

Chapter 2: Coaching Relationship Skills

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Chapter 2

Coaching Relationship Skills

“My certainty is greater than your doubt.”
— Dave Buck, President of CoachVille

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After reading this chapter, you will be able to:

- Define the “heart of coaching”
- Demonstrate the skills for establishing trust and building rapport within a coaching relationship
- Name and discuss “three core coaching skills”
- Demonstrate the skills for mindful listening, open-ended inquiry, and perceptive reflections
- Identify additional tools for developing the coaching relationship
- Discuss the Do’s and Don’ts of coaching
- Describe the qualities of a masterful coach.
- Describe the International Coaching Federation Core Coaching Competencies

Relationship: The Heart of Coaching

Consider the following definitions of coaching from leaders in the field:

“Professional coaching is an ongoing professional relationship that helps people produce extraordinary results in their lives, careers, businesses or organizations. Through the process of coaching, clients deepen their learning, improve their performance, and enhance their quality of life.”

— The International Coach Federation, *The ICF Code of Ethics*, www.coachfederation.org, 2005, pg.1

“Coaching is the art of creating an environment, through conversation and a way of being, that facilitates the process by which a person can move toward desired goals in a fulfilling manner.”

— Tim Gallwey, *The Inner Game of Work*, 2000, p. 177

“Coaching is the process of bringing out the greatness of people. It begins with a desire on the part of the client to accomplish, have, or experience something. The coach inspires the client to accomplish the desired result through personalized teaching, expanding awareness, and designing environments.”

— Dave Buck, www.coachville.com, *The Language of Coaching*, 2004

“Coaching is a process that fosters self-awareness and that results in the motivation to change, as well as the guidance needed if change is to take place in ways that meet (individual and) organizational performance needs.”

— David Dotlich & Peter Cairo, *Action Coaching*, 1999, p. 31

“Coaching is a mutually voluntary interaction that occurs between people in which one person, the coach, has neither responsibility, accountability, or authority over the outcomes of the person being coached towards a result of mutually desirable performance, generative change and development of the whole person.”

— Mike Jay, *Coach2 The Bottom Line*, 1999, p. A-i

“Coaching is essentially a conversation – a dialog between a coach and a coachee – within a productive, results-oriented context.

Coaching involves helping individuals access what they know. They may never have asked themselves the questions, but they have the answers. A coach assists, supports, and encourages individuals to find these answers.

Coaching is about learning – yet a coach is not a teacher and does not necessarily know how to do things better than the coachee. A coach can observe patterns, set the stage for new actions, and then work with the individual to put these new, more successful actions into place. Coaching involves learning. Through various coaching techniques such as listening, reflecting, asking questions, and providing information, coachees become self-correcting (they learn how to correct their behavior themselves) and self-generating (they generate their own questions and answers).

Coaching is more about asking the right questions than providing answers – a coach engages in a collaborative alliance with the individual to establish and clarify purpose and goals and to develop a plan of action to achieve these goals.”

— Perry Zeus and Suzanne Skiffington, *The Complete Guide to Coaching at Work*, 2000, p. 3

Coaching is a relationship that intends to create “transformation and learning in individuals, groups, and communities”.... “It starts with engaging people in a conversation where they clarify their vision, goals, and ideas as well as their agreement to be challenged and supported”.... It assumes “that people have the inherent creativity, intelligence, and tacit knowledge they need to succeed but may need help in gaining access to it”.... It revolves around “committed listening and speaking”. It involves “setting stretch goals, eliciting internal commitment and motivation and self-directed learning, creating a successful theory of action, practicing the fundamentals, observing breakdowns, providing meaningful feedback, as well as teaching new skills and capabilities.”

— Robert Hargrove, *Masterful Coaching*, 1995, pp. 84, 53, 57, and 37

Despite nuances of perspective and emphasis, these definitions of coaching share a common denominator: *relationship*. Coaching is a growth-fostering relationship that enables clients to reach their goals and fulfill their visions.

The core coaching skills described in this chapter are consistent with ICF Core Coaching Competencies (see Appendix 2) and are taught widely by coach training schools. The relevant ICF competencies include “Establishing Trust and Intimacy,” “Active Listening,” and

“Powerful Questioning.” These skills are not new discoveries by coaches – they are rather foundational relational skills of counseling and clinical psychologists, and are core skills of the Motivational Interviewing field described further in Chapter 5.

Establishing Trust and Rapport

The coaching relationship requires the establishment of strong trust and rapport in order to generate a productive and fulfilling change process. When trust and rapport are absent, so is a growth-fostering environment.

Megan Tschannen-Moran defines trust as the “willingness to be vulnerable to another based on the confidence that the other is benevolent, honest, open, reliable, and competent” (2004).

Understanding the importance of these five qualities, masterful coaches pay constant attention to utilizing them in every conversation.

Additional dimensions of relationship building are expanded below:

1. Hold unconditional positive regard

According to Carl Rogers, **unconditional positive regard** is defined as being completely accepting toward another person, without reservations, (1995). Holding such regard for clients is essential for establishing rapport and trust. The coaching alliance will be weak and unsuccessful if clients do not believe that their coaches are on their sides, accepting them unconditionally.

**IMPORTANT**

Judgment, criticism, and contempt – spoken or unspoken – do not motivate or support behavior change. It is not our place to point out our clients' shortcomings and teach them a better way. Rather, we are called to champion their strengths and invite them to figure out a better way. When we believe in our clients and hold positive regard for them – regardless of what they do or do not accomplish– we establish a relationship that can bolster both self-efficacy and self-esteem (See Chapter 6). Unfailing positive regard is the key to establishing rapport and trust, and is the foundation for masterful coaching.

2. Show empathy

Empathy is defined as “a respectful understanding of another person’s experience, including his or her feelings, needs, & desires” (See Chapter 5). Empathy is quite different from sympathy. Someone who is sympathetic identifies with another’s experience, whereas, an empathetic person seeks to understand and appreciate that experience. Coaching is made possible by empathic engagement that builds relationships and facilitates growth.

