

# How to Get the Most from Coaching

All you Need to Know from Finding a Coach to Wrapping up  
Flo van Diemen van Thor



FLO VAN DIEMEN VAN THOR

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# HOW TO GET THE MOST FROM COACHING

ALL YOU NEED TO KNOW  
FROM FINDING A COACH  
TO WRAPPING UP

How to get the most from coaching:  
All you need to know from finding a coach to wrapping up  
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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



I used to joke that I could fill a book with the questions, myths and misconceptions I've encountered about coaching over the years. Well, here I am, putting my money where my mouth used to be!

My name is Flo van Diemen van Thor and I am an executive coach and mentor who specialises in leadership development. Born and raised in the Netherlands I am now based in the UK, where I run my own coaching and mentoring company. I started my career in communications consulting and marketing and honed those skills in the commercial and public sectors for around ten years prior to becoming a mentor and a coach.

It was while employed by a large English local authority during the 2008 economic downturn that senior executives increasingly asked me for support and guidance on how to engage with furious taxpayers and staff whose jobs were at risk. My experience in planning and delivering change communications and my first-hand knowledge of stakeholder engagement were sought after. I quickly discovered that even the most successful and senior executives can have serious self-doubt and esteem issues which cloud their judgment and decision-making. One recommendation led to another and before long I became a rather busy internal coach to leaders in need of thinking space and clarity.

In 2013 I gained a Master's Degree in Coaching and Mentoring from Oxford Brookes University and set up my company Socius Associates a few months later. My client base consists of entrepreneurs in a wide range of sectors and leaders in Further and Higher Education, the National Health Service, Local Authorities and Emergency Services. I work 1:1 as well as with groups and teams in small and large organisations in the UK and beyond. I am often involved with designing, facilitating and evaluating all or part of leadership programmes in large organisations and in developing specialist workshops about coaching, stakeholders and communicating change.

Where some executive coaches limit their practice to the so-called 'C-Suite', I like to work with leaders at all levels. I equally enjoy working with leaders at the start of their career as I do coaching top level executives. For junior leaders, experimentation carries a different risk while they usually have more peers and superiors to ask for feedback compared to their more senior colleagues. But there is an additional reason why I don't discriminate between levels of leadership seniority, and it is because so many of the themes and questions clients bring into sessions are shared across all levels.

In the following pages you will find answers to things people from all kinds of backgrounds, organisations, countries and leadership positions have asked me about coaching over the years. It is my hope it helps the curious and the undecided among you to grasp the concept of coaching and frame your expectations in a realistic manner. I would be delighted to hear whether you think I have achieved that and hope you will get in touch to share your thoughts.

And for now: enjoy your reading!

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# INTRODUCTION

This book is for people who are ready to work with a coach as well as for people who are not yet sure and may decide it is not the right time or approach for them. I have written this short book to cover the questions which I am most often asked by people who are curious about coaching. It is not intended as promotional brochure but as a practical guide that also tackles some misconceptions.

Not everyone is convinced by this thing called coaching, and I am used to getting some sceptical questions at times. Those are very honest interactions which in some paradoxical way I value more than unquestioning acceptance: if there is one attribute a coach needs in my book it is humility. So, if you are critical of coaching and are giving this short book the benefit of the doubt: welcome, and I hope your time reading it turns out to be a good investment.

Coaching originates from both counselling and management theory, in particular in leadership theory. It has been an established developmental approach in business for decades, and in more recent years coaching has become more widely-used outside business. A well-known branch is life coaching, an increasingly accepted way to tackle personal issues that have a profound impact on someone's life but are not debilitating as such.

The coaching profession is experiencing a bit of a boom. For people who are interested in coaching this is both good news and bad: it may be easier to find a coach but it is a challenge to figure out *which* and what *kind* of coach is the best match. How will you know what will and what won't work?

Here are two common scenarios.

1. You are thinking of working with a coach, because you have heard some good things about it. You have a challenge or a question that remains unresolved despite trying everything you can think of and wonder if you can address it with the help of a coach. Where to start? What can you expect from the experience? And what do you need to invest to make it work?
2. Your boss has offered to sponsor your coaching. You have never worked with a coach before and you don't really know what they do. How to go about working with one? Does the coach report back to your boss? Who decides what you talk about? What is expected of you? *What if you would like to say 'no' to the offer?*



We coaches are used to these questions and fully expect to answer them all and many more. Here is my first tip: never hesitate to ask everything you need to know about coaching and about your coach to help you decide whether you want to work with one or not (Chapter 1 has a useful list).

### **Why you should ask everything you want to know about coaching**

I am often asked, ‘What exactly is coaching?’, frequently followed by, ‘How is coaching different from training/counselling/mentoring?’. Sadly, many potential coaching clients feel slightly embarrassed to ask these questions because they somehow feel they should already know the answer. Why else meet with a coach? Nothing could be further from the truth, for two important reasons.

The first one is that coaching can be described in many different ways, so it is very important to ask the coach what *their* definition of coaching is. Does it sound like it will help you address the question or challenge you’re grappling with, or does it highlight that you actually need something different instead? The coach’s answer should explain how they work, which will differ from coach to coach.

A second reason to ask this question is to see how the coach responds. Do you feel informed and encouraged to continue the conversation? Does the explanation make you feel curious? Does the coach welcome your probing? Pay attention to your own reaction to their reply, because it will be a useful indication of how you are likely to feel in sessions with them too.

## **WHAT THIS BOOK COVERS**

### **Chapter 1 Investing in coaching – or not**

This chapter explains what coaching is and isn’t. It covers the investment needed to make it work for you and this is important, because the disappointment is likely to be real if it doesn’t deliver. A bad experience can also seriously dent your confidence in other helping professions such as mentoring or counselling, so knowing what to expect from your coaching experience is key.

## **Chapter 2 Finding a suitable coach**

Where do coaches hang out? What to ask a coach to find out whether they are suitable and qualified to work with you? What to listen out for when selecting a coach?

## **Chapter 3 Making coaching work for you**

This chapter helps to get a mental picture of what useful, great coaching looks like in the real world. It covers practicalities, etiquette and the stages of a coaching collaboration. It will also discuss how to know the difference between ‘this is not working for me’ and having a coach who pushes hard because you need it and knows that you can handle it.

## **Chapter 4 Wrapping up and keeping up the good work afterwards**

You’ve spent weeks or months working with your coach and it is time to wrap up. What questions can help to capture all the learning and new insights from your collaboration? How will you carry forward what you have discovered and changed without the support of your sessions? Is it OK to get back in touch with your coach afterwards? And: how did your coach perform?

### **A note on terminology**

Throughout this book I refer to the recipient of the coaching as ‘the client’, a term I prefer over the often-heard ‘coachee’. A client may be an individual but could also refer to a group or team. Clients frequently pay for their own sessions, but not always – see below.

A coaching ‘sponsor’ is the individual or organisation commissioning and paying for the coaching. This could be a HR director offering coaching as part of a leadership development programme or a team manager engaging a coach for (members of) their team or even a kind friend or relative paying for a loved one’s sessions.

# 1 INVESTING IN COACHING – OR NOT

This chapter explores how to decide whether or not coaching is going to be of value to. The first step is to uncover your real reasons for wanting to work with a coach. You also want to be clear about what you need from a coach to make the collaboration work and, crucially, what you yourself need to be ready to take responsibility for.

The chapter also addresses what a coach needs to know about you and the question(s) you are bringing to coaching. The more you are able to describe the desired outcomes and why these matter to you, the better you will be able to decide whether a potential coach is the right one for you.

First we will clarify what is meant by coaching. We will bookend the chapter by discussing alternative approaches to getting help.

## 1.1 COACHING: A DEFINITION

Let's have a look at three definitions to highlight the different ways coaching can be used.

*Coaching is the art of facilitating another person's learning, development and performance. It raises self-awareness and identifies choices. Through coaching, people are able to find their own solutions, develop their own skills and change their own attitudes and behaviours. The whole aim of coaching is to close the gap between potential and performance.*

– Jenny Rogers, *Manager as Coach*, 2012

*Unlocking a person's potential to maximize their own performance. It is helping them to learn rather than teaching them.*

– John Whitmore, *Coaching for Performance*, 2003

*A powerful alliance designed to forward and enhance a life-long process of human learning, effectiveness and fulfilment.*

– Kimsey-House et al, Co-Active Coaching, 2007

These three definitions have a few important things in common. They:

- emphasise learning over teaching
- aim for the fulfilment of someone's potential
- describe a relationship

Words such as *facilitating*, *helping* and *unlocking* suggest that answers are already available, but so far have remained out of reach for the client. A key assumption a coach will make about any client is that they are “...*naturally creative, resourceful and whole*”<sup>1</sup>.

