



# Coaching Session Design

---

## SUMMARY

A coach's job is to support the client to move from where they are now to where they want to be, and to do that in a way that allows the client to take the reins and direct the process. The client sets the intention for the session, the client identifies any goals and, with the coach's expertise, brings forward any blockages or challenges. They do this however, within a structure and a process provided by the coach.

## COVERED IN THIS TOPIC

- The difference between coaching model and a coaching process
- Planning and running a coaching session
- The importance of the Coaching Agreement to the Session Design
- Reflection prompts
- Coaching session design and the ICF competencies

## COACHING SESSION DESIGN

Each coaching session is unique. It is a partnership of the coach and the client and is impacted by the quality of the relationship; the context of the client's challenge(s) and the individual traits of both the coach and the client that day. Despite or maybe because of this unique quality, coaching requires a structure that will provide the framework for this professional conversation. This structure doesn't override the uniqueness of the session, it simply provides a 'coat hanger' on which to hang your coaching work.

### What is a Coaching Process?

A session structure can also be referred to as a coaching process which is a summary of the usual steps taken from the beginning to the end of the coaching session.

A coaching process differs from a coaching model as it describes what happens in a single session, whereas a coaching model is a description of the philosophies or concepts that underpin a coach's style and approach to your coaching as a whole.

The following process/structure is fairly standard for all coaches in all niches and all contexts. A coach's job is to support the client from where they are now to where they want to be, and to do that in a way that allows the client to take the reins and direct the process. The client sets the topic for the session, identifies any goals and brings forward any blockages or challenges. They do this however, within a structure and a process provided by the coach.

### Sample Coaching Process

For the purposes of this module the 6 step coaching process below has been shown as linear. But, in reality, it can weave and whirl as the client moves towards their intention for the session. During this process the coach will help a client clarify their values, beliefs, feelings, perceptions and ideas, and will hold a safe space for them to identify their strengths, passions, knowledge and skills. Opportunities for shifting limiting beliefs or reframing perspectives will be identified. The coach will be a sounding board for new ideas and the co-creator of goals, action plans, and accountability structures. And, throughout the whole process they will be the clients number one supporter by acknowledging and encouraging their client.

## Sample Coaching Process

1. Establish the Coaching Agreement - set the goal or outcome for the session
2. Clarify the current situation
3. Clarify the gap
4. New Learning
5. Identify and commit to the action
6. Accountability

### 1. Establish The Coaching Agreement

*Identify the specific issue for the allotted time of session and establish the goal for the session.*

- What is the issue/goal you would like to focus on today?
- What is important for you about this?
- How will you benefit when you have this?
- How will you know you achieved what you wanted to accomplish today?
- What will that look like or feel like (subjective or objective)?
- What would be different?
- What might happen if you don't achieve this?
- What will it cost you if you don't achieve this?
- Where are you now regarding what you wanted to achieve today?

### 2. Clarifying the Current Situation

*Starting with the client's desired outcomes, invite them to explore what new actions or perspective shifts might be needed to unearth possible solutions.*

- What is the current situation like?
- Up until now, what have you done or worked on?
- What is most troublesome or bothersome to you?
- What would the ideal situation look or feel like?

### 3. Clarifying the Gap

*In this step, the coach shares observations for the client to consider regarding where the gap exists between the current situation and their desired one. The coaches' questions also clarify the client's feelings about this gap.*

- What might be causing the gap between the goal (desired situation) and the current situation?
- What issues or obstacles are preventing you from achieving your goals?
- Are there things you are not doing or might now do?
- What do you think is the root of this problem?

### 4. Identify and Commit to Action

*Client chooses the actions to commit to*

- What can you do starting today? What can you stop doing starting today?
- What action can you commit to taking in this area?
- What might get in the way of accomplishing this?
- How will you support your commitment to this action?
- Regarding this action, what or who will be involved?
- What other options can you think of?

### 5. New Learning

*Client summarizes actions, commitments and perspective shifts.*

- What have you noticed?
- What has become clearer?
- What are your take-aways from this session?
- What new awareness or learning happened today?
- How will this support you going forward?
- What are some things that you became aware of or became clearer?

### 6. Accountability

*Coach partners with clients to "hold" their promise to themselves.*

- How will you hold yourself accountable to the goal(s) you set today?
- What will need to be in place to ensure you do these things?
- What support can the coaching provide in your commitment to take action?

- As you sit with this plan, what's telling you it will be successful?