Empathy helps to build trust and rapport. When our clients are struggling, it’s especially important that we connect with their feelings, needs, and desires in a positive, supportive, and understanding way. When clients feel judged, their self-efficacy and readiness to change

may be undermined. When clients feel a lack of compassion, they may become resistant and isolate themselves from the resources needed for change.

3. Be humble role models

To develop trust and rapport with clients, coaches serve as humble role models for optimal health and wellness, “walking the talk” without being boastful, arrogant, or rude. To quote Jay Perry, coaching is not a service profession. “It is a modeling profession. We need to be the change that we want to see in the world. We need to model the behavior that we want to see in our clients and our prospective clients (Perry, 2005, p.7).

Our humility comes from continually working on our own fulfillment, balance, health, fitness, and well-being. We know well that we still have much to learn. The challenge is to be role models without placing ourselves on a pedestal or talking too much about ourselves. The key is to never dominate the conversation in our eagerness to help, but to always remain humble.

At the start of a coaching relationship, coaches typically deliver a brief, yet inspirational, introduction that captures our passion for health, fitness, wellness, and coaching. A well-rehearsed summary of our backgrounds and how we work with people should be included. “What more do you want to know about me?” is a great way to end the summary and invite questions that build rapport.



IMPORTANT

When is personal disclosure helpful? People come to coaching not only to learn, but also for inspiration. Most people already know, or at least have a sense of, what they “should” be doing to improve health, fitness, and wellness. They just don’t know *how* to do it consistently. By drawing close to someone who does, such as a coach, they hope to gain insight and inspiration for the journey. Personal disclosure on the part of the coach is appropriate and valuable when it serves the best interests of the client and the coaching program, not because a coach wants to share and be understood (subtly inviting the client to play the role of coach). As coaches, we must carefully discern if and when to share who we are, why we care about health, fitness, and wellness, how we live, what our victories and struggles are, and what we know and don’t know about health, fitness, and wellness.

4. *Slow down*

It is important to continue to establish trust and rapport in each and every coaching conversation. Trust and rapport are not earned once and for all. They are earned, or lost, during every moment of coaching conversations.

If coaches are in a hurry to “get down to business,” trust and rapport will be compromised or lost. We need to set aside the time to have a relaxed – and relaxing – presence with our clients. Even when our appointments are scheduled back to back, we need to slow down and savor every minute with each client.

5. *Pay full attention*

In addition to slowing down, coaches also need to pay attention. Trust and rapport are not built through multi-tasking. When coaches are distracted, whether physically, intellectually, emotionally, or spiritually, the coaching relationship suffers. Trying to do two things at once may cause us to lose strands of the conversation and degrade the quality of our inquiries and reflections. (Simple reflections summarize and restate client messages as discussed later in this chapter.)

Clients can tell when coaches are not 100% present. If coaches fail to pay full attention, their energy becomes less focused and engaging. Clients will often accept this low level of focus and engagement, since it is the norm in modern culture. It's up to the coach to take the conversation to a higher level by paying full attention.

To promote paying full attention to clients, ensure that the room in which you are conversing has minimal distractions, (e.g., foot traffic, noise, phone and computer alerts) that would interfere with your listening ability. Relaxation and reminder techniques can assist you in leaving your own thoughts and concerns "at the door", in order to focus your attention entirely on the client. This is especially helpful if you are feeling any emotional strain.

6. Under-promise and over-deliver

Nothing undermines trust and rapport more than broken promises. That is why it is extremely important to monitor and select our words

carefully, both during coaching sessions and in communications between sessions.



IMPORTANT

Be sure to deliver on every promise. Some promises, such as being ready and available when clients call for coaching, are unspoken parts of the coaching agreement. Other promises, such as sending clients information, are offered in the course of conversation. Delivering on all promises is crucial to the coaching relationship. Be careful to not fall into the trap of over-promising and under-delivering. This may be common in society, as people seek to make themselves look good, but it quickly leads to failed coaching relationships and poor outcomes.

Delivering even more than was promised creates an even stronger bond. Going beyond the expected minimum is a great way to build rapport and trust. For example, coaches may contact clients by email between coaching sessions to congratulate them or to remind them of something important. Offering the opportunity for an occasional extra coaching session or check-in, at no extra charge, is a real “wow!” and a great relationship builder. When clients email or contact you, make sure to respond within 24 hours, if only to acknowledge the contact and to promise a date and time for a more thoughtful response.

7. The client finds the answers

The three rules of coaching, like the three rules of real estate, are all the same: “The client finds the answers. The client finds the answers. The client finds the answers.” It is up to clients, in conversation with their

coaches, to discover their strengths, identify their goals, develop their plans, and design their strategies for growth and change.

Even when clients need to gain knowledge or learn new skills to move forward, it's important to remember these rules and to assist clients to acquire this learning for themselves. If coaches have relevant knowledge and expertise, they ask permission to offer their expertise and teaching, while leaving clients in control of their choices. If coaches do not have relevant expertise and knowledge, coaches can help clients find and pursue appropriate knowledge and expertise from other sources.

Coaching is about fostering growth, not forcing it.

It can be especially difficult to encourage clients to find their own answers when you have expertise in particular areas (e.g. diabetes, weight loss). Clients may ask for advice in managing medical conditions, making medical decisions, or learning new skills (e.g., strength-training or meditation). The more we know, or think we know, the easier it is to slip into the role of expert advisor and to insist on what our clients must work on or do. This approach, which does not build trust and, let alone self-efficacy, is to be avoided. Advice, when it is given, should be offered in response to a request, or offered as a choice – and should almost always be framed as a possibility rather than as a prescription. Allowing the client to make the choice is motivational and mutually constructive for coaches and clients alike.



IMPORTANT:

Something is wrong in the relationship when coaches are working harder or talking more than their clients in coaching sessions – whether to create goals, figure out strategies, or develop the case for change.

8. Confidentiality is crucial

The coaching relationship is built upon a foundation of confidentiality. Clients need to know that the information they share with their coach will not be shared with others. The coach should make this clear both orally and in writing.