This assumption is important. If a client is not creative in the sense of problem solving; if they lack the resourcefulness to try enough approaches until something delivers the desired result or if they display signs of illness, reduced mental functioning or prolonged stress, coaching is not the answer.

There are also some differences between the definitions above. The first two emphasise improving *performance*, suggesting they mostly describe work-related coaching. Co-Active Coaching considers *fulfilment* to be the driver behind achievement, which could be professional or personal in nature.

**Tip** – When you speak with a coach you are thinking of working with, ask them what the purpose of their coaching is. This too varies from one coach to the next. Here are some examples:

- developing leaders for a complex world
- transitioning from military to civilian life
- relaunching careers after raising a family

If you want to learn specific skills, a workshop or training programme may be more appropriate. For example, a coach might help you deal with your bulging inbox by helping you set priorities but if you need to use Outlook better you probably need training.

## 1.2 WHAT DO YOU WANT TO WORK ON?

A 'coaching agenda' sets out the plan for the coaching collaboration, in particular the things you want to achieve. This agenda should be the main focus of your first conversation because its purpose is to guide the coaching so that it contributes to achieving your goals.

You do not have to have a clearly defined idea of everything you want to achieve before you start. Certainly, if you are driven by a big deadline that is very helpful to know, but if you don't have one that is by no means a deal breaker.

However, you do need to give some thought beforehand about what you want a potential coach to know about you. Here are some questions to help you:

- What needs to be different and why?
- How am I affected by the issue?
- What are the wider consequences of doing nothing about it?
- How have I already tried to address the issue?
- Who else, besides myself, is affected by the issue?
- What factors are influences on successfully addressing the issue?

Be realistic. Keep checking whether you are focusing on the right thing and make your goals neither too stretching nor too easy to achieve.

Here are some examples of questions or challenges clients have brought to coaching to give you an idea of what other people have said in this initial conversation. You can see that they don't answer all the questions listed above, and that's absolutely fine. Names have been changed.

**Yasmine:** I want to be a director in a year's time and I know there is a restructure coming up that might make this possible. I see at least two other serious candidates and I want to beat them.

**Nichola:** I am really, really bored in my career and I feel so stuck I can't think of where to start to change that. All I see is the exact same job I am doing now and that's what I don't want anymore.

**Alan:** I invested my redundancy pay out in a new venture and a year on I realise it's a huge mistake. I'm in full blown panic mode, I have no idea where to start to figure out my next steps...

**Parbat:** I've never had any leadership development; I've just ended up becoming an area manager. I want to discover my leadership style and develop from being a manager into a leader.

*"Understand where you are and what it is that makes you want a coach."*

– Elena, coaching client

### 1.3 WHAT YOU NEED TO BE PREPARED FOR

To make your coaching experience a success, you need to be prepared on a practical and mental level.

On the **practical level** you need to make time for your sessions and to work on your goals in between seeing your coach. Check if you need to book a meeting room and of course remember to book time slots in your calendar too – be sure to double check dates and



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times with your coach. Do you need to negotiate time away from your duties with your line manager for your sessions? If so, don't forget to include any travel time.

**Tip** – these things come in handy in coaching sessions:

- something on which to write down your thoughts and actions
- anything you'd like your coach to look at with you such as a 360 Review or a psychometric report; priorities for the year; your job description or that of a role you are interested in; a course outline, etc.
- calendar for setting appointments
- camera phone for taking pictures of anything you create in session such as maps, lists, flow charts, doodles (especially useful when you use flipcharts or whiteboards). Some coaches also use card sorting exercises which can be useful to take pictures of

You also need to be prepared on the **mental level**. Being mentally prepared means understanding that the conversations you have with your coach will be different from those you have with friends, family or colleagues. A good coach is curious about you and will continue asking questions where a friend might stop to give advice or an opinion instead. A coach is trained to help you work out your own views for yourself.

A friend is also more likely to let you off the hook whereas a coach's job is to probe deeper. Be prepared to be pushed outside your comfort zone in this respect. It is important to see why: if you want things to be different, you can't keep doing things the way you have always done them. Challenge can come in various forms: being encouraged to delegate an important task or stepping up to get a taste of the more senior role you are interested in; giving someone close to you some difficult feedback or approaching that very senior colleague with your idea.

*"Be a little bit prepared to talk about yourself, but don't be over-prepared. Don't try to answer the questions before you are asked them because it allows the coaching to be spontaneous and free-flowing."*

– Elena, coaching client

You also need to be prepared to see some of your deepest held beliefs and truths challenged by your coach. They will do this when it is evident that one or more of these are holding you back. A professional coach will only ever challenge your beliefs, values or truths in the service of what you need to achieve, but never because they disagree with them personally.

**Case study** – An interesting example of such a ‘truth’ for one manager was that in order to know that a team is effective, people needed to be at their desks at all times. However, when he examined this long held belief, he discovered that the member of staff who seemed away from his desk a lot to chat was in fact a very effective collaborator who got things done by going to see his colleagues. It saved everyone time on email exchanges and he picked up useful new ways of doing things that he shared with his team.

## 1.4 WHAT COACHING IS NOT

A very common question is about the differences between coaching, mentoring and counselling/therapy. There are some similarities: all of them want to help someone else (a person, group or team) without fixing things *for* them. All three require a skilled practitioner and all require the client to be an active participant in the collaboration.

The differences are best illustrated by a making a comparison.

<b>Coaching</b>	<b>Mentoring</b>
Short term – taking place over weeks or months	Long term – taking place over months or years
Usually by formal agreement	Often informal
Delivered by a qualified professional	Qualifications are only relevant to the question
Avoids advice giving	Advice giving is part of the process

**Table 1.1** Coaching vs mentoring

As explained in the introduction, a coach will make an important assumption about their client, which is that they are “...*naturally creative, resourceful and whole*”<sup>2</sup>.

In this context, ‘creative’ means that the client has enough inspiration to solve problems; ‘resourcefulness’ refers to mental resilience and toughness in the face of setbacks. A client whose general health and mental functioning is good or even optimal is considered ‘whole’. The most striking difference between coaching and counselling or therapy is about the latter, as the following table seeks to illustrate.



Coaching	Counselling and Therapy
Short term – taking place over weeks or months	Medium to Long term – taking place over months or even years
The client is generally functioning well at work and at home, even if there is a crisis	The client is experiencing a crisis which <i>impairs their day-to-day functioning</i>
Works in the present looking to the future	Works to resolve past trauma
Assumes an equal partnership	The counsellor/therapist is an expert
Aims to help the client achieve their goals	Aims to help the client cope again
Looks to develop the client’s potential	Looks to heal trauma and distress
Not qualified to diagnose mental health problems	Qualified to diagnose <i>and</i> treat mental health problems

**Table 1.2** Coaching vs counselling/therapy

Because a coach needs to establish with you that coaching is the right approach for you, be prepared to discuss some aspects of your health, in particular your general mental wellbeing with them.

*“be prepared for the possibility to discover that what you think you want is actually not what you want – or need!”*

– Elena, coaching client

## 1.5 WHEN TO AVOID COACHING

This would not be a helpful book if it didn’t cover when coaching is not the answer and maybe even harmful. Here are some considerations.

Don’t work with a coach if:

- you are being pressured into it by someone else, by your employer or by peer pressure
- after careful consideration you know you’re not ready to fully explore your challenge
- you are not ‘whole’: counselling, therapy or mediation may be appropriate
- a workshop or training course will cover your need for development
- a mentor would be much more useful to work with
- you truly can’t think of something meaningful to work on

- you are too busy, distracted, preoccupied or all of those to fully engage
- you are not prepared to put the work into it and be held to account
- after consideration the thought of coaching simply puts you off

The one reason to avoid coaching that you will not find in the above list is if you have had a bad experience with coaching before. Did you give up on driving after a few terrible lessons? Of course not. Are you glad you persisted? I bet you are! Allow yourself to reconsider your opinion by being honest with yourself about what you can gain from working with a coach and by sharing your reservations with the coach you're talking with and see how you think and feel about it afterwards.

