

15 ways for coachees to get the most from coaching sessions

The nature of coaching is that it is a two-way process involving coach and client as equals; the more active a part you take in the process the better the outcomes are likely to be for you. Here are 15 practical ideas and suggestions to help you get the most from your coaching.

1. Remember it's not the coach's responsibility to solve your problems or achieve your goals for you

The coach is there to support, challenge, listen, stimulate, encourage, share feedback and offer anything else they have in their tool kit to help you think better and plan well to make the changes that are important to you. Ultimately you are the one that has responsibility for your own work and life. This is why we encourage a model of active, adult-adult partnership in coaching rather than anything that suggests you are dependent on your coach.

2. It's up to you to ask your coach to change the way they are coaching you if you feel they could coach you in a better way

Coaches are of course only human, and as such have their own distinct personalities: yet a good coach will be able to flex their style in many ways to suit you, e.g. by being more or less direct/challenging, by moving at a faster/slower pace or by sharing more or less of their thinking and ideas with you. They will be happy for you to make such requests because their aim is to coach as effectively as possible.

3. The coach's job is to ask you for even more than you might normally ask of yourself

Your coach wants the best for you and for this reason will be looking to offer and encourage 'stretch' wherever possible. Your coach may well question the limits you set for yourself and encourage the setting of challenging goals and targets. Coaching should not be a 'cosy club.'

4. The coach is your success partner, not an accountability service

Coaching will work best for you when you are actively seeking to get the best from yourself and when you take responsibility for your own growth and development.

5. The value of coaching isn't based on how much time is spent coaching

The value of coaching depends on quality rather than quantity: when both you and your coach are fully engaged in the task and working hard then success should follow – it is a bit like going to the gym and really working at it, rather than thinking you will get results just by being there.

6. The coaching session in itself is not what gets you results

Ultimately this is down to what you do and how you act after the coaching – what you put into practice. Coaching is there to help you to plan and prepare to get the best out of what you are doing.

7. Talk about what matters most to you

You are not there to conform to any expectation you feel your coach may have on you – least of all are you there to please the coach in any way. Yours is the only agenda that counts and if it is important to you, your coach will work on it with you.

8. Focus on yourself

Sometimes clients worry that coaching is somewhat self-indulgent - even a selfish luxury. We offer the view that you can only effectively do your job or serve others well if you are yourself fulfilled, purposeful and operating to your fullest potential. When you succeed, others should benefit too: if you are unhappy, unfulfilled or frustrated in your work or blocked in some other way it is likely that others will not get the best from you. You can look at your coaching as a positive boost to the communities of which you are a part.

9. Be open to seeing things differently

Very frequently, the issues you face are not in themselves the real issues! Often it is the way we see issues and how we think about them that needs to change. Even when some of the issues we face are objectively daunting or difficult challenges, we can use coaching to open ourselves up to new ways of responding to them. Opening your thinking up will open up new possibilities for choice. Your coach can help you identify ways of seeing, thinking and responding that may offer you very different options and approaches.

10. You can develop and evolve with coaching

Coaching is both a developmental process and an evolutionary one. It helps clients accomplish more with less effort - the developmental aspect - and can also lead to different thinking and possibilities for growth and change - which we call evolving. Evolving is a skill worth building because life itself is about evolving, not just developing.

11. Use your coaching to help you think about - and design – the kinds of environments and systems you want to work in – you can go beyond yourself

We can all exercise some choice and responsibility in creating the kind of environment to allow ourselves to flourish. Even when our organisation places apparent restrictions in our way we can often exercise at least some discretion in the physical, social, professional and cultural contexts in which we work and live. Coaching encourages a whole-system approach and links personal change to the contexts we inhabit.

12. Take charge

You are invited to take charge of the coaching process, to get it focused on what you most want and need. We encourage you to come to each session with a direction in mind, perhaps a list of issues or questions you want to address. Ultimately the more you know what you want out of your coaching the better. Your coach can then work with you to craft really specific and relevant goals for the coaching.

13. Be Real – say what you think

When what we say does not reflect what we are really thinking, we are incongruent. Coaching is not an abstract exercise or an intellectual joust but an opportunity to work together with your coach in a climate of shared honesty and truth. When you are authentic it really helps to get the best out of your coach.

14. Promise what you can deliver

Whilst we encourage stretch and boldness in coaching we also ask you to be mindful of what is realistic and doable in the context of everything you are trying to do. Overextension causes great anxiety, guilt and suffering. We encourage you to remain mindful of what you are realistically able to take on as a result of your coaching.

15. Share what you are doing with your coaching

People close to you will see and feel the effect your coaching is having, either directly or indirectly. For some people this will create questions and even anxieties about the changes you are making. We would suggest that where possible you are open to others about what you are trying to do via your coaching. This will have the double benefit of including them and reaffirming your commitment to developing as a person and a leader.