessions, or Live Meetings if those work better for the client.

"[Michael] has developed test groups and processes from scratch, culminating in solid, dependable teams that were key in several successful implementations. If I had to pick one Leader for a testing organization, Michael would be the person."

-Tom DiBella, VP, Client Services, Interactions

Given the technical nature of software development and the need for clear communication when consulting, it's not uncommon for my coaching to include professional document reviews. Depending on the length and detail of the documents being reviewed, those may need to take place over time and with iterative feedback cycles. For large documents (like strategies, plans, or methodologies - anything over 5 pages), I may charge extra given the amount of time involved in those reviews. For shorter documents or emails, there is no charge.

"[Mike] does not inflict his help on you, he checks in. He does not micromanage you; he offers strong, honest suggestions and lets you decide. He seems to intuitively know your limits and lets you struggle just enough to encourage you to ask for help, and when you do, he jumps in with the kind of reliability, grace, and efficiency reserved for concierges at fine hotels. That's not Mike's 'style', that's just Mike being Mike."

-Jon Bach, VP Conferences, Association for Software Testing

How much does coaching cost?

For clients I meet with more than once a month, I like building formal 90-day coaching plans. This helps for a couple of reasons. First, it tells us if we're making progress. Second, it helps us set expectations for what we think you can reasonably accomplish given the number of times we meet each month. And finally, it can help you get an idea for how much coaching might cost in the long run. I don't expect you to keep me around forever.

In general, you determine how we structure the coaching plan. Once you become a client, you can call, instant message, or email for additional coaching or support outside of our regularly scheduled sessions. I enjoy providing this extra level of service. If I'm not immediately available, I'll usually follow up within 24 hours. If I'm your coach, I'm here to support you how and when you need it.

Pricing will vary based on how frequently you'd like to meet, but it's not uncommon for individuals to pay somewhere between \$250 and \$1,000 a month. For teams where I'm coaching more than one person, there may be discounts based the number of individuals receiving coaching. You don't pay in advance; you pay at the end of each month. If you're not happy with the coaching you've received, then you don't pay me. You control what plan you're on by how often we meet, and you control when we stop. If you'd like to customize any of the plans above, contact me and we'll figure it out together.

"Unusually gifted, [Mike] inspires trust and confidence because he is insightful and really cares. He is dangerously likeable, and leads in the best way -- by doing, humbly setting examples."

-Ross Collard, Owner, Collard & Company

"Mike is a fantastic resource for expert knowledge of all facets of software testing. He is capable of training and mentoring other employees. [...] He is extremely personable and easy-going. His calm under high-pressure situations is a real asset. [...] With or without a title Mike is dedicated to helping others achieve more and is always approachable and helpful."

-Kenneth Petty, PMP

Methodology and Approach

My approach to coaching is based primarily on the works of Gerald Weinberg, Virginia Satir, and VitalSmarts:

Gerald Weinberg has worked for more than half a century to transform software organizations, particularly emphasizing the interactions of technical and human issues. He has an enormous body of published works, and regularly speaks at conferences and provides workshops related to systems thinking, technical leadership, software quality, and organizational change. For me, his most influential works include: *Becoming a Technical Leader*, *Secrets of Consulting*, *More Secrets of Consulting*, his *Quality Software Management* series, and *Introduction to General Systems Thinking*.

Virginia Satir was an author and psychotherapist, known especially for her approach to family therapy. Virginia created the "Virginia Satir - Change Process Model", a psychological model that was developed through clinical studies. I use this model to help people understand how change happens, and why at times it's chaotic. Virginia also created the Self-Esteem Maintenance Toolkit. I leverage this toolkit liberally myself, and help teach others how to use it to be more effective.

VitalSmarts is an organization that provides amazing corporate training for organizational performance. I'm not in any way affiliated with them, but I am a huge fan of their research and work. For me, their two most influential works include *Crucial Conversations: Tools for Talking When Stakes are High* and *Influencer: The Power to Change Anything*. Both of these books provide tools and frameworks for influencing others.

For clients interested in coaching related to getting started with consulting, our focus

"Mike is an independent tester out of Indianapolis. By 'independent' I mean he not only is a self-employed consulting tester, but is a man who insists on re-thinking things in his own way. I love that about him. He once flew out just to work with me for a few days. I put him through a barrage of testing exercises. You can read about it in his blog. The experience convinced me that Mike is one of the most serious students of software testing in the field. One to watch."

-James Bach, Satisfice

in the early stages is often on developing business (sales, marketing, building relationships, etc...), developing products and services, setting prices, techniques for managing multiple clients and projects, and the basics around building a personal business (insurance, incorporation, accounting, etc...).

My approach to software testing is consistent with the seven basic principles of the Context-Drive School of software testing. I work to apply these principles in the way that I teach people to test, and with the teams that I help build:

1. The value of any practice depends on its context.
2. There are good practices in context, but there are no best practices.
3. People, working together, are the most important part of any project's context.
4. Projects unfold over time in ways that are often not predictable.
5. The product is a solution. If the problem isn't solved, the product doesn't work.
6. Good software testing is a challenging intellectual process.
7. Only through judgment and skill, exercised cooperatively throughout the entire project, are we able to do the right things at the right times to effectively test our products.

When approaching performance and automated testing projects, I prefer taking a strategy-driven approach to a tool-driven approach. That means I look first at what performance or automation problems the team is trying to solve, and *then* worry about selecting which tools we can use to accomplish our goals. In general, I prefer open-source and homegrown automation tools to commercial ones, and I look to leverage commercial solutions for performance testing when it makes sense. For both types of testing, I prefer to approach testing from the bottom up, preferably building in automation at the unit and service layer, and automating at the GUI only for acceptance testing or system-level regression testing.

"Mike is perhaps the most forward thinking and productive software tester you'll find. He understands what software testing can do for an organization in a variety of situations, and he can lead a team of testers in delivering that value every time."

-Tate Stuntz, Java Discipline Lead, Fusion Alliance

I teach a skills-based approach to exploratory testing, based mostly on the work of James Bach, John Bach, Cem Kaner, and Michael Bolton. With this approach, I value developing the skills and domain knowledge of the tester more than building out comprehensive testing documentation. When regulatory compliance is required, I work with teams to develop testing processes and solutions that minimize the costs of adhering to those regulations, while maximizing test coverage and minimizing project risk. I prefer to manage the exploratory testing process using session-based test management, and I teach teams how to most effectively integrate session-based test management into their existing software development methodology.

About Mike Kelly

Mike is a Partner at Developer Town - a venture development firm. His focus is software testing, he leads projects for Developer Town, provides consulting services, and regularly provides training publically and for companies. When he consults, his longer engagements include some level of project management and/or test management. He is most passionate about exploratory testing, performance testing, and testing in an agile environment. He writes and speaks about topics in software testing and is a past director and president for the Association for Software Testing and a co-founder of the Indianapolis Workshops on Software Testing, a series of ongoing meetings on topics in software testing.

Contact us today to discuss how we can help you get a fresh perspective on ways to make you and your team more effective.