

# **SUCCESS SERIES**



## **BUILDING YOUR PRACTICE**

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**You must be able to generate enquiries and convert an enquiry into a paying client in order to stay in business. The two main areas the life coach initially needs to concentrate on are how to build the practice and how to get clients interested enough to pay for your service. Actually setting up a life coaching practice is very simple and inexpensive. The four things you need are a telephone, notepaper, diary and a pen. Using the RABIT model you can easily turn the enquiry into a paying client. Referrals are the most effective approach to building a client base and therefore building a successful coaching practice.**

This is one of the most important chapters in this book. You must be able to generate enquiries and then convert an enquiry into a paying client in order to stay in business.

Without this skill you will not create your life coaching practice and will be robbed of that superb feeling of excitement that arrives when one of your clients succeeds beyond their wildest dreams.

You need to start by concentrating on two main areas: building your practice and getting clients interested enough to pay for your service. Many life coaches come from a heartfelt desire to help their fellow human beings and it is this desire that was their motivation to enter the profession.

The big dilemma for these life coaches is justifying to themselves the need to charge for this service. After all, they rationalise, "The client does all the work and I only facilitate the success." Always remember that clients pay for your experience, knowledge, training and background, which have all cost you a great deal more than the few hundred pounds that you will be charging for your coaching sessions.

Actually setting up a life coaching practice is very simple and inexpensive. Here are the only four things that you really need to begin.

- Telephone
- notepaper or printed forms that we have supplied or you pre-design
- pen or pencil
- diary

You can start your practice off with only these four items and it will work. When you add the following inexpensive items you will be off to a winning start.

**ITEM**

A colour trifold brochure  
picture of you  
on the front or the back.

**DESCRIPTION**

An A4 sheet of paper folded three ways, which  
with a describes the benefits of life coaching  
along with who you are and how to contact you.  
You will either hand these out or send them off  
to people who seek more information. With the  
owners' consent, you can place them in  
locations where your prospective clients are  
likely to visit.

Business cards

These should have your name, practice name,  
address and telephone number. Include your fax  
number, e-mail address and website details if you  
have them. Your business cards can be one of your  
most effective low-cost marketing tools, but they  
cannot work for you if they are sitting in your desk  
drawer.

Headed paper

Compliments slips

Paper with your practice name, address and your  
logo. Keep to standard A4 size.

Press releases

Rectangular pieces of headed notepaper with "With  
compliments" printed in the centre. These are  
usually one-third of an A4 sheet.

Typed press releases about life coaching. You send  
these regularly to local, national press and media  
to generate interest and clients. Remember to  
include your telephone number for any enquiries.

The majority of typical high street printers will be pleased to help you with design and content, and many of them offer attractively priced "business start-up packs." If you are working from your home, it can be advantageous to use a PO Box number as your address. This is easy to arrange with the post office. The cost is very low and you can choose whether your mail is delivered with your usual domestic post or whether you collect it from your local sorting office. You pay more to have it delivered.

You will also need to arrange a separate business bank account, bookkeeping, and VAT registration (optional).

So, how do you generate interest in an embryonic service-industry profession? Well, life coaching is about people and for people, so you go to the people.

A remarkably effective way of generating clients is to deliver talks and demonstrations anywhere that groups of people get together. Contact your local business groups such as the Chamber of Commerce, Institute of Management, women's groups, diners' clubs and the many organisations that meet regularly and invite external speakers. This marvelous opportunity for you to explain and demonstrate your service.

You can offer a prize of a couple of free coaching sessions to the organisation and this can produce money for them if they organise a raffle. Organisations or clubs always welcome offers of free gifts.

Plan your talk beforehand. It should have a structure and be timed exactly according to the time slot allocated. Introduce yourself as a professional life coach and always start with a big statement to catch the attention and imagination of your audience.

Think carefully about your audience and make your opening statement powerfully relevant to them. Then proceed with your talk, and include the benefits of life coaching and the benefits of using you, and do a short demonstration. Finally, the talk should summarise the main benefits you can offer them. Your powerful last sentence must link to your equally arresting opening. Here are three possibilities:

**Opening:** "Life coaching can seriously change your life."

**Closing:** "Call me only if you're serious about making the changes you've always wanted to make."

**Opening:** "Think of me as a bottle opener - I release your potential." **Closing:**

"Let me help you to pop your cork of potential."

**Opening:** "I am a magician. I reawaken dreams and make them come true." **Closing:** "Life coaching is the millennium magic."

Inform your host that you will be asking for a volunteer to demonstrate life coaching. Get a commitment from your host that, if no volunteer comes from the floor, they will offer to be the one. It is important to demonstrate how powerful life coaching can be and to be able to answer any questions about it after the demonstration.