*"the anticipation of coaching is worse than the actual reality of it, like the exercises and the homework. Be prepared to try something different and be more forgiving to yourself."*

– Elena, coaching client

### 1.5.1 HOW TO DECLINE WITH GRACE

Going against your wishes is a recipe for disaster. No-one but you can know whether the opportunity to work with a coach comes at the right time, if you have fully explored the idea.

If you are being offered a coach but don't want to take it up, you should be able to decline without sharing information that you want to keep to yourself. A graceful way of doing so is by saying that you would like to know if you might revisit the opportunity in future, budgets allowing. This deals with potential counter arguments along the lines of 'now or never, once the budget is gone, it's gone'. After all, it is better for a sponsor to spend precious time and money on people who truly want it than to force it on those who don't.

If you feel pressured by well-meaning friends or family to find a coach for yourself, and you are certain that you don't want one, remember this: only you are the expert of you, and have given the idea of coaching careful consideration before deciding that you don't want it. You do not have to explain your decision to anyone if you feel that it will only perpetuate the 'negotiations'. Instead, thank them for being so supportive and suggest ways in which they can continue being so without pursuing this particular option. Perhaps you don't need a coach because you have one or two great listeners in your personal circle. Or maybe you want to look at some courses instead, and would like to get their opinion on your shortlist.

As a final note I'll add this: coaches will appreciate your candour and honesty here, so please don't edit yourself to spare our feelings. One of the worst things that can happen in our profession is attempting to work with a reluctant or resistant client. It is hugely demotivating for both the client and the coach, and if there is one, for the sponsor. In this scenario, nobody gains anything.

## 2 FINDING YOUR COACH

The next step is finding a coach to talk more about what you could achieve through coaching. Perhaps you are still unconvinced about coaching, and the best way to make up your mind either way is to talk to at least one coach about your reservations. Three is better.

### 2.1 FIRST THINGS FIRST: CHEMISTRY SESSIONS

A chemistry session is the initial conversation between a prospective coach and client. It is intended to get to know each other and the focus of the coaching before committing to working together. The session is designed to see if coach and client both think they will be able to work well together, in other words, if the chemistry is present. A good chemistry session will give you a flavour of what it would be like to work with the coach.

Chemistry sessions are common practice among professional coaches. They work both ways: the client can use the occasion to decide whether they want to be coached in the first place and if so, whether they want this coach, or someone different to work with them. The coach will listen for clues about your readiness, resolve, resilience and openness to challenge while finding out more about what you want to work on.

There should be no strings attached to a chemistry session and both of you should be free to pursue other options. Take your time to decide, especially if it isn't immediately obvious you want to work with them. A professional coach will never pressure you into working with them.

To give you an idea of what to expect, my chemistry sessions are usually around half an hour long and are often phone conversations. I take care to explain what coaching is and how I coach and I encourage people to ask anything they want to know about me as well. I'm often asked how I became a coach, and that's a great question to ask! Most importantly, I make sure they get a little taste of what it would be like to work together by exploring what is on their agenda and reflecting back how we might start tackling some of the questions. It gives me the opportunity to see how the client responds.

**Tip** – Do ask for a chemistry session when you have found a coach you are interested in. They are often free of charge (mine are), although some coaches expect to be paid for them. It's up to you to decide whether you want to or not.

## 2.2 FINDING A COACH

The days when people picked up the Yellow Pages or phone book to find a professional service seem largely behind us. How then do people find a coach? Here are some tried-and-tested ways you can consider.

**Ask for recommendations.** This is one of the best ways to find a coach and also one of the worst: a coach who is perfect for one individual may be entirely unsuitable for another. Business and other professional networks can be a good place to ask for recommendations.

**Ask your employer.** Larger organisations often have a list of preferred external coaches and/or internal coaches they can match you with; your line manager, Human Resources or Learning and Development are a good place to start. The latter can also discuss other opportunities like training etc. to help you get the full picture.

**Consult professional coaching bodies.** These have a searchable directory of coaches that you can access and you can filter on location, languages spoken, areas of speciality, certification/accreditation and more. Here are three of the main ones:

- [International Coach Federation](#) (ICF) global
- [Association for Coaching](#) (AC) global
- [European Mentoring and Coaching Council](#) (EMCC) European

**Other professional bodies** Many professional bodies offer learning services. Check your professional memberships to see what yours offer: they may have a directory of coaches or have preferred suppliers of coaching they can share with you. Some professional bodies even offer coaching courses – and that means they know some brilliant coaches they can tell you about!

**Contact universities that offer coaching courses.** This is a great little secret if you are on a budget. It is a course requirement for student coaches to deliver a minimum amount of pro bono coaching. To put your mind at ease: students who enrol in Post Graduate coaching programmes are typically mature students who are often already working as professional coaches. Others have a professional background which has allowed them to develop strong coaching skills. They are supervised as part of their training and all professional standards that apply to paid coaching apply to these sessions too, including boundaries around confidentiality.

**Online searches and social media such as LinkedIn** can also yield suitable candidates and you can tailor your search as you wish. It is the equivalent of taking out the phone book, so always check if that coach with the impressive website is a member of any coaching

organisations and what their credentials actually mean. If possible, check in with past clients (you can sometimes find out a few names from recommendations on someone's profile page). Although these are likely to be positive you can find out more about the coach and their strengths this way.

**Tip** – If your employer is sponsoring your sessions, be sure to discuss the budget: how much the budget is and where it comes from! You don't want to discover your cost centre is being billed when you assumed it was covered by the central Learning and Development budget...

## 2.3 WHAT DOES YOUR COACH NEED TO BRING?

Now let's turn our attention to the coach you would want to work with. If you consider that you will be sharing some of your deepest thoughts with them, what kind of person will they need to be for you for you to trust them with your work in progress? It is a lot of effort and a personal investment to work with a coach, so this is an important question.

It may sound odd, but you do not necessarily need to like your coach as such to successfully work together. You wouldn't engage a coach to socialise with them, they have a job to do. If a prospective coach isn't the kind of person you are naturally drawn to, don't dismiss them on that basis alone.

Here are some key questions to ask yourself before meeting a prospective coach.

### 2.3.1 WHAT PERSONALITY TRAITS ARE IMPORTANT IN MY COACH?

According to [Myers-Briggs](#), who specialise in mapping personality and preferences, personality traits are examples of actions, attitudes and behaviours<sup>3</sup>. Think about those traits that foster your trust and respect in others. If you can't think of any, call to mind a trusted friend, colleague or a leader you admire. Write down the traits that you value in them.

In the table below are some personality traits that are often heard about coaches. What traits are not important to you? What traits would you add to this list? Pick four or five.

Common coach positive personality traits			
Approachable	Curious	Insightful	Realistic
Articulate	Empathic	Neutral	Reflective
Calm	Focused	Organised	Sensitive
Challenging	Genuine	Patient	Trustworthy
Compassionate	Honest	Perceptive	Warm

**Table 2.1** Positive personality traits

When you first meet a coach you will have a lot to discuss and think about. Listen to your intuition throughout the meeting. After the conversation, take a few minutes to consider these questions:

- How do I feel now?  
For ex. *Ready/confused/motivated/downcast/excited*
- What words would I use to describe this coach?  
For ex. *Reassuring/overbearing/credible/arrogant/trustworthy*
- Which of the traits that are on my list has the coach displayed?

### 2.3.2 WHAT EXPERIENCE DOES MY COACH NEED TO HAVE?

Now we need to turn our attention to the background your coach brings to your working together. Coaches generally avoid giving advice or opinions, which is important to bear in mind when you consider what experience they should have. Here are some questions to guide your thinking:

- How important is the personal experience of your coach? Do you expect them to have lived through the experience you're dealing with yourself? If so, why?
- Are you interested in how many and what kind of clients the coach has worked with?
- What industry knowledge does your coach need to have? Why is this?
- Is there anything specific your coach would need to be knowledgeable about in order to successfully work with you? For example cultural context, health matters, disabilities etc.