Your clients' personal disclosure and discovery is the material with which you and your clients work. Some clients may initially be intimidated or uncomfortable about personal disclosure. You need to create a safe place by establishing a policy of confidentiality from the very beginning.

There may be instances when a client wants to share something personal but does not want it to be recorded in your paper, electronic, or web client files. This will be a rare occurrence, but it may come up when a client says something like, "I want to tell you something, but not if you have to make it part of my record."

It is important to exclude such confidences from your records or coaching notes – but only if it does not create liability (e.g. health-endangering, or illegal client behaviors.)

9. Be honest

Honesty is not only the best policy, it is the *only* policy when it comes to coaching. Clients and coaches alike should agree to “share what is there” with courage, since honest communication leads to learning and growth. However, coaches should never be or sound critical or judgmental. We are called to share our thoughts, feelings, and intuitions with compassion, empathy, and care. Through honest inquiries and reflections, an authentic and meaningful coaching relationship is built.

Using Mindfulness in Coaching

Mindfulness is the non-judgmental awareness of what is happening in the present moment. The topic of mindfulness, now supported by a large body of knowledge and practice, enhances the coaching process. In order to increase client awareness of the critical variables which influence their success, coaches ask questions, give feedback, and co-create learning projects that increase client mindfulness.

More often than not, clients are not fully aware of and awake to *where they are and what they are doing*. That’s because people often walk around on automatic pilot. When they are eating, they may be reading, working, or worrying about past or future events, instead of tasting each bite of food. When they are working out, they may be thinking about all they have to do that day, instead of being in tune with their body and what it is doing.

Mindfulness is a way to break free from being on autopilot. By paying attention to our thoughts, feelings, behaviors, relationships, and environments, without judgment or condemnation, we wake up to the

experience of what's going on around us and within us *while it's actually happening*. This frees us to make informed decisions about new directions.

Everyone has the ability to be mindful. For example, eating provides a wonderful opportunity to become mindful. Instead of rushing through meals or snacks, doing two things at once, with hardly a thought as to what we are eating, where the food comes from, or how it will impact our bodies, minds, and spirits, we can slow down and pay attention in ways that increase enjoyment, change our relationship to food, and make us more conscious as to our consumption. Such mindfulness can lead not only to improved eating habits but also to fuller experiences in other areas of life. Increased mindfulness in one area leads to increased mindfulness in all areas.

To give clients an experience of mindfulness during coaching sessions, coaches may want to include mindfulness exercises. For example, coaches may want to start their coaching conversations with a minute of silence and breath-work. They may also choose to guide clients to discover an object with a beginner's mind. For example, the coach can guide clients to discover a raisin very slowly by examining its surface, feeling its texture, smelling it, etc. Clients can then be asked to put it in their mouths and get a sense of it on their tongues. Then, and only then do they take the first bite, eating it as slowly as possible, noticing each sensation as it comes. This exercise allows clients to awaken from their automatic reactions to food, which may not support healthy eating.

By increasing mindfulness during coaching sessions, clients learn to increase mindfulness in their daily experiences. They naturally grow to pay more attention not only to the food, but also to the many dynamics of health, wellness, and life. Jon Kabat-Zinn writes:

“When, through the practice of mindfulness, we learn to listen to the body through all its sense doors, as well as to attend to the flow of our thoughts and feelings, we are beginning the process of reestablishing and strengthening connectedness within our own inner landscape. That attention nurtures a familiarity and an intimacy with our lives unfolding at the level of what we call body and what we call mind that depends and strengthens well-being and a sense of ease in our relationship to whatever is unfolding in our lives from moment to moment. We thus move from dis-ease, including outright disease, to greater ease and harmony and, as we shall see, greater health” (2005, p. 123).

Since it is important to be mindful in the everyday moments of our lives, coaches may want to offer advice to clients on how they can elevate mindfulness in between coaching sessions. For example, clients can, ask themselves the following questions before, during, and after eating:

- Where am I?
- What is my body position?
- What is going on around me?
- Am I really hungry?
- What does the food look, smell, feel, and taste like?
- What am I thinking about?

- What am I feeling?
- What do I really want to eat?
- How can I enhance my experience of eating?



IMPORTANT:

As coaches, we cannot facilitate the development of mindfulness in our clients unless we, ourselves, become mindful. It is only in the practice of mindfulness that we can come to understand the process and its effect on health, fitness, and wellness. By practicing mindfulness in our everyday lives, and showing up mindfully for our sessions with clients, we enable clients to learn, grow, and develop beyond what they might otherwise have imagined possible.

Mindfulness is also a critical ingredient for coaches in managing their emotions during coaching sessions. The more we know about what is going on with us, the less we will allow our own events, feelings, opinions, and worries to get in the way of our being present in the moment.

When clients trigger an emotional response for you as the coach, notice those feelings and then gently set them aside. Stay focused on the client. Examining those feelings later outside the coaching session – alone or with a mentor coach – is important to our development as coaches.

Some tips for activating your mindfulness before you begin coaching sessions:

- Take three deep breaths
- Close eyes for five seconds
- Become aware of your breathing
- Say to yourself...
 - *I am grateful for this opportunity to connect and make a difference*
 - *I have an opportunity to make a pivotal contribution*
 - *I am open to and curious about what will unfold*

Three Core Coaching Skills

Although different coaching systems have their own inventory, language, and description of what's in the coaching repertoire, three coaching skills are consistently found across platforms and form the basis for developing the coaching relationship. They are introduced here and are explored again from different angles in later chapters.

1. Mindful Listening

Mindful listening is the most important of all coaching skills. Listening that brings full, non-judgmental awareness of what someone is saying in the present moment is the hallmark of great coaching. Indeed, there may be no other relationship in our clients' lives where they are heard in the way they are heard by coaches. People seldom have the undivided attention of anyone, even for brief periods of time – and without judgment.

Mindful listening requires a coach's concentrated effort each and every session. Coaches must silence the voices in their own head so they can actively pay attention to the voice of the client. *"Listen until I don't exist"* is the motto of great coaches. That's because they set aside their agendas in order to pay singular attention to their clients' agendas. Coaches describe the experience as both liberating and deep. Mindful listening is transformational, not only for the client but also for the coach.