Plan what you are going to say and rehearse several times in front of friends. When asking for volunteers to take part in your demonstration simply ask your audience, "Is there anyone here who has an area in their life they've tried to change in the past but were not successful, and still wants to change that area?"

When you ask for volunteers, you may get several offers. Simply ask each of them

to tell you one thing that they want to change. The intention here is for you to select a topic that you know you could handle and one that you believe will have a positive impact on your audience.

Before starting your demonstration say loudly, so that the whole audience can hear, "Thank you for volunteering. I want to give you two free coaching sessions after this demonstration as a thank you gift. You'll all be aware that a brief demonstration will never replace the effectiveness of a full session. I really want [name of volunteer] to succeed with [their stated change]. To do this competently and professionally will take at least two full sessions. This demonstration will give you all only a brief introduction, an idea of how it works. The multitude of benefits that you'll get from life coaching sessions can be truly enjoyed only when you book a course of coaching with me.

Coaching achieves outstanding results after only a few sessions have been experienced." (There are some embedded commands in the above sample speech - see Chapters Thirteen and Fourteen on language patterns.)

This sets the scene and prepares your audience to accept that you will not attempt to complete the process in the forum of a public demonstration. By confirming that you will finish the procedure later and at no charge to your volunteer, you will convey the message that you are a generous and professional coach.

If you have not spoken to a group of people before, you really need to get professional assistance by attending a course on presentations. There are some very good courses available on the market ranging from one day to several days. If you cannot afford to attend a course, look in your local directory for toastmaster or speaking clubs. There is an American Toastmasters organisation, which holds regular meetings for public speaking around the country; they will welcome you and train you at the same time.

You will also find it valuable to attend seminars and listen to as many other speakers and presenters as you can. You will learn a lot by watching and you will also observe a few poor techniques that you will want to avoid in your own presentations.

Another way to generate interest is to send a press release to your local newspaper about your new practice. They may publish a feature that has genuine human interest or news value but they will decline a blatant advertisement disguised as a press release.

Whether or not they run your story is always dependent on the news items of the week in question. However, if they decide not to run your article because of a more newsworthy story don't get upset. Simply ask them to hold it over. Give their readers the opportunity of a free sample by offering the paper some free sessions. This will sometimes be enough to ensure a space on the competition page, along with associated "free" publicity. Don't be afraid to ask them if they will let you have all the entries so that you can follow them up, including the losers.

Early November is a good time to send out press releases extolling the benefits of a life coach for the New Year, when most people focus on resolutions. You can also point out that a few life coaching sessions would make an original Christmas gift.

When you are at any gathering of people, you may be asked what you do for a living. Be sure to have an interesting answer ready. Here are a few suggestions that are bound to start a conversation:

- "I open the door of your potential"
- "I'm the deliverer of dreams"
- "I am your potential wizard"
- "I hold the key to success"
- "I unlock the doors of desires"
- "I'm a specialist in gap analysis - I close the gap between goals and achievement"
- "I'm in show business [you have probably heard this one before]: I show you how to achieve the life you want"

Follow this statement of interest immediately (without pausing) with a question: "May I ask you something? Is there any area in your life you wish you could change?" This will lead you on to explaining how you help your clients and how you can help them.

Be sure to present them with a business card and, as you hand it to them, repeat your interesting statement and tell them to call tomorrow when you can inspire them to achieve the change they said they wanted to make.

By far the most successful way of getting clients is by referrals from your existing clients. This can happen in either of two main ways. The first is that your client is so impressed that they tell their friends about you and pass on your telephone number. This really does happen. The second way is that you wait until the precise moment when a client excitedly tells you about how they have achieved one of their greatest dreams. Then, at that exact moment, you ask them if they know anybody who would like to share these wonderful feelings of success.

Agree what would be the best way forward. Would they be willing to tell this person about the service and give out your promotional material? Would they give you the name and telephone number of a friend they would like to enjoy the same level of success? Would they also help you both by telling their friend about their experiences with you?

The second approach is best because you get a recommendation *and* a telephone number so that you can call the prospective client. This keeps you in control and diminishes the opportunities for the prospective client to lose your number, forget to call you or not even bother to call. You should be the one to make this call as you are selling your services, which come highly recommended.

Whether you call the prospective client or they call you, you have to be able to provoke curiosity and then transform this call from an enquiry into a paying client. Quite often, your first opportunity to explain your service to a prospect client will be over the telephone.