Only you can answer these questions. Choosing a coach who is a complete outsider to your world can be very refreshing too. It requires you to explain things in a different way than you are used to on a day-to-day basis and this can be the very thing to stimulate some new thinking about old problems.


**Tip** – if your main goal is to learn about an industry or to understand what skills you will need for a particular job or career someone who has been there themselves can be most valuable to you. They can be a/your manager acting as a mentor. You can also approach industry organisations to see if they have a mentoring scheme they can refer you to.

If you are preparing to leave where you are now, be it a profession, a role or a personal situation and the goal of your coaching is to get ready for a very different future, choose a coach who will bring a fresh perspective to help you develop on a personal and/or professional level.


Remember, the coach's job is not to tell you how to do yours or to give their personal views on things, but to support you while you work out your own.

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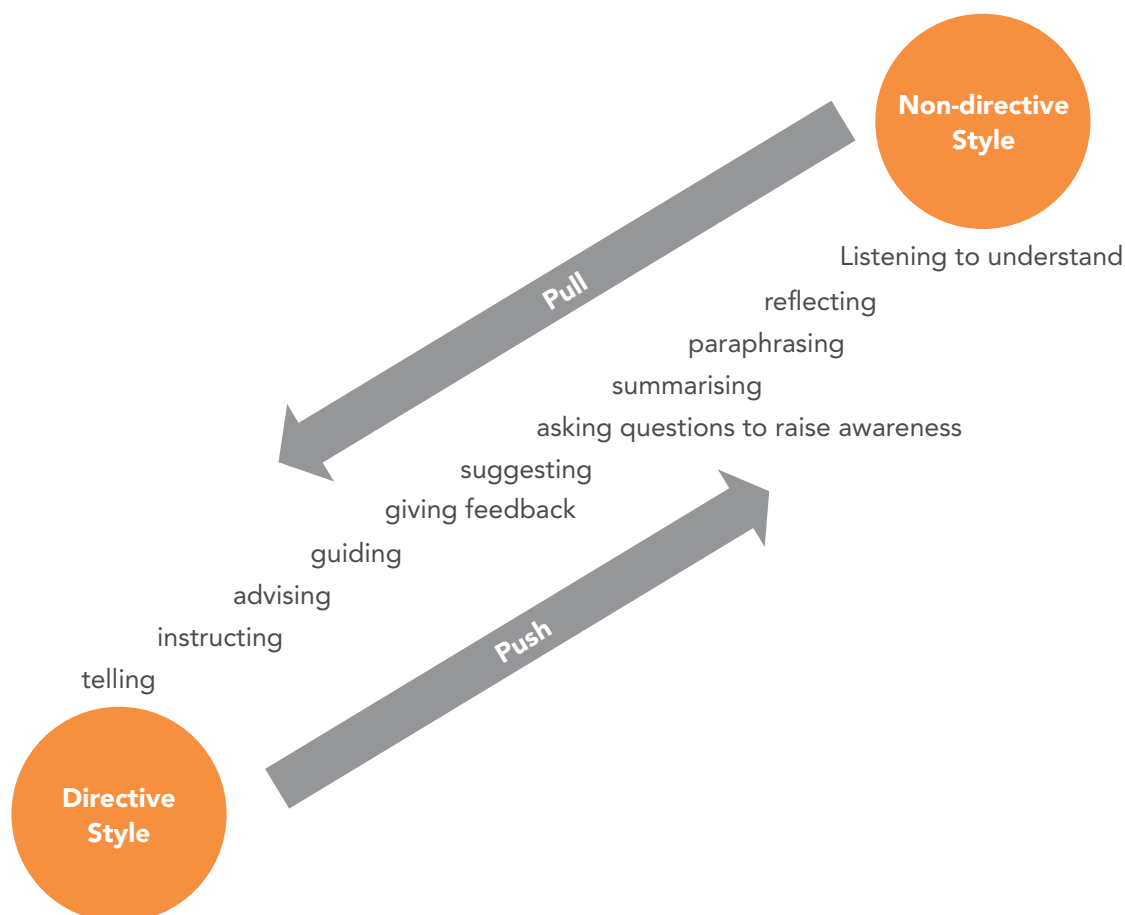
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### 2.3.3 WHAT STYLE OF COACHING IS BEST?

The way coaches work can vary a great deal too. This depends on their personality, the kind of challenges they like to work with and on their coaching method. All these need to match what you need and prefer. How do you want your coach to ‘be’ with you: authoritative or more facilitative?



**Figure 1.1** Directive vs non-directive coaching

As the above figure shows, the more directive the style, the more hands-on the coach's involvement with the subject matter is. A non-directive style puts the initiative more on the client. Whether one or the other is appropriate depends on the focus and nature of your challenge and on your preferences.

Professional coaches will adjust their style according to the need that arises with their client. Giving feedback is a classic example. It is considered to be moderately directive, and it is an essential tool for coaches. Many coaches whose preferred style is non-directive will use feedback in sessions when it is clear that this will progress the client's agenda. Feedback 'pushes' insights towards the client whereas listening to and reflecting their thoughts 'pulls' the client towards new insights.

However: if you would prefer a highly directive coach who tells you how to do your job, it is time for a frank conversation with your supervisor or line manager instead.

### 2.3.4 WHAT TYPE OF COACHING IS BEST?

There are many different types of coaching, often geared towards achieving a certain type of goal. An obvious example is sports coaching where goals can literally be the goal! Matching the type of coaching to your need is as important as finding a coach you get on with.

Coaches will describe the type of coaching they practise in several ways, so to keep things simple, here is a short overview.

type	focus on	useful for
Skills coaching	Learning specific skills such as operating a till	Learning on the job when you are new to it
Performance coaching	Raising performance level through increased outputs and efficiency	Improving and maturing in current job
Developmental coaching	Longer term development of the whole person	Using current job or personal circumstances to develop capability and capacity for future situations
Transformational Coaching	Achieving a permanent shift in thinking	Leaving old habits, behaviours and beliefs behind

**Table 2.2** Types of coaching. Based on Hawkins and Smith (2006)<sup>4</sup>

**Skills coaching** is usually done in-house by more experienced colleagues, supervisors or managers. Picture a barista in a chain we'll call Coffee Co: after receiving initial training they learn on the job.

**Performance coaching** is often done by line managers who have added coaching to their management approach, and by internal coaches in larger organisations. After five years or so in the job our barista might work with a performance coach to fulfil their ambition to become store manager.

**Developmental coaching** looks beyond roles, responsibilities or specific situations to find opportunities to grow and develop. While this approach might seem less focused on tackling

urgent questions it certainly does work on resolving presenting issues. Our Coffee Co store manager, having successfully turned around a failing branch, has been stepping up as interim area manager and is now hotly tipped for the newly vacant senior strategy manager position at head office. Their work with a developmental coach has helped them to ‘translate’ their skills from one role to the next.

**Transformational coaching** aims to leave old patterns behind by examining what is happening now. It is primarily interested in achieving a deep and permanent change. It is a very suitable approach for clients who have experienced a life-changing event such as a diagnosis that requires a complete lifestyle change or a sudden change of career. Let’s say our senior strategic manager has decided to leave Coffee Co after 15 years to set up their own consultancy. This requires a significant lifestyle change which they also need to combine with caring for an elderly parent. Not only will they need to rebuild their professional identity, a complete rethink of what truly matters in life is also on the cards.

Developmental and transformational coaches are usually external practitioners.

## 2.4 KEY QUESTIONS TO ASK: A CHECKLIST

Before we move on, let me suggest a number of additional questions to ask a coach you are considering working with. These are important to ask and it is not strange at all to take this list into a chemistry session. Many of them will be covered in the course of your first conversation anyway.

- **What are your coaching credentials?** Check your understanding of what these mean, because there are a lot of different ways to become a coach. It is not strange to ask more questions, and certainly do your own research into the training the coach has had.
- **What professional coaching organisations do you belong to?** If none, ask why.
- **What professional or ethical code to you adhere to?** Ask for a copy.
- **What is your complaints procedure?** This is a normal question to ask. Most coaches will refer to their professional bodies or the company they work for.
- **What insurance do you have?** A coach who says they don’t need insurance is like a driver who doesn’t have car insurance: they are not taking their responsibilities seriously. They should at least have Professional Indemnity Insurance, and Public Liability Insurance may be appropriate in certain circumstances.
- **How often do you have coaching supervision?** This is essentially being coached on your coaching. Professional coaches aim for supervision with a qualified coaching

supervisor roughly every 35–40 coaching hours. Be wary of coaches who don't invest in supervision, it is an essential part of keeping coaching practice safe and current.

