



# BUSINESS IN NUTRITION COACHING

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- 1 | Explore and describe the most common styles of nutrition coaching.
- 2 | Describe how to write a nutrition coaching business plan.
- 3 | List methods for building clientele.
- 4 | Explain the importance of getting client referrals.

### INDEPENDENT CONTRACTORS:

People contracted to do work or provide services for a company as a nonemployee; the company is not required to provide benefits.

### FREELANCE NUTRITION COACHES:

A nutrition coach who works for themselves.

Nutrition coaches can work as **independent contractors** for a fitness facility, work directly for a health or fitness company, or work for themselves with their own client base. They are also often hired to work as employees in companies and organizations. Gyms and other types of health and fitness companies employ nutrition coaches to work with clients as a part of their services offered. Other companies may have wellness or human resources programs to promote healthy lifestyles. They may hire nutrition coaches to work with their employees.

Coaches choosing to work independently will be both nutrition coaches and small business owners. **Freelance nutrition coaches** work for themselves with their own client base and must develop a business plan, market their services, and find clients. Much of this discussion applies to freelance coaches. However, skills such as social media, marketing, training styles, and the client life cycle apply to all nutrition coaches regardless of employment status.

## STYLES OF NUTRITION COACHING

The first step in starting an independent nutrition coaching business is to determine the style of coaching it will offer and the target client. Many coaches cater to the general population, but many also focus on smaller specialized groups like seniors, athletes, youth, or weight loss clients.

It is also important for coaches to keep in mind the scope of practice for a certified nutrition professional. Nutrition coaches cannot offer medical advice or diagnose conditions. They can, however, work in conjunction with medical professionals when necessary.

### IN-PERSON COACHING

Nutrition coaching is flexible and can take many forms. In-person coaching is an option in health clubs, private fitness facilities, or at home. This type of coaching allows for personal attention and a closer connection with clients. The coach can collect body composition data directly, demonstrate recommendations, and demand greater accountability.

The disadvantage of this method is that it requires more logistical planning, so that both coach and client can agree on times and places to meet. The cost of a one-on-one session is also generally higher for the client. Individual in-person sessions work well with new clients, especially those just beginning a fitness and health journey. These clients need more personalized attention and guidance. They may feel uncomfortable asking questions in front of others in a group setting or may struggle to learn nutrition basics in virtual sessions.

## DID YOU KNOW?

For the best results when working on health goals, clients should work on fitness and nutrition together. Many personal trainers who are also certified nutrition coaches offer physical training sessions along with nutrition guidance.

Becoming a personal trainer and offering sessions to existing clients is a smart way for nutrition coaches to expand their business. A personal training certification can be used with in-person sessions as well as virtual, group, and corporate coaching. Training sessions can be included with nutrition plans or charged separately as add-on services.

Including fitness is a great way to boost a business and add value to existing services.

## GROUP COACHING

Solo sessions with clients provide a good foundation, but group or community nutrition services also have a place in a coaching business. The nutrition information provided for group sessions may be more general but can still be beneficial for clients. For example, a coach may instruct groups in basics of nutrition, calculating and counting calories, and making good food choices.

Group sessions do not allow much time for individual meal planning, but question and answer sessions can provide value for clients. A group session can also be a great way to meet and network with potential one-on-one clients.

Major benefits of group coaching include support and accountability. Open communication between participants should be encouraged to promote mutual support. Online communities, in alignment with the group sessions, allow participants to communicate with the coach and other clients, which is useful for increasing compliance, motivation, and engagement with the process.

## VIRTUAL COACHING

Online and **virtual coaching services** are rapidly growing in popularity with coaches and clients. A nutrition coach can reach clients globally using a website, nutrition applications, and social media platforms. Virtual coaching allows for a larger client base and the ability to work with multiple people at once. Online coaching usually involves using emails as well as videos, live online interactions, and chat forums.

### VIRTUAL COACHING SERVICES:

A style of coaching conducted via live web-based video conferencing, online materials, and emails to remove the obstacle of proximity; also refers to online written and prerecorded video coaching services.