There is a model that is easy to remember and easy to use. Although it cannot guarantee to transform prospects into paying clients, it gives you a framework to follow and makes sure that you do not forget any important stages in the process. It is called the RABIT model because it shows each of five vital stages clearly. It is easy to remember, and it can produce countless offspring in the form of clients.

**R**        **Recount** to your prospect a few of the benefits of life coaching.  
**A**        **Ask** about the prospect.  
**B**        Your **background**, qualifications, experiences, successes and fee.  
**I**        **Interest** testing.  
**T**        **Time** to close the deal and get the business.

Let us look at these in more detail.

R stands for **recounting** a few of the benefits of life coaching. Tell them briefly, about one of your great successes. If you do not have a success story yet, tell them a successful coaching story that you have heard about.

Make sure you know that you have decided beforehand which benefits you are going to talk about. After outlining each one, ask your prospect if this benefit would be of interest to them. Avoid long lists of benefits, as this actually detracts from the overall effect and can, in the worst scenario, sound like a sales pitch. This is not a sales pitch like a double-glazing or life-insurance sell. You want the prospect to become a client because they want to, not because you have done a hard sell on them.

A is for **asking** the prospect to tell you a bit about their background and what prompted them to enquire about life coaching. "Briefly, what is your current situation?" or, "If you were to hire me as your coach, what would you want to work on?"

When you have an answer, use metaphor (see Chapter Sixteen) to compare what they want to achieve with someone else you know who had a similar situation and how they overcame it with your help (or how it was overcome with the help of another life coach).

B is a little about your **background**. Include appropriate qualifications, experience, your successes and, if you have one, a reference from a satisfied client who is prepared to say how good you are. The purpose here is to attract a new paying client, not to bore the other person with your life history and achievements. To ensure you select the best examples of your background, make a list of all your achievements and qualifications.

You will find it useful to create your own Briefing Matrix. Once you have listed all your possible background items, ask yourself this. "If I were enquiring about life coaching, how would this information really make me want to hire this coach?"

Give each item on the list a mark between 1 and 10, where 1 is "not at all likely" and 10 is "very likely." Once you have a score in each box, add up the totals across the page. The three highest-scoring items are the ones to use.

The first example below receives only 11 marks. That is because, although it is important to the coach on a personal level, it is not a high selling point for life coaching. The next example scores highly because it shows how you helped your client to achieve a goal.

Prospective clients will be more impressed with your results rather than qualifications.



Develop three items into a simple, brief and positive sentence. Then ask a trusted colleague if they would hire you on this basis. Avoid asking a friend, as they may be tempted to protect your ego by telling you what they think you want to hear.

A reliable statement that I use at this stage in the model is, "I need to be convinced that you're committed to achieving results because I have a hundred per cent success rate currently and I won't take you on if you're not committed to working hard for change." Prospects usually affirm their commitment, and that gives you a good opening to go on to the cost of your services.

If the prospect states that they would like to meet you and you then have to travel for the meeting, be sure that the client knows that you will always charge travel time. After all, while you are traveling you could have been taking another fee-earning coaching call.

If you are nervous about asking for money, practice with your friends and family until you sound confident. It is very important that you sound sure of your pricing policy. If you are not confident, then your client will not feel confident in agreeing to pay you.

The I of RABIT is for **interest** testing. This simply means asking the prospect if they are interested in what they have heard so far. Phrase your questions to get a positive answer: "This is a really interesting and exciting way to shape your future, isn't it?"

As soon as they answer "Yes" proceed to the T which means it is **time** to pose the "close question." Here is the one that has yielded me the greatest number of clients.

"So, can you see [or feel, or whatever their preferred representational system is - see Chapter Eleven] any reason not to proceed?" Now remain silent until the prospect speaks. If your prospect says no, you move to the alternative close. This simply means that you offer two different dates and times for appointments and ask which one they prefer. It distracts them from the decision they have just made by offering another, easier decision. You are simply asking if they prefer Monday or Friday? This really does ease their decision-making process and helps things along. Do not worry about the ethics of the alternative close, because it works on only clients who want to go ahead and need a gentle push. The clients who do not want to use you will not fall for it.

We have almost completed the foundations for your professional life coaching practice. There is only the remaining issue of ethics or code of conduct.

At present, there is no governing body for life coaching and it is up to us as individuals to ensure that we do not bring this wonderful profession into disrepute. Think carefully about what you will and will not do, what principles and values you stand for and how you conduct yourself and your practice.

Then prepare a code-of-conduct or charter-of-business document. You can send this to new clients to let them know how you will work. Here is a copy of my own business charter as an example.