- **How much time do you invest in continuing professional development?** Again, beware the coach who doesn't keep up with their profession. A professional coach will invest in several days' development per year. Self study is fine, conference attendance is good, formal learning is even better and accredited courses are the best.
- **Have you had coaching?** Would you trust a coach who has never had one themselves?
- **How and where do you keep notes?** This is important: your notes should be kept safe and remain confidential. Expect password protection and locked cabinets to keep your data safe.
- **What are the bounds of confidentiality?** This is important to ask if your employer or someone else is sponsoring your sessions. It is irregular for a coach to discuss any aspects of your coaching with a line manager (or anyone else, for that matter) without your prior and explicit consent.
- **How many sessions do your clients have on average?** This varies per coach but can also according to type and focus. As a very rough guide, executive coaches typically see clients 6–10 times while life coaches might see clients 10+ times.
- **What is the average frequency of sessions?** Again this varies. Executive coaching clients typically need more time between sessions and once every 4–6 weeks is common. Life coaching clients may see their coach more often. See what suits you and your coach best.
- **How long is a session?** As before: it varies. Executive coaching sessions can range from 60 minutes to several hours, while life coaching sessions are often 45–60 minutes.
- **What is your cancellation policy?** This should include what you should be able to expect if the coach has to cancel and/or reschedule.
- **What are your rates and payment terms? Is the rate inclusive of tax?** Rates can vary significantly. Executive coaching can run into hundreds of dollars/euros/pounds per hour while life coaching rates are typically lower. Some coaches ask for payment up front – be sure to check. Don't be afraid to ask about a payment plan, it's a perfectly good question!

**Tip** – Ask yourself if you want to work with a coach who displays impatience with these questions.

## 3 MAKING SESSIONS WORK FOR YOU

This chapter covers what happens in a session, coaching ‘etiquette’ and the typical stages of a coaching collaboration. We will also look at what to do when your coaching experience is not as you expected. Hopefully having some more insights help you to get started quickly and with a good focus, allowing you to make the most of the available time with your coach.

Let’s assume for the sake of this chapter that you have agreed to have six sessions with your coach. On your agenda is defining your next career move and making a start putting that plan into action. You also want to achieve a healthier work-life balance, which is an important reason to make a change in your career because your health and personal life have come under strain in recent months.

What should you expect?

### 3.1 COACHING ETIQUETTE

For many people coaching is a new experience and some of us feel a little more awkward about it than others, even if we are looking forward to it and feel excited about the possibilities. Here are a few notes to help you navigate the etiquette involved with coaching.

**Come prepared** There’s a useful little list in Chapter 1 with things you may like to have ready in coaching sessions. iPads are great for taking and keeping notes, taking pictures, checking calendars, making doodles and pulling up documents such as your last performance review, a business plan or job advert that excites you. If you are more of a notebook person, having a separate one for your coaching notes and actions is useful.

Being prepared also means collecting your thoughts before each session about what you want to use the session for. If you agreed to do some tasks in between sessions, make sure you have done them. You will be wasting precious (and probably expensive!) time if you arrive unprepared.

**Be punctual – both of you!** You should expect your coach to be on time every time, so don’t be surprised to find them waiting for you when you arrive. They will be expecting you, so don’t hesitate to go in at the appointed time, even if they seem busy. It is bad form

for a coach to be on the phone or worse, still be in session with previous client when yours is due to start.

Should you run late, try to get a message to your coach to let them know. Most coaches build a little flexibility into their schedule but we do usually end sessions at the appointed time regardless of whether it started on time. Expect to be billed the full amount if you don't turn up at all – this is standard practice in many professions, not just coaching. Hold a coach to account who arrives late themselves. Genuine emergencies aside, it is deeply unprofessional to keep a client waiting. Be sure you know what policy applies to lateness and cancellations.

**Switch off** Put your devices on silent (don't forget to mute your iPad notifications) and put them away until you need them in the session. It is not OK for a coach to be taking calls or checking their messages while in session with you.

**Tip** – Explain to colleagues or family members that you are not to be interrupted while you are in your coaching session except in an absolute emergency (and explain what an emergency is and is not). Consider making appointments private in your online or shared calendar.

**Meet elsewhere** If possible, arrange your sessions to take place away from your home or office. This can be a public space such as a coffee place or hotel lobby, or a meeting room on a different floor or in a different building. This reduces the chance of interruptions while being away from your usual surroundings can help switch into a different mindset for your session.

**Do your homework** This is so important that I am listing it separately here. There really is limited benefit in having coaching if you do nothing in between sessions. Your coach will aim to set actions and tasks with you to work on between sessions, and they will expect an update next time you meet. Some coaches are more directive in this respect than others (see Chapter 1) but as a key rule this always applies: *you do not have to agree to homework you really do not want to do.*

Be ready to be challenged on this but put your foot down too. Arguing why something isn't worth doing will help your coach to learn about you and your situation. They will agree more meaningful actions for you to work on between sessions.

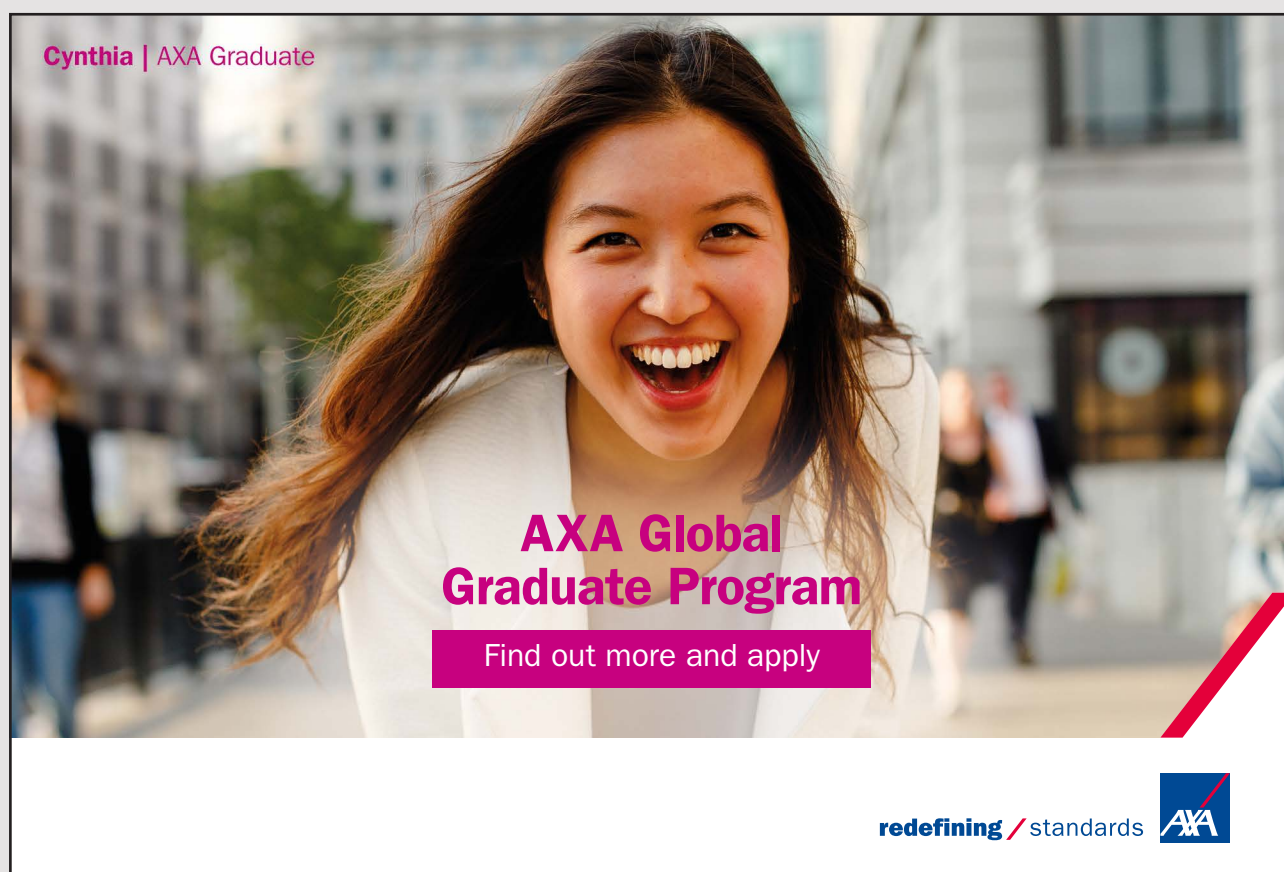
**Expect your coach to be prepared** What many clients don't realise is that coaches prepare before each session and record case notes afterwards as well. While you are working on some actions between sessions yourself, your coach will have their own homework. They may go

through some of the tools that may be useful in your next session or read up on a useful theory. A professional coach plans for each session keeping in mind your agenda and the actions you are working on. If you notice your coach is unprepared for your sessions, you should hold them to account.