A website is essential for a virtual nutrition coach. This allows clients to log in for communication and to access resources. A website may include scheduling for live consultations, client handouts, personalized plans, and a library of blogs and videos. Consultations by phone may also be useful.

Virtual coaches may also use fitness apps like MyFitnessPal, Lose It, and MyPlate (unrelated to the US Department of Agriculture's MyPlate). Clients create profiles, enter their calorie and macronutrient goals, and log their foods. Many of these apps include nutrition tips, large food databases, weight trackers, and social connections. They range from free to \$5 to download, and use of these apps is an inexpensive way to keep in contact with nutrition clients and to monitor them and keep them accountable.

### CORPORATE WELLNESS COACHING

#### **CORPORATE WELLNESS:**

Employer programs that support employee well-being, health, and satisfaction by creating a culture of health and wellness.

**Corporate wellness** is increasingly popular with employers. As the cost of health care rises, many employers are looking for ways to reduce their health care premiums. One strategy is to promote employee health. Keeping workers healthy lowers the costs of health care and improves efficiency on the job. Corporate wellness programs offer perks like free or reduced-cost gym memberships, nutrition services, health care professional referral programs, and financial rebates or incentives.

Research has shown that companies with corporate wellness programs see real results: 8 percent more employees self-report exercise, and more than 13 percent more employees actively manage their weight and diet. When employees are healthier, companies see lower health care premiums, decreased missed days, and improved job performance.

Nutrition coaches may offer corporate wellness and nutrition services, like other types of group sessions. There are some important advantages to doing corporate wellness. The employee pool provides opportunities to take on new individual clients. Also, typically the company hiring the coach will actively promote the coach and their services.

## WRITING A BUSINESS PLAN

Planning is an important stage in the process of starting a small business. It includes learning about competing businesses, the available market, and accessing funding. A **business plan** outlines the structure, marketing, and growth of a new business.

The **Small Business Administration (SBA)** is an organization available to all small business owners and anyone interested in starting a business. The SBA offers resources like consultants and business loans. Experts in business help small business owners plan, launch, manage, and grow their operations. Most major cities have a local office.

According to the SBA, there are two types of business plans. The traditional business plan is detailed, time consuming, and useful for any new business owner looking to secure funding. It should provide detailed information about growth and financial projections so that investors or banks can make decisions about funding. A lean business plan is shorter and contains less detail. It is generally used internally for planning and is not shared externally with investors.

**BUSINESS PLAN:**  
Outlines the structure, marketing, and growth of a new business.

**SMALL BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION (SBA):**  
A US government agency established in 1953 to promote economic growth by counseling small businesses on start-up advice, financial advice, and tips to grow an existing business.



## TRADITIONAL BUSINESS PLAN

### MISSION STATEMENT:

A formal summary of the values and goals of a company or individual.

### MARKET ANALYSIS:

A qualitative and quantitative assessment of a business market that examines product and service volume, buying patterns, regulations, and business competition.

### TARGET MARKET:

The particular group(s) of consumers that a product or service targets.

### LIMITED LIABILITY COMPANIES:

A corporate structure in the US that limits the liability of the owner; it combines aspects of corporations and sole proprietorships.

### CUSTOMER LIFE CYCLE:

The steps a customer goes through when considering, buying, and using a product or service; this includes awareness, engagement, evaluation, purchase, experience, and bonding and advocacy.