To convey to clients that you are listening carefully to everything they say, periodically summarize and restate their messages. Such simple reflections provide a mirror that reflects back to clients where they are and what they are learning. This process reassures clients, clarifies what they mean, encourages deeper thinking, and promotes open communication.

Mindful listening involves listening for the meaningful whole, including such diverse elements as a client's best experiences, core values, significant moments, feelings, current challenges, and future dreams. In addition, the stories clients tell enable coaches to tap into their intuition in order to generate better questions and more evocative reflections. These are the raw materials of coaching.



IMPORTANT:

Masterful coaches listen to the words and to the truth beyond the words. It is important to not only listen to the facts (cognitive listening) but also to the feelings and needs behind the facts (affective listening). "The

facts, ma'am, just the facts," may be enough for detective work, but it is never enough for coaching. Clients' moods, emotions, tone, energy, body language, hesitation, and pacing provide important clues. Listening for trends and repeated patterns can lead to important insights.

Remember

Do not rush clients through the telling of their stories. By taking the time to evoke and listen to their stories, we reflect a genuine interest in their aspirations. It's never helpful to grill a client with questions, especially one right after another. Instead of asking clients to cut to the chase, invite clients to elaborate, in order to tease out the nuances, meanings, and treasures in their stories. Displaying curiosity is a wonderful way to help a client open up. It's also not helpful to make assumptions or launch too quickly into advice giving. Take the time to listen to what's being said, to what's not being said, and to what clients may want to say, gently guiding them to discover their own answers.

Some quick tips for mindful listening:

- Do not think about what you will say next until your client has spoken the last word of his/her thought
- Pause after your client has spoken
- Weave the client's last words into the next step
- Weave the client's story into later steps
- Listen for emotions as well as facts
- Do not interrupt (except in the rare moment when your client wanders off track)
- Reflect where possible

2. *Open-Ended Inquiry*

To enable clients to open up and to tell their stories, it's important to ask open-ended questions. Open-ended questions require long, narrative answers. Closed-ended questions require short, "sound-bite" answers.

Examples of closed-ended questions:

- Do you like to exercise?
- Do you think your life would change if you started exercising?
- When did you exercise last week?
- Have you heard about the nutritional value of fruits and vegetables?
- Do you know the physical risks you are creating with your eating?
- Has your spouse expressed concern about your weight?

Examples of open-ended questions:

- What do you enjoy most about exercising?
- How would your life change if you started exercising?
- How did things go with your exercise last week?
- What have you heard about the nutritional value of fruits and vegetables?
- What do you think will happen if you keep eating the way you are eating?
- What conversations have you had with your spouse about your weight?



“What?” and “How?” are often the best ways to begin open-ended questions because they encourage story telling. Since stories are the stuff that move people to change, “What?” and “How?” are the master keys of great coaching questions.

“Why” questions are often not as useful. They tend to provoke analysis, rather than story telling. They may also evoke resistance because they can suggest judgment. For example, asking “Why did you eat the whole cake?” may cause a client to respond defensively.

“Why” questions, however, can be powerful when asked at the right time and in the right way. For example, you can connect clients to their deepest motivators by asking, “Why do your vision and goals deeply matter to you?”

While coaches use more open than closed questions, there is a place for closed questions, for example when we ask our clients whether they want to commit – to a vision, strategy, or goals, e.g. “Are you ready to move forward?”



IMPORTANT

Avoid asking too many questions in a row. Clients may feel interrogated. Avoid asking questions in a negative tone. Clients may feel judged. In a non-judgmental fashion, ask positive questions and ones that reflect your curiosity. Avoid asking deep, probing or challenging questions until clients are in the flow of the coaching session and are in a receptive frame of mind.

When clients avoid or fail to respond to a question, or if you think they aren't being totally honest in their answer, drop it and come back to it at another time. If this happens consistently regarding the same issue, you may want to non-judgmentally share this perception with your client. Accept the client's decision about what to share and what to keep private.

Remember

Great questions elicit what is on the client's mind rather than what is on the coach's mind.

3. Perceptive Reflections

Perceptive reflections are a form of listening (hence they are also described as reflective listening statements in Chapter 5 on Motivational Interviewing). They enable clients to hear what they are saying from the vantage point of another person. This process is often more provocative and transformational than inquiry because it causes clients to connect more deeply to their emotions and the truth of the matter. When coaches perceptively paraphrase and reflect back what they think clients are saying, clients react with more of an emotional response, generated from the limbic region of the brain (where emotions, rewards, and pleasure are regulated). When coaches ask questions, clients objectively think about and formulate an answer before responding. The “CEO” (or analytical) region of the brain (mostly the left prefrontal cortex) is activated as people are drawn more into their head than their gut.

The purpose of using perceptive reflections is to elicit sentiments which support change (called “change talk” in Chapter 5 on Motivational Interviewing). Instead of the coach making the case for change, the client is encouraged to pick up the ball and run with it. When the case for change comes from the client rather than the coach, rapid progress can be made in the direction of desired outcomes.

The simplest reflection is to restate what a client says in more or less his or her own words. Like a mirror, such simple reflections enable clients to see themselves more clearly and make adjustments, if they so desire. Other, more complex reflections are intentionally designed to be more evocative (see Chapter 5). They communicate not only that the coach is actively listening, but also that the coach is noticing things the client may be overlooking. They can serve to make the prospect of change sound bigger, brighter, or more inviting. They enable clients to stop and consider whether they want to spend more time on those issues.