**Don't apologise for talking about yourself** Truly, people do this! Your coaching sessions are not for your coach's benefit; they are to help you progress with something that truly matters to you. This means doing most of the talking and talking more about yourself than perhaps you are used to. If this feels strange at first: your coach will expect you to talk about yourself and they will be sensitive around difficult topics.

Similarly, don't apologise if you feel emotional during a session. It happens to many of us, men and women alike. The last thing you should worry about is whether it makes your coach uncomfortable – remember, we are trained professionals! Your coach will check that you are OK to continue with your day before the session ends and help you find suitable support if you are not coping so well.


**You can ditch the small talk** Your time is precious, so dive straight in when you arrive. Small talk can be a real distraction and it is not expected by your coach. If you lack inspiration



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(this can happen) you can simply say you're not feeling as fired up as you would like. That in fact makes for a good start of a session because it is important information for a coach: they will check that the coaching is focused on the right objectives and how you are doing in more general terms.

**Ask for what you need** If you need your coach to be challenging in one session and more supportive in the next, ask them for it. Sometimes a client arrives for a session feeling more fragile than usual because something unsettling has happened. A professional coach will always 'check in' with their client to see how they are at the start of each session, and adjust their style accordingly.

Similarly, if you want to do something specific in a session, do ask. Examples of things clients have asked for is doing a questionnaire to find their preferred management style; inviting their line manager into part of their session to discuss work priorities; going on a walkabout in the department they were leading; observing them chair a meeting and giving targeted feedback; swapping a stuffy meeting room for a walk along the canal (and getting ice cream along the way!). Always bear in mind these are your sessions and you are in charge of what you want to use them for; your coach is there to make sure your sessions keep contributing to the bigger plan and will steer accordingly when necessary.

## 3.2 STAGES

Broadly speaking the life cycle of a coaching collaboration has four stages, each with a distinct purpose and atmosphere, if you like.

### 3.2.1 STAGE 1: CONTRACTING AND SETTING THE AGENDA

Contracting refers to agreeing how you will work together and what you will commit to – and that applies to you as well as your coach. An important part of this contracting is done when you have your chemistry session and you discuss the terms of your collaboration, so this stage starts before your official collaboration begins (see Chapter 2 for more on chemistry sessions).

For the coach contracting also refers to building a co-called 'working alliance' with you, a strong, mutually respectful relationship that allows for challenge, support and openness. They will use the first few sessions to get to know you and invite you to do the same in return.



Your early sessions with your coach may also feel a little tentative: perhaps you are still a little uncertain about the possibilities. That's normal. Keep asking questions to clarify things you haven't quite worked out yet, whether it is about coaching in general or about your coach. It helps to build your working relationship and it can also help you to develop your inquisitive side, which you'll certainly need while you're working with your coach!

In this first stage you will focus on setting and refining the coaching agenda, using your initial discussion as a starting point. Your coach will probe around the issue or problem or challenge or opportunity that is at the heart of your agenda to help narrow down what matters the most and what is merely a distraction. They will help you to establish what will make the biggest positive difference to your situation and where to start to ultimately achieve your desired result. A big goal will need to be broken down into smaller ones.

Let's look at your fictitious out-of-kilter work life balance. You've been sleeping badly as a result of long days and increased stress, and you've had a cold lasting almost all winter. Your coach will want to investigate how this affects you before looking at where you can make some useful changes to your daily routine and habits.

Your overall goal is to make a significant career change, but in the meantime you have to deal with a lack of sleep too! While boosting your immune system by getting more sleep is not likely to lead to a job offer, being well rested and free of your cold before an interview will make a world of difference.

While your agenda takes shape, you may start to feel a sense of relief that you are finally getting a plan together to achieve something that truly matters to you. You may start to see some small benefits already when you make some changes with the encouragement of your sessions, and you probably enjoy the helpfulness of the conversations too.

*"coaching is about simplifying and putting priorities into a logical order. It helps to untangle and then structure your thoughts with the help of a coach because they can see the wood from the trees when you can't."*

– Elena, coaching client

### 3.2.2 STAGE 2: EXPLORING

Your coaching agenda is at the heart of everything you do together. It's the coach's job to ensure the work is always relevant to the agenda, and this frees you up to explore and go

off on tangents. If you wander too far away from work that contributes to achieving your desired goals, your coach will bring you back.

Being able to explore wild and seemingly implausible scenarios does wonders for creative thinking. Together you will create time and a space to do this in, where you can be certain you won't be judged or told to stick to your job. This stage often feels exciting with your coach encouraging you to see how many ideas you can generate and giving you feedback so you can decide which are the more outlandish ones that can be abandoned.

In this stage rapport between you and your coach is growing further and sessions often feel cheerful as exciting possibilities start to emerge. They will also push you to put things in order of priority and commit to them, which can be harder than it sounds.

While working on making improvements to your work-life balance, your coach asked you to list all possible career scenarios. On your list are:

- staying where you are and renegotiating your job description
- staying, and moving into a more desirable role (in this case also a promotion)
- leaving for a similar role at a competitor where you'll negotiate more favourable terms
- retraining and leaving your current employer

Because you have several options exploring each in detail is crucially important. Questions could be: which of these scenarios excites you the most? Which is least likely to pay off? Which scenario is the quick fix and which one is the more strategic one? What is the order in which you should explore them – if there is one?

You realise that you can start looking at courses while you're engaged in negotiations at work. In fact, after your session your list looks more like this:

- Negotiating to retrain on the job with a view to be promoted upon qualifying
- Analysing the work issues that contribute to my poor work-life balance and raising these with my line manager
- Updating my LinkedIn profile and CV, building my professional network in preparation for a promotion or possible change of employer

Your coach suggests a few tasks including making a list of people to get in touch with on LinkedIn, and keeping notes on habits that improve your work-life balance.

Your coach will also do some exploring of their own: how much are you willing to risk to realise your dreams, how resilient are you, how hard can they challenge you? While they are encouraging you to think broadly and creatively, they will test your boundaries by suggesting tasks or exercises and holding you to account for doing them. This may feel challenging at times.

### 3.2.3 STAGE 3: KNUCKLING DOWN

It's not a very scientific term, but it does describe what this stage in coaching is all about: genuinely putting the effort in, taking risks, and seeing things through. This is the most challenging stage of the four because it is where you are very likely to run into your limitations in one or more ways, which can feel very uncomfortable.

For example, your coach may be picking up on habits or behavioural patterns that have contributed to ending up where you are, and describe these to you. Their feedback may remind you of things other people have said too. Discovering what we have contributed ourselves to the situation that we now want to change is uncomfortable. It is part of the work you are doing and your coach will help you to safely navigate and deal with the sticky issues you uncover. Remember: even if what they say sounds suspiciously like something your manager or other half or best friend has also told you, your coach is there to help you, not to prove other people right.

Your fifth session feels challenging because you still haven't brought up your plan to retrain with your line manager. Your coach challenges you and asks whether this is because you are trying to avoid having a difficult conversation, or if something else is going on.

On reflection however you realise that this particular option is no longer your favourite. A few developments at work have you wondering whether you want to continue working there at all. One development is that the promotion you are interested in is in jeopardy because of recent changes in the management structure. A second reason is that an ex-colleague you enjoyed working with very much some years ago has tipped you off about a potential opening at their current place of work.