The traditional format is great for detail-oriented individuals looking for a comprehensive overview and plan for a new business. There are several elements of a traditional business plan:

- The executive summary includes the what and the why of the business. It should outline the basics of the financials, **mission statement**, vision, and products or services offered. It is an introduction or an abstract.
- A detailed company description and **market analysis** should be included and will explain the business's **target market** and give an in-depth look at local competitors. This should highlight the coach's experience and anything that sets them apart from the rest of the market.
- The business plan should describe the business organization type. Many small businesses with just one or two owners are **limited liability companies**. The plan should describe the ownership structure and whether there will be employees or independent contractors.
- A comprehensive description of services offered should also include an estimate of **customer life cycle**.
- Marketing is also important in a business plan. All planned strategies for marketing should be outlined here.
- A traditional business plan is generally used to get funding, so it must include financial projections and funding requests. This part can be complicated and requires some specialized knowledge. It may be a good idea to work with an accountant or the SBA to determine how to flesh out this section. The financial projections need to be based on data and be reasonable and attainable to secure funding from investors or loans from a bank.

**Figure 14.1 Perfect Customer Life Cycle.**



## **LEAN BUSINESS PLAN**

A lean business plan will include most of the same information as a traditional business plan but with much less detail. This type of plan is used primarily for the owner and any other employees to organize the structure, finances, and plans for future growth.

A lean format is appropriate for smaller businesses that will be starting up quickly and offering few services. It should establish products and services offered, their values, how customers will find the business, marketing plans, and a brief study of the market and target audience.

Regardless of type, a business plan is an important step in starting a small business. It helps with planning and organization. New coaches should take advantage of resources during the planning process, including the SBA or a local chamber of commerce.

## **MARKETING**

Marketing is essential for bringing awareness to a new business and bringing in new clients. The first component of marketing is the creation of a business name, brand, and logo. When creating a name and look for a new business it is also a great time to start building the mission statement to help clarify the brand and goals.



### **Target Market**

Determining a target market is an important early consideration for any business, and it will evolve over time. It is best to start with products and services offered and then determine what kind of person will be interested in them.

Using online analytics (often offered with websites and social media accounts), conducting periodic customer surveys, and monitoring social media and online activity are effective ways to determine if the business is reaching the target market.

As the business evolves, new markets may emerge that make more sense to target. Starting with one demographic does not mean that a business cannot expand into other markets or change the demographic entirely. It is acceptable and often necessary to adjust marketing and coaching focus to shift with the target market.

### Business Messaging

A focused business message is key for consistent marketing and branding. To create a business message, first determine the target audience. Identify the needs of this audience and how the business will address these needs and offer solutions. With a message in place, all marketing efforts should remain consistent.

An example of a focused business message is “I’m dedicated to helping you find a lifetime of balance with food and fitness for a full, sustainable, and enjoyable life.”

A consistent business message should list attributes that set the business apart from competitors. This may include relevant experiences or credentials or a specific target audience, like seniors or young athletes. Standing out from the crowd is essential in marketing and gaining new clients.

### Social Media and Online Presence

Social media and a website are the hallmarks of modern marketing. They are necessary for a business to have success and growth. These are likely to be the two main pathways that lead customers to new businesses. As the owner of a small business, it can be tempting to combine existing personal sites and profiles with those of the company. Avoid doing that, and stick with separate accounts, websites, and social media profiles.

Business profiles and marketing materials must include frequent engagement through blogs, photos, teaser articles, informative posts, and **calls to action**. These keep businesses relevant and in front of potential clients.

Business social media sites must be active, with regular following and linking to potential clients and relevant businesses and influencers. Use **hashtags** and other fitness and wellness profiles to connect with the target market.

#### CALLS TO ACTION:

A marketing statement that demands an immediate response from the recipient—for instance, “Click here to learn more.”

#### HASHTAGS:

A social media tag users can create to help others find messages and posts with a specific theme or content.

Relevant and high-traffic social media platforms for nutrition coaches to consider using include the following:

- YouTube
- Pinterest
- Facebook
- LinkedIn
- Instagram
- Snapchat



Each platform offers a unique way to share credentials and services. They can also showcase results and client testimonials. These are typically free platforms that are small business friendly. Many also have paid options for accounts that provide opportunities for greater visibility, advertising, and targeting of potential clients.

### **Research Competitors**

Researching the competition is essential for planning and marketing. This can include reviewing local nutrition coaching and fitness businesses and evaluating business profiles, advertising, social media, and online reviews. The goal is not to copy others but to observe and look for methods that are effective or ineffective.