Thomas Gordon has outlined twelve kinds of responses that are *not* coaching or perceptive reflections (1970):

1. Ordering, directing, or commanding
2. Warning, cautioning, or threatening
3. Giving advice, making suggestions, or providing solutions
4. Persuading with logic, arguing, or lecturing
5. Telling people what they should do; moralizing
6. Disagreeing, judging, criticizing, or blaming
7. Agreeing, approving, or praising

8. Shaming, ridiculing, or labeling
9. Interpreting or analyzing
10. Reassuring, sympathizing, or consoling
11. Questioning or probing
12. Withdrawing, distracting, humoring, or changing the subject

Coaches may occasionally use some of these responses over the course of a coaching relationship, particularly when clients are in the action or maintenance stages of change. Yet, be aware that such responses tend to take the responsibility for change away from clients and set up the coach as the expert who knows best. Especially in the early stages of change, such responses tend to make clients defensive and resistant to change rather than receptive and open to changing. Perceptive reflections do the opposite. They stay with the clients' thinking/feeling processes in order to clarify their visions and help them develop change strategies.



IMPORTANT:

Don't be too concerned about the accuracy of your perceptive reflections. If the reflection is accurate, clients agree. If it is off target, clients disagree. Either way, the reflection moves clients forward and engages them in the search for higher well-being and the "best me."

Other Relationship-Building Tools

1. Positive Reframing

Positive reframing means framing a client's experiences in positive terms. Once the conversation takes a positive turn, it is easier to engage in brainstorming, action planning, and forward movement.

It is a natural human tendency to look at, focus on, and talk about problems. Indeed, many people who come to coaching would say they want help with a problem. "I'm overweight," "I'm out of shape," and "I'm stressed out," are three of the most common complaints in the health and wellness arena. From week to week, many clients also want to start the coaching conversation with a problem as the issue of the day. For example, "I blew my diet," "I didn't exercise like I said I would," and "I took no time for myself this week."

Masterful coaches avoid the temptation to respond to such complaints with a root-cause problem analysis, which can be demoralizing, overwhelming, and counterproductive. Instead of inspiring and empowering change, problem analysis can weigh people down with more reasons not to change.

Without dismissing people's problems, masterful coaches know how to reframe the conversation in positive terms. For example:

- "What's the silver lining in this situation?"
- "Tell me about your best day, or even your best meal."
- "Tell me about the activities you enjoyed most this past week."
- "Tell me about the best thing you did for yourself, no matter how small."
- "Tell me how you got through this and what's possible now."

When clients can think of nothing positive, encourage them to go back further in time.



IMPORTANT:

At times, clients need to be reminded that setbacks are a natural part of the process. When learning to walk, infants fall many times. These are not failures, but essential lessons that help them learn and grow. Just as we cheer on infants when they fall down after their first few steps, we can use positive reframing when our clients slip. By teaching our clients to positively reframe, we can enable them not only to get back on track, but also to avoid becoming attached to feelings of failure, even if they think they failed.

2. Silence

One thing is certain: if we are talking, we are not listening. Given the importance of listening in coaching, it's vital that coaches become comfortable with silence. When clients are speaking, do not interrupt them and/or think about what to say next. After asking a question, do not talk again before the client answers.

Be prepared for the surprises of silence! It is a wonderful gift and a core tool in coaching. Silence has a way of evoking greatness from people. Silence sends the empowering message: "I believe that you can figure this out by going deeper." Often, silence will lead to new insights and directional shifts that coaches may never have anticipated.

Coaches would do well to incorporate silence as a daily habit in their daily routine. Becoming comfortable with silence can be supported by an ongoing practice of meditation or cultivating other silent moments throughout the day. It is hard to effectively utilize silence in coaching if we have not developed the habit of silence in our own life.



IMPORTANT:

In masterful coaching sessions, clients talk more than twice as much as coaches. Nicola Stevens encourages coaches to remember the acronym: **W.A.I.T.** - Why Am I Talking? (2005, p. 161).

3. Giving Advice

It's best to avoid giving advice as much as possible. In order to foster lasting change, masterful coaches enable their clients to research and figure out their own answers. When clients ask for advice, or when it appears that advice would be helpful, obtain permission to give advice. Then frame that advice as a possible solution among 2-3 alternatives (too much choice can also hurt self-efficacy), rather than as a single, "right answer." There is never just one "right answer" when it comes to health, fitness, and wellness.

It is not always easy to refrain from giving advice. Clients often equate coaching with advice giving. Perhaps because of what they think high-profile sports coaches do, they may expect you to tell them what to do and then make them do it. Remember that giving advice does not

promote lasting behavioral change – and it interferes with the development of self-efficacy. Giving advice can become more of a roadblock that triggers resistance than a facilitator of change.



IMPORTANT

If a client says something that, as a credentialed professional, you know could do them harm, it is your duty to let them know. However, never offer advice beyond your level of expertise. If a red flag goes up for you that you are not sure about, you might suggest that they seek the advice of the appropriate credentialed professional. If clients ask for advice in an area outside your credentials and experience, do not be afraid to say, “I don’t know.” Such honesty builds trust and occasions a search for information.

Also, never give advice outside the bounds of legality and medical ethics (e.g., a client’s taking another person’s prescription drug or you recommending unregulated supplements).

4. Humor & Playfulness

Although coaching is serious business with serious goals in which people are seriously invested, this does not mean the coaching conversation itself needs to have a serious tone. In fact, a consistently serious tone may cause clients to dread their coaching sessions, and consequently fail to thrive.

The more often you can make clients laugh and see the lighter side of their challenges and opportunities, the more they will open themselves

up to change. A playful approach can make clients more open to experimentation, and to trial and correction. Be careful not to joke about something that may make a client feel vulnerable. Use empathy to distinguish between those areas that are ripe for humor and those that may make your client feel worse if treated too lightly.

Be sure your clients never think you're laughing *at* them. It's fair game, though, to laugh at yourself!

5. Championing

At all times we champion our clients' ability to realize their goals, especially when they lack self-efficacy. Our evidencing an upbeat and energetic attitude, combined with a positive outlook, can enable our clients to find the courage for change. Coaching should be a hope-inspiring relationship. Dave Buck, President of CoachVille, describes this dynamic as: "My certainty is greater than your doubt." That dynamic is what attracts clients to masterful coaches.