Now your priorities look like this:

- Research external opportunity and speak to ex-colleague about it
- Get feedback on my updated LinkedIn profile and CV to fine tune it
- Discuss organisational changes with line manager to find out precisely how these affect my plans (which may not be what I am assuming!)

Having the challenge from your coach has brought out there was a good reason behind not bringing up your original plan to retrain with your line manager. The ensuing conversation has generated your next steps which leave both options – leaving and staying – open for now.

### 3.2.4 STAGE 4: CONSOLIDATING AND WRAPPING UP

In the final stage of your coaching collaboration you will have made some significant progress with your plans and notice that you use your sessions differently. As you become more

confident in the decisions you have made and your well-considered plans start to produce results, you will ‘need’ your coach less and less.

When you get to the end stage of your coaching, you and your coach spend more time looking at what you have achieved and examining them for the useful insights you have gained that you can take forward with you after the coaching ends. Getting ready for going it alone is a very important task now. We’ll look more closely in the next chapter.

**Tip** – revisit the notes you kept throughout your coaching collaboration to remind yourself of all the work you have done. Jot down the salient points ahead of your final session.

### 3.3 FEELING STUCK

It is possible that you experience something best described as a ‘plateau’ where not much seems to be happening and you feel a bit stuck. There can be a number of reasons why the coaching seems to stall or cruise at the same level, which most frequently happens – if it does – around the third stage. They are:

- you have explored all options with no new results or insights
- you are not making progress because you are not putting in the work in between sessions
- the agenda needs to be revisited and adjusted
- your coach and you are running out of steam in your collaboration

**No new insights** When you have explored all options and nothing new emerges, this can mean that you are ready to make some important decisions. To be certain of this, the coach will help to check that no possible options have been left undiscovered. The answer to this type of plateau is to go back to the beginning when you created your list of options and see if you would add or change anything. If not, it’s time to put your plans into action and move to the next stage!

**Not doing your actions** The second reason for a plateau is not brilliant because it means the opportunity to make real progress is being wasted. I’ll often explain to my clients that the ‘real’ work happens between our sessions. A useful way of looking at the sessions is to consider them as catalysts for your plans and a playing ground for testing out ideas. You can use them to practise what you are going to do next, for example talking through a difficult conversation you need to have. However, if you then duck out of actually having that conversation, the coaching to get you ready for it has been in vain.

If a client plateaus for this reason, coaches tend to be at their most challenging towards them. If this happens to you, remember the reasons why you wanted a coach and above all, be very honest with yourself about the reasons your progress is stalling. If you have a good working relationship with your coach, you should be able to share your thoughts and worries with them as well as accept their challenge. It is often after moving on from this type of plateau that coaching starts to produce more and more meaningful results than before.

**Revisiting the agenda** It is very, very common for coaching agendas to shift and develop over time. In fact I see this as a good development, because it signals progress. A plateau can simply indicate that it is time to go back to the beginning and check whether the agenda is focused on the right priorities and desired outcomes. It is also possible that something unexpected happens which changes everything in the middle of your coaching collaboration. For instance, you might find out that you and your partner are expecting your first child or your employer announces a merger, throwing your future at the company into serious doubt.

A coaching agenda should never be fixed in stone allowing for it to be updated along the way. If your coach seems reluctant to do this, that is a concern. Ask them why and insist on a full answer.

**Running out of steam in the collaboration** Sadly, it does also happen that something changes or does not quite develop between coach and client. There could be an issue with the initial contracting where both agreed the way they would work together and what to focus on in the collaboration. If this is the case, revisit your expectations with them and see whether this resolves the issue.

A coach should always be open to feedback at any stage of the coaching collaboration and they should make it as easy as possible for you to share yours. However, if you doubt the coach's ability to hear your concerns in a non-defensive way, this is a sign something is not right, especially if you have put your carefully considered thoughts to them. It is difficult getting results if somehow trust has been undermined, so this too important to ignore.

If you have tried the above and still feel your coaching is not reaching its potential and you have a sponsor, raise it with them because they should be aware of your disappointment. Prematurely ending the coaching collaboration is a last resort, and if you do take this route check any relevant policies that apply to avoid any unpleasant surprises.

## 4 WRAPPING UP

Bringing a coaching collaboration to a good close is as important as starting the work well. After all, what good is it to leave behind the valuable new insights and skills you've gained because you no longer have sessions? In this chapter we will explore how approaching the time to close the collaboration can feel, so that you can recognise this yourself, and how to get ready to wrap up well. The true value of coaching lies in the long-term benefits of everything you have worked on while you were having sessions. That is why you should spend a little time on preparing for the final session.

### 4.1 RECOGNISING THAT YOU ARE READY TO WRAP UP

If you have not set a specific number of sessions, how do you know when you are ready to finish your coaching sessions? And if you are approaching your agreed final session, what will tell you that the time is indeed right, or whether you should find out if you can arrange for extra sessions?

When coaching has advanced to the final stage, clients often share less detail instead describing what they are working on in more broad terms. This can mean a few things, including that they need less support from their coach as their new insights help them to get on with their plans. It also suggests that the client is focused and confident that they are working on the right priorities.

Another indication that a client is ready to wrap up their sessions is when the coach starts to feel more or less surplus to requirement. For example, the client brings in an interesting idea that would have been a big piece of work to tackle together earlier on in the coaching collaboration, and proceeds to set out quickly and confidently how they are going to develop the idea further. Where they might have sought some support from the coach to do this, they 'self-coach' on the idea instead. In other words, if you notice your coach is mostly nodding and sense-checking, you are nearing graduation day.

**Tip** – Professional coaches will actively avoid creating or encouraging a dependency on sessions. Although it is tempting for a coach to continue working with the same client for longer, it is unethical to do so if it is not in the client’s interest.

Trust your instincts if your coach seems reluctant to agree to a final session. Ask them for their views if they disagree with you (they may have some valid points) but also insist if you don’t feel you should continue. Remember: you can return to coaching with this coach or a different one any time of your choosing.

Assuming that you have had a very good experience with your coach and sessions (see Chapter 3 on recognising and dealing with disappointing coaching), signs that you are ready to complete your coaching sessions can include:

- Feeling less excited about your upcoming session
- Wondering if you might not use the time in your calendar for something else instead
- Being a bit bored in session
- Suppressing the urge to chat about irrelevant things with your coach like an interest you happen to share
- A sense that the sessions are a luxury now as opposed to the essential development they represented previously
- Impatience to just get on with things now because you don’t really need to talk them through so much
- Having built some new or improved relationships that help to talk through ideas and thoughts you have about your priorities.

Keeping some mental notes of whether and how often you have some of the above is a useful way of knowing whether it is time for you to discuss wrapping up. If all is going well, your coach will bring up the topic or welcome you doing so because they have spotted the same signs you have.

## 4.2 MAKING THE MOST OF YOUR FINAL SESSION

Prior to having the final session, some clients report feeling a little nervous or even sad about wrapping up. That is not strange if you think about the closeness that often builds between them and their coach. Clients also make meaningful progress on matters that are important to them and some clients make changes that are so significant that they describe the coaching as life changing.

Other clients feel ready and resolved to finish their coaching and not having any further sessions doesn't provoke much of an emotional response. They report on the usefulness of the experience and the gains they have made that they can now build on, often in the knowledge they can revisit coaching any time they wish in the future.

A good final coaching session looks something like this:

1. Catching up on developments since the last session
2. Revisiting the (initial) coaching agenda which was agreed at the beginning
3. Summing up the main learning, new insights and progress made during the coaching, including how the agenda, priorities and focus might have changed
4. Any new or unfinished business that you will be working on by yourself from here on, and especially how you will ensure you are successful in achieving your objectives
5. Feedback on the coaching as a whole and for your coach in particular

Your own input will be crucially important in order to make the most of this final session, so preparation is key. Many coaches, including me, will send a questionnaire to help clients reflect on the experience. Have a look at it even if you don't usually like questionnaires and don't really want to complete it. You can talk through the questions you find relevant in the session instead.

If you just rely on your coach to do the summing up, you will miss a wonderful opportunity to consolidate your new insights. Only you know precisely how and what learning and personal development took place for you while you were engaged with coaching. Your coach can add their perspective to that to enrich it further.