Businesses in the area that are well known and trusted and that have large client bases are employing good practices with their marketing. Researching the competition also helps determine ways to distinguish the business from others.

### DID YOU KNOW?

A SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) analysis is useful during the planning phase of starting a new business, but it can also be used to periodically review an existing business with the goal of making improvements.

**Strengths:** Nutrition coaches should reflect on and list their strengths in all areas of business, including actual coaching, client interactions, organization, marketing, and other business tasks. Coaches can use client feedback as well as self-reflection here.

**Weaknesses:** It is important for coaches to identify their weaknesses in all the same areas of working with clients and running a small business. This can be tough to face, but no one is perfect at everything, and there is always room for improvement. Again, coaches can use self-reflection but also be open to receiving constructive criticism from clients. Being willing to see weaknesses and improve them sets the most successful business owners apart from the rest.

**Opportunities:** With established strengths and weaknesses in a business, a coach can then identify opportunities. This may include taking more specialized nutrition courses, attending networking sessions, or being more aggressive with email marketing. These should be opportunities not yet used or not used fully.

**Threats:** Finally, it helps to look at other factors to see what might threaten a business's success. Coaches should conduct an updated review of other similar businesses in the area or in the same specialty, for instance. An employee who has caused clients to drop out is also a threat to success, as are bad reviews.



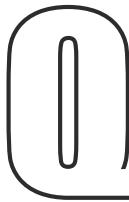
#### STRENGTHS

- Advantages
- Capabilities
- Resources



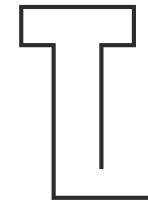
#### WEAKNESSES

- Disadvantages
- Vulnerabilities
- Limitations



#### OPPORTUNITIES

- Chances
- Developments
- Benefits



#### THREATS

- Obstacles
- External effects
- Risks

## BUILDING A CLIENT LIST

It is important for coaches to develop ongoing relationships with current clients while adding new clients. Selling is part of being a small business owner. Even coaches working in gyms or for other employers must use sales tactics to bring in new clients.

### DETERMINING THE NEED

Every potential client has a goal or a problem to solve. A potential nutrition client may have a goal weight or need help creating a consistent, effective diet, for instance. A nutrition coach must ask open-ended questions to determine the true need—not just the superficial needs—of a client before selling them services.

A superficial need is often a quick response someone gives when asked why they are interested in working with a nutrition coach. For example, a potential new client may say that they want to get healthy and feel better in their own skin. The true problem becomes clear when they explain more about their situation. They need to lose 50 pounds or be put on additional medications and face serious health consequences. Getting a true need comes from asking questions that require more than just “yes” and “no” answers and by listening thoughtfully to the responses.

### FILLING THE NEED

With the understanding of a client’s needs, it is possible to offer a viable solution. The potential new client must understand how it will help them meet their goal before committing to buying services.

A client’s needs can change throughout their customer life cycle, which is why it is important for a coach to maintain a good relationship, to understand their changing needs, and to keep offering relevant services.

By asking the right questions to the client who wants to lose 50 pounds in less than a year, a coach can find out important information. Maybe they struggle with accountability and consistency, or perhaps they just need guidance for meal prep. Understanding the timeline means the coach can offer a reasonable contract for long-term coaching. By going deeper with clients to identify needs, it is possible to match those needs more precisely and to gain more clients in the process.

### DID YOU KNOW?

An elevator pitch is often used in sales for all types of businesses. It is a quick 15- to 30-second rundown of a product or service. It should be short and concise yet also describe exactly what a product or service offers and the benefits of it. When a coach meets potential clients, time may be limited and the interactions brief. A successful nutrition professional should have an elevator pitch prepared.