### ***Charter of Life Coaching Practice Aim***

I aim to provide a high-quality professional coaching service, which serves the needs and interests of my clients. I aim to build long-term relationships with you. These, in turn, will enable us to work together to enhance your working and business skills and competencies. I aim to support you in achieving your goals, career, health, wealth, contribution, relationships and mission.

### ***My Values***

Respect, Integrity, Honesty, Quality, Professionalism, Partnerships and Value.

### ***Guarantees***

I will make every effort to supply the coaching hours contracted to high standards. Should I make a mistake I will seek to remedy it to your satisfaction.

### ***Courtesy***

In all dealings I will maintain a high level of courtesy to clients, their employees and their customers. I will reply promptly to all and any enquiries.

### ***Information and Assistance***

Within the limits of maintaining the confidentiality of other clients, I will provide all the information and assistance that I can, to fulfill any contracts to the highest standards.

### ***Fairness***

I will seek to be fair in all aspects of my business relationship with clients.

### ***Confidentiality***

I will at all times respect the confidentiality of clients and will not divulge any information unless required to by the law.

### ***Time Allocation***

At all times, I will allocate and be available for the session times agreed in the contract and remuneration will be apportioned in all circumstances for this allocation.

Do please ensure that you can fulfill all that you promise. Now you are ready to launch your professional coaching practice, although you will find more advanced help and information in Chapter Eighteen.

### ***Summary***

- This is probably the most important chapter of this book
- Prepare a code of conduct or charter of business practice
- Have an interesting introductory sentence to generate clients
- Use RABIT to generate offspring clients and convert prospects into clients

### ***Renewals***

We have looked at how to build a coaching practice, but we also need to consider how to keep a practice ongoing and profitable. Renewals and referrals are the mainstay of the life coaching practice, and without them there would be no practice and no profit. Referrals have already been extensively covered in Chapter Six.

Renewals need careful planning and preparation. You should not consider renewals as a separate entity to the individual coaching sessions. Renewals are harder to achieve if you leave the work until the last session of a life coaching program.

Putting all your efforts into persuading the client to renew during the final session can cause you enormous pressure and is often unsuccessful. If you continuously provide an excellent service throughout the entire life coaching program for each client, there is a much greater possibility your clients will renew with you. To increase the chances of their renewing, ask yourself this question during each session, "If this client had to decide right now whether to continue or renew their coaching program with me, would they do so?" The answer should always be a convincing yes. If you are unsure that this client would renew, you will need to perform a detailed evaluation of the coaching session in doubt.

Questions you could to ask:

- What needs to be improved for this client to want to renew with me?
- Was I in a peak state throughout the entire life coaching

session?

- How did I listen?
- Did I allow myself to become distracted at any time while I was engaged during the session?
- Did I miss any nonverbal clues?
- Did I assume, delete or distort information from this client?
- How judgmental was I?
- What needs to be improved for the next session?
- Are there any actions I can take between now and the next coaching session to improve my service to this client?

Concentrate on providing an outstanding service to your clients at each and every life coaching session and the renewals will follow automatically.

Renewal clients are the most profitable because all the costs of marketing and winning their business have already been accounted for during the sale of the first coaching program. Renewal contracts are almost pure profit. You do not have to finance further marketing, further sales presentations or free coaching sessions. The costs of renewal may involve only the reissuing of contracts (if you originally chose to issue contracts), the cost of minimal stationery and the downloading of e-mails. There do not have to be any other costs involved.

It is in your financial interest to renew all life coaching programs and here lies the dilemma: the most cost-effective way to run your practice is to renew all contracts with your clients; yet it is ethical to terminate a contract with a client as soon as you have completed the original goals. The question you have to ask yourself is, "Did I manipulate my client into renewal or did my client renew because of the outstanding service I provided?"

Once clients have received the specific results that they wanted, it may be advantageous to move the client into a quarterly coaching contract. This means that you would meet for one coaching session (either face to face or on the telephone once every three months). This enables your clients to continue to gain results and forward movement while continuing to your income flow. Remember, clients who continue are your biggest asset because they are likely to continue to refer new clients to you. You will want to work out specific pricing for this coaching agreement.

Be careful not to manipulate to gain renewals because you do not want clients with subsequent regrets. They will not recommend you to other people and they will be extraordinarily demanding throughout the life coaching program. If you accidentally manipulate a client and you think they may be suffering renewal regrets, confront the problem by asking your client directly if this is the situation. Issue an immediate refund with a thank-you-for your patronage card. If you bury your head in the sand and continue regardless, you will pay a hidden cost for this action in the future.

### *Summary*

- Use a consistent coaching model that works for you;
- Life coaching is about all areas of your client's life;
- Use humour appropriately;
- Referrals and renewals are critical to your success;
- Renewals: the dilemma.