

The Coaching Session

The client always calls the coach. This encourages them to take responsibility for the coaching.

The client is responsible for the session's agenda. You can have them prepare one ahead of time and send it to you, or you can just dance in the moment with what shows up. In either case, the client should think about the appointment in advance, and make notes of what they want to discuss or accomplish in the session. If a client consistently comes unprepared, talk with them about this, and jointly determine ways to address the issue.

During the session you will be making requests of the client and asking powerful questions. If you find that you are struggling to keep the session moving, then you are doing too much of the work. Ask the client what is going on. What is it that they want to accomplish from the session?

You may find it helpful to take notes from each session, but it isn't necessary to have pages of detailed notes. Notice how much of your attention is focused on your notes rather than over there with the client. At a minimum, write down any homework, inquiries, goals, or any other important events or commitments that you want to track session to session.

You are responsible to manage time for the session, and begin and end your sessions on time. Some coaches schedule clients back-to-back to reinforce ending on time. Other coaches schedule in a short break between clients. Find what works best for you.

Outside the Coaching Session

If a client needs extra accountability or a structure to stay in action, one idea is to have them leave a voicemail that an action item has been started and/or completed. This is called "book-ending" and is a very useful structure. You can also have clients use voicemail or email as a place to make daily commitments, celebrate a win, vent, or provide a progress check.

Creating Your Schedule

Starting with your first client, be mindful of how the sessions are scheduled into your life. Many coaches have specific days and time slots that they coach in, such as Monday and Wednesday mornings. Arrange your appointments so that you are able to be in a centered, calm place for each client and also so that the remainder of your life is not disrupted. Be willing to say "no" to those clients who want you to coach at times when you have other commitments. In this way you'll be modeling behavior of a balanced life and clear boundaries.

Ensure that your schedule includes breaks! Both on an hour-to-hour basis and also month-to-month. Once a quarter there is a month that includes 5 weeks. Many coaches take the 5th week off from coaching clients.

A tip is to ensure that your family, friends, and neighbors are aware of your general schedule. Often when folks know that you work at home, or when family members see you at home, they assume that you are available at any time. Create a daily or weekly schedule to post in a visible location to let your family know when they can and can't interrupt you. In other words, design your alliance with your house-mates, family, friends, and neighbors to minimize distractions and intrusions.

Letting Go of a Client

In the coaching relationship, you need to be able to tell your client the truth and do your job in an open, straightforward manner. To do this, you need to be willing to lose a client. Don't tiptoe around topics. Be straight and firm, though always with compassion. For the most part, clients will appreciate and value this kind of relationship with you. You are not trying to be the client's friend, rather you are their coach.

There are times when a client should not be in a coaching relationship such as when the issues they are facing are more appropriate for therapy or business consulting. It's important to recognize when it is best to refer your client to another resource, and act on it (i.e., refer your client and stop coaching with them). However, coaching can often work well in conjunction with psychotherapy, career counseling, business consulting or other kinds of professional support.

Sometimes, the chemistry between you and your client just doesn't work, or the client is looking for a different style of coaching. This is not a personal judgment, just a recognition that coaching is not a "one-size-fits-all" type of service.

In all of these situations, it will be important to be able to let go of a client and refer them to a therapist, business consultant, or another coach who might be more appropriate for them at this time in their life.