When clients are struggling, we should reassure them that different people move towards mastery of health, fitness, or wellness at different speeds and at different times in their lives. *When they are ready, they can and will succeed.* As the coach, your work is to facilitate clients' movement at a time and speed that is comfortable yet challenging. This is the "flow zone" that will enable clients to achieve the goals they have set for themselves.



**IMPORTANT:**

- *At the beginning of every session, acknowledge positive things about your clients to elevate both their self-esteem and their self-efficacy.*
- *During every session, praise your clients for their efforts and achievements. Be sure your praise is sincere and not overdone.*
- *Close each session by praising or acknowledging your clients for a positive change in behavior or attitude.*

Continually focus on and champion the positive changes. Do not dwell too long on the negatives, and always find a positive side to negative issues. Coaching is about action and learning, not blame and shame.

6. Solicit input and suggestions

It is important to ask your clients to share input and make suggestions on how the coaching process can be made more productive and enjoyable. Soliciting input builds the coaching relationship by making it clear to clients that their coach is totally devoted to their success. Frequently ask, "What was most valuable about today's session?" and "How could our sessions work better for you?" Listen for what is unspoken but conveyed in a client's tone and hesitations. Ask for clarification if you suspect that there may be a problem. Keep private notes and follow up on the points raised as soon as possible.

Most new coaches experience clients who go *missing in action*, not showing up for coaching sessions or disappearing without explanation.

By asking clients at the outset of the coaching program to make you the first to know if anything isn't working, you can help them talk about their concerns rather than act them out by not showing up.

If you receive criticism, listen for and respond to needs that are going unmet. Thank clients for their input and use it to grow stronger as a coach. Without violating confidentiality or becoming defensive, you may want to:

- Consult a mentor coach and colleagues on the points of concern. Then develop strategies to overcome these issues before the next session.
- Report back to your client the steps you are taking to improve the situation.

Some Do's and Don'ts in Coaching

Do's:

- Renew your trust and rapport at the outset of each and every session.
- Begin each session by asking clients how they feel now. Give clients a chance to express themselves fully.
- Empathize with clients' feelings and needs.
- Look for openings to explore their best experiences, core values, and heartfelt wishes.
- Be a great listener. Don't interrupt or cut clients off when they are speaking.

- Keep an upbeat, energetic, and positive attitude at all times.
- Praise clients for their efforts and focus on the positive changes.
- Strike the right balance between over-praising and under-praising, according to clients' needs.
- Eradicate judgment and show appreciation for the challenges of making and maintaining behavioral changes.
- Support client motivation with a variety of motivational tools.
- Use humor to lighten the load.
- Remember important days, such as birthdays, anniversaries, promotions, etc.
- Reframe “failures” as “life lessons” and “learning opportunities”.
- Be supportive and encourage family support (spouse, friends).
- Pay attention to necessary environmental modifications.
- Ask open-ended questions to evoke stories as learning experiences.
- Reflect back what clients are saying in ways that provoke change.
- Speak the truth with love, as long as it builds self-esteem and self-efficacy.
- Challenge clients to aim higher, if you think they can accomplish more.
- Take minimal notes, but enough to refresh your memory about important client issues from week to week.
- Stay current in health/fitness/wellness news, books, and other publications.
- Send emails between sessions.
- Obtain regular input regarding what is and is not working in the coaching process.

Don'ts:

- Talk too much.
- Play psychotherapist.
- Wear the expert hat, unless your client gives permission and requests such assistance.
- Assume you understand what clients are saying.
- Impose your goals on clients.
- Push clients beyond their capabilities.
- Become impatient with a lack of change.
- Focus on yourself or your issues during sessions.
- Allow clients to dwell on topics outside your coaching scope or expertise.
- Make assumptions. It is extremely important not to assume that you understand your client or what s/he needs or wants. Exploration is the key.



Never Take Anything for Granted nor Make Assumptions

Below is an example of how making assumptions can hurt your clients' progress:

Client A has an exercise spurt where he suddenly starts working out for 1 to 2 hours every day, using heavier and heavier weights and pushing himself on the treadmill.

You think he has finally gotten "with the program," and you praise him and help him intensify his new weekly goals. You don't realize that he just learned that he's in danger of losing his job, and he's trying desperately to work off stress and depression.

Since you seem so happy with his new changes, he fears you'd think less of him if he told you why he's working out so hard and if he admitted that he's pushing himself to exhaustion so that he won't revert to alcohol.

It is easy to make a wrong assumption about a client's behavior and damage the trust and rapport, and your ability to help your client find solutions.

Never jump to conclusions. Always ask for your client's perceptions, interpretations, and point of view. If your client isn't ready to tell you, wait for a better time to probe again.

What qualities do masterful coaches possess?

One of the few things that gets better with age is our ability to coach masterfully.

Authentic empathy and complete acceptance come out of the pores of masterful coaches. They cannot summon an ounce

of judgment. They have an uncanny ability to sniff out client strengths, values, and desires. They prefer to listen rather than talk. They love and enjoy client stories. They see the funny side in ways that facilitate growth. They hold up the mirror with courage when necessary. They have the patience to allow clients to sit in the muck, even in tears, without succumbing to the urge to rescue. They assist clients to achieve more than they otherwise might. Masterful coaches take risks to challenge clients to reach higher at the right moment. They know that lives are at stake if clients don't take great care of themselves. Best of all, masterful coaches know how to celebrate client success.

Appendix 1: Examples of open-ended questions

Vision & Outcomes Questions

- What would you like your wellness to look like in three months, one year, two years, five years...?
- What would you like your health and wellness to look like in three months, or in one year?
- What are the top three values in your life? How is your health linked to these values?
- What are the top three goals in your life? How is your health linked to these values?
- What part of your life is most important to you? How does your health fit in?
- What would you like less of in your life? How is that linked to your wellness?
- What would you like more of in your life? How is that linked to your wellness?
- What excites you? How can we link that to your wellness?
- What would you like to accomplish in the next three months?
- What motivators are important enough to you to enable you to overcome your obstacles meet your goals?
- What would your life be like if you achieve these goals? How would that feel?
- What would your life be like if you do not achieve these goals? How would that feel?
- What is the best case scenario?
- What is the worst case scenario?
- What will it take for you to make changes?
- What have you tried and succeeded to accomplish in your life that is similar to this goal?
- What are some new possibilities that you haven't considered before?
- What do you think is the best possible outcome of our coaching program?
- What do you think is the likely outcome of our coaching program?
- What do you think is the worst possible outcome of our coaching program?
- What would you like the outcome of our coaching program to be?