Examples include the following:

- *"I'm a former college athlete who helps youth between 8 and 18 improve and tailor their nutrition to create strong, efficient, and durable bodies and improve their sports performance as they advance to the next level."*
- *"I am a nutrition coach with my own weight loss success who helps others looking to lose any amount of weight, avoid chronic health issues, and feel comfortable in their own bodies."*
- *"I am a mother of two who helps other new moms take control of their bodies, regain their physical strength, and refocus their nutrition not only for themselves but for the well-being of their families."*

### ASKING QUESTIONS AND TAKING NOTES

With a prospect considering the investment, it is time for a coach to address concerns or barriers preventing the client from signing up for services. The coach should determine a client's hesitations or worries before closing the sale. Then they can be addressed to get a final commitment.

Talking about concerns in advance will reduce the likelihood the client changes their mind later. Objections or concerns are never bad; they are just problems to be addressed and solved. In sales, objections are a chance to earn a customer's trust and gain even more commitment to the plan or service.

Objections to pricing can be especially tricky to manage. Nutrition coaches must set costs for sessions based on value and the current market. Pricing that is well above other coaches will limit the ability to get new clients. Pricing too low makes clients happy but leaves the coach in a difficult position, unable to earn what their services are worth.

The coach should keep the focus on the value of the service and the cost of not hiring a coach. For the example client who wants to lose 50 pounds, there is tremendous value in avoiding more medications and health complications. There is value for this person in learning how to plan and prepare consistently healthy meals.

## CLOSE THE SALE

A nutrition coach has a lot of work ahead in the way of uncovering a client's motivations and barriers to success. If the step of determining the need of the client was done effectively, they will have several pieces of ammunition to use when asking for a sale:

- The potential client's reason (at least superficially) for wanting change
- Some of the things they have attempted in the past
- What they feel they failed to do previously
- Their current goals
- When they have felt successful previously
- What services offered would best fit them and why

Closing does not have to be a scary process. If the right questions have been asked and answered and the professional feels confident in their services, the question should be as simple as "Which plan works best for you?" followed by "What type of card would you like to use?"

Most coaches collect payments before delivery of services. This reaffirms commitment and ensures they are compensated for their time with no risk of having to chase people down for payment later.

## CLIENT REFERRALS

A referral is an important and valuable way to build clientele. When a current or past client refers services, it means they trust the coach and value the services they offer. Referrals may even come from someone who has never been a client but who had a positive interaction with a coach.

All interactions are important. Even those that do not end in a sale could lead to a referral.



### PROMOTERS VERSUS DETRACTORS

Nutrition coaches and small business owners encounter two main types of people:

- Promoters are those who had positive experiences with a coach and their services. They are happy with their results and will likely refer friends or family.
- Detractors are unsatisfied with the interactions or services. These individuals will usually make themselves known very quickly. It is important to directly reach out to any detractors as quickly as possible to hear their concerns; empathize with them; and, if possible, offer a solution.

Conducting periodic surveys of current, past, and potential clients can provide useful information on the effect of marketing materials and client satisfaction.

### POSITIVE SHAREABLE MARKETING MATERIAL

Using positive client reviews—with their permission only—is a great way to prove the value of services. These are like referrals, but they can be used in a range of marketing materials to reach more people. Testimonials from clients and before and after photos and stories are effective in reaching new potential clients on social media and on a business website.

Marketing materials and posts using client testimonials and stories should be positive, informative, colorful, and engaging. Coaches should encourage comments, discussions, and questions for these kinds posts and reply in a timely manner.

### WHEN TO ASK FOR REFERRALS

Any time can be good to ask for a referral or testimonial. But people are most excited about a coach's services when seeing results. It is advantageous for a coach to leverage that excitement to get a quote or to ask for a referral. The client may have family or friends who admired their progress and showed an interest in coaching services.

It is best for a coach to ask for more information about the people the clients know who may be interested to create a targeted sales pitch. For instance, if a client talks about a family member struggling to lose weight and trying diet after diet, a coach might jump in and ask more about it.

The more a coach gets to know their clients when working with them, the more they can help them reach their goals. But conversations also help the coach find potential new clients. They can use the information to pull in clients' friends and family members to sign up for services.