## **The Coaching Flow**

The coaching process relies on an interactive dialogue between coach and client; one that unearths a vision, a new idea or action from the client. Some have called this dialogue the 'coaching flow' as it describes the ease and forward leaning of the coaching process. To give you a picture of what this flow looks like, think of a closet that has some light but also some areas where the light is not quite bright enough to see clearly. Imagine this is the coaching topic, situation or goal. While the client explores what they are looking for in the closet, there will be obvious ideas and awarenesses (those that are well lit) and there will be others that are not really clear or perhaps are overlooked or hidden due to the poor light (underlying beliefs, innovative ideas, and new ways of thinking).

The coach and the client work together to explore the closet – side by side – with the client moving the contents of the closet around, examining them and making choices about what will get them what they want. The coach then is holding a flashlight to guide and support the client in their search. For each coach, the process may be slightly different – there is no prescriptive or one-way to get in the coaching flow.

The coaching flow allows you to have a more structured coaching conversation that lends itself to partnership and productivity. The coaching flow enables the coach to:

- Support the client to take action more decisively and efficiently to achieve their goals
- Keep track of where you and the client are in the conversation and where and whether the conversation is headed toward the goal.

## **One Size Does Not Fit All**

When we think of being 'in the flow' we are likely at ease with ourselves - our strengths, values, and individuality. The experienced coach understands how to go with the flow with a client while holding a structure that ensures the session is as effective as possible. Each time you coach you further develop the creativity and confidence needed to be in the coaching flow with your client.

The coaching flow is "enabling," not strictly followed. For example, more or less time may be spent on certain steps or stages or steps may be shortened or even skipped because every

coaching relationship is unique and likely to follow its own particular path based on the problems, issues or challenges raised in each session.

### **Flow is Built into the Process**

When starting a coaching conversation, the coach observes from the sidelines and engages their curiosity and wonder as they observe the client. Many coaches find it can be a bit tricky to 'establish the coaching agreement' as it often feels like a choice between being in the coaching flow or sticking to the steps or markers of establishing a tangible outcome for the coaching session. If the client's goals are not concrete or seem vague despite your efforts to gain clarity, there is a temptation to abandon establishing the coaching agreement altogether.

However, the client's desire to gain clarity or "talk a topic through" is not considered a goal for the session. This might sound like:

- It sounds like you would like to use our time to talk through this issue.
- What would this do for you? What might be the benefit?
- By talking through this, what do you hope to achieve? (this is the goal)
- What about that is important to you?
- How will you know our conversation has been time well spent?
- How will you know it's been a successful conversation for you?

Consider these questions and your reflections in establishing the agreement as a demonstration of your curiosity. After all, how can we support someone with our professional coaching if we don't have an open mind and an active ear? Think of this process as serving your client by exploring and discovering the very purpose of the coaching conversation.

The coaching relationship happens in a roomy container for the coach and client to work together. It is important to lean on the process without letting it become prescriptive or rigid. The coaching conversation is about the client, not the coach. If the process is too prescriptive, it means the coach is following their own agenda rather than attending to the client's issue. Resist following each stage too closely or in a specific order. The coaching flow is not a straight line – it's more of a spiral where there is an ebb and flow and a looping back and forth between current and new ideas, thoughts and beliefs as well as possible obstacles or needed resources. Some coaches refer to the process as "scaffolding" – the actual 'building' or results will be built in partnership as slowly or as quickly as they both experience as necessary.

## REFLECTION

1. When learning a new skill, it is natural to become fixated on the new process that you are learning. What will tell you that you are following your structure or session design too rigidly?
2. Think about a time when you failed to establish a clear agreement - what happened to the session's flow?

## ICF COMPETENCIES AND COACHING SESSION DESIGN

### A. FOUNDATION

#### 1. Demonstrates Ethical Practice

- Demonstrates personal integrity and honesty in interactions with clients, sponsors and relevant stakeholders
- Is sensitive to clients' identity, environment, experiences, values and beliefs
- Uses language appropriate and respectful to clients, sponsors and relevant stakeholders
- Maintains the distinctions between coaching, consulting, psychotherapy & other support professions
- Refers clients to other support professionals, as appropriate

### B. CO-CREATING THE RELATIONSHIP

#### 3. Establishes and Maintains Agreements

- Explains what coaching is and is not and describes the process to the client and relevant stakeholders
- Reaches agreement about what is and is not appropriate in the relationship, what is and is not being offered, and the responsibilities of the client and relevant stakeholders
- Reaches agreement about the guidelines and specific parameters of the coaching relationship such as logistics, fees, scheduling, duration, termination, confidentiality and inclusion of others
- Partners with the client and relevant stakeholders to establish an overall coaching plan and goals
- Partners with the client to determine client-coach compatibility