Ambivalence

- What is happening when you feel _____?
- What are the triggers that are stimulating you to feel _____?
- What would it take to deal with your feelings of _____?
- What is holding you back or standing in your way? How is it holding you back?
- What are you afraid of?
- What is at risk for you?
- What is more important to you then meeting this goal?
- What would make this the right time for you to do this?
- What is on your plate right now that may be getting in the way (this week, this next month or three months)?
- What would you like to do?
- What are you able to do to overcome _____ or meet your goal?
- What are you willing to do to overcome _____ or meet your goal?
- What do you want to do to overcome _____ or meet your goal?
- What can I do to best help you today (or in our coaching program)?
- What might I do better to help you today (or in our coaching program)?
- What would your life be like if you do not achieve this goal? How would that feel?
- What would your life be like if you do achieve this goal? How would that feel?
- What is the best case scenario if you achieve this goal?
- What is the worst case scenario if you don't achieve this goal?
- What might be wrong about this goal/these goals?
- What might be right about this goal/these goals?
- What will it take for you to reach this goal? What needs to happen for you to reach this goal?
- What would it take for you to be ready to change?
- What motivator is important enough to you to help you reach this goal?
- What can you/we learn from this?
- What is the solution here?
- In the next week, what could you think about or do, that would move you forward?
- What have you tried and succeeded to accomplish in your life that is similar to this goal?

- What are some new possibilities that you haven't considered before?

Appendix 2

International Coach Federation, Core Coaching Competencies

(www.coachfederation.org)

The following 11 core coaching competencies were developed to support greater understanding about the skills and approaches used within today's coaching profession as defined by the ICF. They will also support you in calibrating the level of alignment between the coach-specific training expected and the training you have experienced.

Finally, these competencies were used as the foundation for the ICF Credentialing process examination. The core competencies are grouped into four clusters according to those that fit together logically based on common ways of looking at the competencies in each group. The groupings and individual competencies are not weighted - they do not represent any kind of priority in that they are all core or critical for any competent coach to demonstrate.

A. Setting the Foundation

1. Meeting ethical guidelines and professional standards
2. Establishing the coaching agreement

B. Co-creating the relationship

3. Establishing trust and intimacy with the client
 4. Coaching presence
- C. Communicating effectively
5. Active listening
 6. Powerful questioning
 7. Direct communication
- D. Facilitating learning and results
8. Creating awareness
 9. Designing actions
 10. Planning and goal setting
 11. Managing progress and accountability

Note that each competency listed below has a definition and related behaviors. Behaviors are classified as either those that should always be present and visible in any coaching interaction (in regular font), or those that are called for in certain coaching situations and, therefore, not always visible in any one coaching interaction (in italics).

A. SETTING THE FOUNDATION



1. Meeting Ethical Guidelines and Professional Standards -

Understanding of coaching ethics and standards and ability to apply them appropriately in all coaching situations

- a. Understands and exhibits in own behaviors the ICF Standards of Conduct (see list, Part III of ICF Code of Ethics),
- b. Understands and follows all ICF Ethical Guidelines (see list),
- c. Clearly communicates the distinctions between coaching, consulting, psychotherapy and other support professions,
- d. Refers client to another support professional as needed, knowing when this is needed and the available resources.

2. Establishing the Coaching Agreement - Ability to understand what is required in the specific coaching interaction and to come to agreement with the prospective and new client about the coaching process and relationship

- a. Understands and effectively discusses with the client the guidelines and specific parameters of the coaching relationship (e.g., logistics, fees, scheduling, inclusion of others if appropriate),

- b. Reaches agreement about what is appropriate in the relationship and what is not, what is and is not being offered, and about the client's and coach's responsibilities,
- c. Determines whether there is an effective match between his/her coaching method and the needs of the prospective client.

B. CO-CREATING THE RELATIONSHIP

- 3. **Establishing Trust and Intimacy with the Client** - Ability to create a safe, supportive environment that produces ongoing mutual respect and trust
 - a. Shows genuine concern for the client's welfare and future,
 - b. Continuously demonstrates personal integrity, honesty and sincerity,
 - c. Establishes clear agreements and keeps promises,
 - d. Demonstrates respect for client's perceptions, learning style, personal being,
 - e. Provides ongoing support for and champions new behaviors and actions, including those involving risk taking and fear of failure,
 - f. Asks permission to coach client in sensitive, new areas.

4. **Coaching Presence** - Ability to be fully conscious and create spontaneous relationship with the client, employing a style that is open, flexible and confident
- a. Is present and flexible during the coaching process, dancing in the moment,
 - b. Accesses own intuition and trusts one's inner knowing - "goes with the gut",
 - c. Is open to not knowing and takes risks,
 - d. Sees many ways to work with the client, and chooses in the moment what is most effective,
 - e. Uses humor effectively to create lightness and energy,
 - f. Confidently shifts perspectives and experiments with new possibilities for own action,
 - g. Demonstrates confidence in working with strong emotions, and can self-manage and not be overpowered or enmeshed by client's emotions.

C. COMMUNICATING EFFECTIVELY

5. **Active Listening** - Ability to focus completely on what the client is saying and is not saying, to understand the meaning of what is

said in the context of the client's desires, and to support client self-expression

- a. Attends to the client and the client's agenda, and not to the coach's agenda for the client,
- b. Hears the client's concerns, goals, values and beliefs about what is and is not possible,
- c. Distinguishes between the words, the tone of voice, and the body language,
- d. Summarizes, paraphrases, reiterates, mirrors back what client has said to ensure clarity and understanding,
- e. Encourages, accepts, explores and reinforces the client's expression of feelings, perceptions, concerns, beliefs, suggestions, etc.,
- f. Integrates and builds on client's ideas and suggestions,
- g. "Bottom-lines" or understands the essence of the client's communication and helps the client get there rather than engaging in long descriptive stories,
- h. Allows the client to vent or "clear" the situation without judgment or attachment in order to move on to next steps.