Some coaches find success in offering rewards for referrals. It could be as simple as an entry into a monthly drawing or a free session if the referral pans out. A reward can be an effective, inexpensive, and motivating way to drive the referral process.

Quick follow-up with referrals is essential to leverage interest in the moment. People are easier to talk to and objections are easier to overcome when they are excited and highly motivated to change.



## COMMON BUSINESS MISTAKES TO AVOID

Coaching clients is different from running a business. They are two different skill sets that are both necessary for a successful business. Coaches already have the health, nutrition, and interpersonal skills but often overlook the business side of their work. Some common mistakes that new business owners make are easily avoidable.

### **1. Failing to track client information**

Whether in print or digitally, a system for keeping track of client information is essential. Coaches should include contact information, food planning forms, food logs, progress assessments, and other important information.

### **2. Assuming everything must be done virtually**

Not all coaches or clients like doing business online and remotely. In-person coaching may be more suitable for certain individuals and has many advantages as far as building relationships and keeping clients over the long term.

### **3. Assuming all clients have adequate tech skills**

Coaches should prepare a plan or a quick guide to teach clients how to use technology associated with coaching. Using a new app, for instance, will be much easier if a client is given some basic instructions. Technology should not be a barrier to services.

### **4. Failing to check in with clients**

It is important for coaches to determine a schedule for checking in with clients and to be consistent. Even if a client purchases a one-time meal plan, checking in allows them to ask questions or request additional resources or sessions. Check-ins are great opportunities to sell additional services, ask for referrals, and build relationships.

### **5. Not asking the right questions during the customer life cycle**

Coaches do not stop asking questions at the initial assessment or intake. They should continue to engage each client through the life cycle. Purposeful questions about concerns, hesitations, successes, and referrals are most important, but conversations should be kept professional and positive.

### **6. Not targeting a specific demographic**

Nutrition is a broad subject. Choosing a specific target client or having a specialization makes it easier to create business messaging, marketing materials, and services. Focusing on one or two target markets helps to set individual coaches apart from the rest.

### **7. Failing to stay organized**

Organization is essential to running a service-oriented business. Without a good organization strategy, it is easy to miss appointments and communications. Being organized is a courtesy to customers, who will soon get fed up with a coach who can't keep track of meetings, paperwork, or emails.

## **8. Failing to maintain professional boundaries**

Getting to know clients and establishing relationships builds strong businesses, but it must remain professional. There is a line that should never be crossed between a professional relationship and personal relationship. Coaches should keep all communications, conversations, and interactions business appropriate.

## **9. Overwhelming clients with too much information**

Nutrition coaches are passionate about what they do and have a lot to share with clients. It's easy to get excited about educating clients too fast and with too much information all at once. Coaches should keep the details and information about nutrition plans relevant and manageable for each client. The information should be delivered in a way that they can easily apply to their lives. If necessary, coaches can break the information up into multiple sessions to increase adherence and comprehension.

The first step in establishing a nutrition business is to create a business plan. Resources like the SBA are available for free. There are many opportunities for a nutrition coach who is working independently, for a fitness facility, or in conjunction with a corporate wellness program. Virtual coaching, email, video, applications, and in-person nutrition coaching can be used in all of these work environments.

Social media has become a fast, inexpensive, and effective way to reach potential clients and grow a business. Platforms such as LinkedIn, Instagram, YouTube, and Pinterest allow coaches to showcase themselves and their services and to reach more people.

The sales process is important to understand and to practice, even for coaches working for larger companies. It starts with asking questions and listening to client needs, problems, and concerns. Every client has a goal or a need for nutrition services. Listening to clients is essential to showing them that a coach can fill the need and help them reach their goals.

Organization and punctuality are two skills that every successful nutrition coach possesses. Keeping accurate and organized records and plans as well as being on time for all scheduled appointments will lead to business growth and referrals. Coaching is a business, and that means that successful nutrition coaches will be good at their jobs and at running a small business.