To help you get ready, here are some tips:

- Look through the notes you took during your coaching sessions, starting at the beginning, and jot down all the important discoveries and decisions you made in a list
- Think back to your sessions to see if you can recall any moments that stand out for you. These can be something the coach said as well as something you thought, or an exercise you did
- Ask for some feedback from people around you such as your partner, friends, family, co-workers or your manager about differences or development they may have noticed. If they don't know you've had coaching, you don't have to tell them now if you don't want them to know
- When you think back to your expectations of coaching and what you hoped it would do for you, how have these been met? If they have not been met, or not



entirely, what needs to be addressed about that? What caused this? You may need to take a close look at a few things here, including your own commitment and that of your coach

- What is still on your to-do list now, and what are your plans for those things?
- If you had another two coaching sessions, what would you use them for? Would they be ‘nice to have’ or would you spend them on something strategically important to you?

If you know deep down that to have more coaching sessions would be comfortable and a bit of an indulgence, it is time to wrap up.

#### 4.2.1 SUMMING UP ALL OF YOUR WINS

Reflecting back on the work you have done while having a coach also includes any other activities you have done in that period. Perhaps you went on a workshop where you learned new skills or maybe you did three job interviews and learned something relevant each time. Sometimes it is hard to say what insights came from coaching and which ones were triggered by something else, and that is fine. Coaching is a catalyst for more curiosity and openness that you apply outside your sessions. Coaching sessions can also be where something we learn in a workshop is ‘translated’ into real life.

Interestingly, many clients forget where they started from after just a few sessions. Looking back to the start and recalling what was limiting then can be very enlightening. I have heard clients exclaim ‘I can’t believe that was such an issue to me back then’ so often I have lost count.

**Tip** – Taking stock of everything you’ve done is also a great way to celebrate your hard work and the distance you’ve travelled. We often forget to congratulate ourselves once in a while and to enjoy the fruits of our labour.

Some of your wins will be hard-earned and others will have come easily, and they all count. Easy wins can take us by surprise, for example when the thought of trying something different kept us awake at night only to find it wasn’t hard at all when we actually did it. Those are valuable wins to remind yourself of next time something looks hard at first.

### 4.2.2 MAKING YOUR PLAN

Once you have summed up all the work you have done it is time to look ahead and make a plan to continue on your own. Coaching at its very best enables you to confidently build on what you have started without the support of a coach. Coaching is always temporary, which makes planning ahead so important. Here are some questions you can use to think through what needs to be in your plan:

- What wins are too important to lose again?
- Where do I need to be extra careful not to relapse into old behaviours or ways of thinking?
- What are the tools and skills that have been so useful to me?
- Which skills do I need to keep sharpening to keep up the pace of my progress?
- What are the early signs of undesirable situations that I have learned to deal with?
- What helpful new habits do I want to keep up, and which old ones will I not allow to resurface?
- What or who can help when the going gets tough?
- What is my next goal or objective, now that I have achieved X?

Maintenance is key when you are still getting used to doing some things differently. It takes time and effort to update habits and behaviours! Making a plan helps you to identify what you need to do to ensure you don't relapse or lose the focus that having regular coaching sessions has provided. Your coach will have worked towards this final session with you and they will use it to help you get your plan together.

### 4.3 TAKING YOUR LEAVE – OR NOT

Finishing your sessions means saying goodbye to your coach – or at least for now. A frequently heard question is whether it is OK to get back in touch later. My own response is that of course it is! Every coach I know loves having news from past clients, especially when they have achieved something important. It's also not inappropriate to come back to your coach to check something with them, for example how to use a tool they introduced or what the title of that useful book was. If you would like to keep the door open, simply ask your coach about getting back in touch later.

I am also yet to meet a coach who does not appreciate referrals from past clients. As you now know, referrals are a great way to find a suitable coach and if you want to recommend coaching to someone else, your own coach is a logical place to start. Always remember that anyone working with a coach needs to be self-motivated, and that coaches you may be

speaking to on behalf of someone else will want to check with the individual themselves that they do want a coach (revisit Chapter 1 for a refresher on what to take into consideration).

If you are considering returning to coaching yourself in the future, you are free to start from scratch and talk to different coaches before deciding who to work with. There is no expectation to work with the same coach unless you want to.

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Something I do, which does not appear to be standard practice, is to get in touch with each client around three months after our final session to offer a catch up. I don't chase them for an appointment, because my theory is that if they would find it useful, they will act on it. I make it clear that the catch up is entirely optional and that I don't charge for it. We often arrange a half hour phone call or sit down to chat over a coffee. Sometimes the catch up turns into a 'top-up' coaching session which is absolutely fine.

I follow up like this for two reasons.

One, I want to make sure the client is doing well and there are no loose ends that I should attend to as their coach. Sometimes people have an insight or question after the coaching has concluded, and it would have been helpful for them to bring it into a session. Knowing there is one more opportunity to do this can be reassuring. I also want to check that the client is 'safe' without the regular sessions, which tells me that we have concluded well and at the right time. If this is in doubt we use the catch up to see what needs to be done.

Two, we coaches do not often get to see what happens after the client goes their own way, even if we bump into each other in the company cafeteria occasionally. Checking in a few months later gives me more insight into if and how the coaching continues to pay off for the client. This is good for me and it certainly benefits my future clients to understand more about how clients continue with their development afterwards.

#### **4.3.1 GIVING YOUR COACH FEEDBACK**

Feedback from current and past clients is hugely important to coaches because it helps us to develop and keep our practice up to date. If all is well you have been able to give feedback throughout your coaching collaboration and this has helped you to make the most of your available sessions. Now you can give your coach some unique insights into what it is like to be their client, and a professional coach will greatly appreciate this feedback.

Giving feedback can be challenging and perhaps it was even one of the items on your agenda. Remember that your coach is trained themselves in giving feedback and that receiving it is a very important professional skill for anyone, especially coaches. If you still find it difficult to give your coach some developmental or constructive feedback, keep in mind that you know each other well by now and that your feedback is very unlikely to be misinterpreted. And finally, treat it as a last opportunity for practising giving feedback in a safe environment: if this has been something you have been working on with your coach, they will appreciate you sharing your thoughts about them even more.

Here are a few ways you can give your coach feedback:

- What went well?
- What could have been better, and how?
- What can your coach do more of?
- What can your coach do less of?
- What did you expect at the start of your coaching experience that didn't happen?
- What surpassed your expectations and how?
- If you could take a single-use magic wand to the coaching, what would you use it for?

To give you an idea of what coaches might want to know, below are some of the questions that I frequently ask my clients. Some of these questions are about the usefulness of the coaching as a way to develop and work on an agenda and other questions are about my performance as a coach. Even though I make a conscious effort to ask how I am doing throughout the collaboration and what I can do to adjust to my client's needs, I still need to check at the end of our work together whether I have delivered against their expectations.

- How would you describe coaching to someone who is new to it?
- When would you recommend coaching to someone?
- With the benefit of hindsight, what advice would you have given yourself about getting ready to work with a coach when you started?
- What has been the most surprising thing about coaching for you?
- What did coaching not deliver for you that you are disappointed about?
- How can I ensure that this is addressed satisfactorily?
- How would you describe my approach to coaching?
- What would you describe as my strength as a coach?
- Where can I improve my coaching?
- Would you recommend me to others?

Together with regular professional development and supervision my past clients' feedback is what keeps other clients safe. While it is absolutely wonderful to get glowing feedback (I'm human after all!) asking my clients to help me increase my understanding of where I can develop also models the idea of lifelong learning to my clients.

The best feedback any client can give their coach is by using their new insights every day and achieving all the things that matter to them. Do drop your coach a line or two, even when it has been a while – I guarantee you will be making their day.

# LIST OF FIGURES AND TABLES

Table 1.1 Coaching vs. Mentoring

Table 1.2 Coaching vs. counselling/therapy

Table 2.1 Positive personality traits

Figure 1.1 Directive vs. non-directive coaching

Table 2.2 Types of Coaching

# ENDNOTES

1. Kimsey-House et al, *Co-Active Coaching*, 2007
2. Kimsey-House et al, *Co-Active Coaching*, 2007
3. The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator or MBTI is a well-known psychometric based on Jungian theory
4. Hawkins, P. and Smith, N., *Coaching, Mentoring and Organizational Consulting*, 2006