6. **Powerful Questioning** - Ability to ask questions that reveal the information needed for maximum benefit to the coaching relationship and the client
 - a. Asks questions that reflect active listening and an understanding of the client's perspective,
 - b. Asks questions that evoke discovery, insight, commitment or action (e.g., those that challenge the client's assumptions),
 - c. Asks open-ended questions that create greater clarity, possibility or new learning
 - d. Asks questions that move the client towards what they desire, not questions that ask for the client to justify or look backwards.

7. **Direct Communication** - Ability to communicate effectively during coaching sessions, and to use language that has the greatest positive impact on the client
 - a. Is clear, articulate and direct in sharing and providing feedback,
 - b. Reframes and articulates to help the client understand from another perspective what he/she wants or is uncertain about,

- c. Clearly states coaching objectives, meeting agenda, purpose of techniques or exercises,
- d. Uses language appropriate and respectful to the client (e.g., non-sexist, non-racist, non-technical, non-jargon),
- e. Uses metaphor and analogy to help to illustrate a point or paint a verbal picture.

D. FACILITATING LEARNING AND RESULTS

8. **Creating Awareness** - Ability to integrate and accurately evaluate multiple sources of information, and to make interpretations that help the client to gain awareness and thereby achieve agreed-upon results
- a. Goes beyond what is said in assessing client's concerns, not getting hooked by the client's description,
 - b. Invokes inquiry for greater understanding, awareness and clarity,
 - c. Identifies for the client his/her underlying concerns, typical and fixed ways of perceiving himself/herself and the world, differences between the facts and the interpretation, disparities between thoughts, feelings and action,
 - d. Helps clients to discover for themselves the new thoughts, beliefs, perceptions, emotions, moods, etc. that strengthen

- their ability to take action and achieve what is important to them,
- e. Communicates broader perspectives to clients and inspires commitment to shift their viewpoints and find new possibilities for action,
 - f. Helps clients to see the different, interrelated factors that affect them and their behaviors (e.g., thoughts, emotions, body, background),
 - g. Expresses insights to clients in ways that are useful and meaningful for the client,
 - h. Identifies major strengths vs. major areas for learning and growth, and what is most important to address during coaching,
 - i. Asks the client to distinguish between trivial and significant issues, situational vs. recurring behaviors, when detecting a separation between what is being stated and what is being done.
9. **Designing Actions** - Ability to create with the client opportunities for ongoing learning, during coaching and in work/life situations, and for taking new actions that will most effectively lead to agreed-upon coaching results

- a. Brainstorms and assists the client to define actions that will enable the client to demonstrate, practice and deepen new learning,
- b. Helps the client to focus on and systematically explore specific concerns and opportunities that are central to agreed-upon coaching goals,
- c. Engages the client to explore alternative ideas and solutions, to evaluate options, and to make related decisions,
- d. Promotes active experimentation and self-discovery, where the client applies what has been discussed and learned during sessions immediately afterwards in his/her work or life setting,
- e. Celebrates client successes and capabilities for future growth,
- f. Challenges client's assumptions and perspectives to provoke new ideas and find new possibilities for action,
- g. Advocates or brings forward points of view that are aligned with client goals and, without attachment, engages the client to consider them,

- h. Helps the client "Do It Now" during the coaching session, providing immediate support,
- i. Encourages stretches and challenges but also a comfortable pace of learning.

10. Planning and Goal Setting - Ability to develop and maintain an effective coaching plan with the client

- a. Consolidates collected information and establishes a coaching plan and development goals with the client that address concerns and major areas for learning and development,
- b. Creates a plan with results that are attainable, measurable, specific and have target dates,
- c. Makes plan adjustments as warranted by the coaching process and by changes in the situation,
- d. Helps the client identify and access different resources for learning (e.g., books, other professionals),
- e. Identifies and targets early successes that are important to the client.

11. Managing Progress and Accountability - Ability to hold attention on what is important for the client, and to leave responsibility with the client to take action

- a. Clearly requests of the client actions that will move the client toward their stated goals,
- b. Demonstrates follow through by asking the client about those actions that the client committed to during the previous session(s),
- c. Acknowledges the client for what they have done, not done, learned or become aware of since the previous coaching session(s),
- d. Effectively prepares, organizes and reviews with client information obtained during sessions,
- e. Keeps the client on track between sessions by holding attention on the coaching plan and outcomes, agreed-upon courses of action, and topics for future session(s),
- f. Focuses on the coaching plan but is also open to adjusting behaviors and actions based on the coaching process and shifts in direction during sessions,
- g. Is able to move back and forth between the big picture of where the client is heading, setting a context for what is being discussed and where the client wishes to go,
- h. Promotes client's self-discipline and holds the client accountable for what they say they are going to do, for the

results of an intended action, or for a specific plan with related time frames,

- i. Develops the client's ability to make decisions, address key concerns, and develop himself/herself (to get feedback, to determine priorities and set the pace of learning, to reflect on and learn from experiences),
- j. Positively confronts the client with the fact that he/she did not take agreed-upon actions.

Review and Discussion Questions

1. Explain what is meant by “relationship is the heart of coaching”.
2. List several dimensions of relationship building and give examples.
3. What is mindfulness? Give an example of an exercise to increase mindfulness.
4. Define “mindful listening” and discuss its importance in building trust and rapport.
5. What does it mean for a coach to “listen until I don’t exist”?

6. What is open-ended inquiry? Give an example of an open-ended and a closed-ended question.
7. What are perceptive reflections in the context of a coaching conversation? Give an example.
8. Discuss the importance of silence in a coaching conversation.
9. What is reframing? What can you do to reframe a coaching conversation in a positive light?
10. What is meant by the phrase, “My certainty is greater than your doubt”?
11. Describe several qualities of a masterful coach.

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