

SUCCESS SERIES



TOP 10 MARKETING TIPS FOR COACHES

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1. Do Not Attempt to SELL Coaching

Coaching is such a new phenomena that to all practical purposes, no one knows what it is. So at any given time less than 1 in 10,000 people are actually looking for a coach. You will meet with struggle if you persist in trying to **sell** something nobody understands or wants.

On the other hand, if you **market** coaching - specifically use the incredibly powerful service it is - **as a solution to problems your clients already have, and are already spending money on**, you will prosper. (According to the American Society for Training and Development, organizations spend over \$200 billion on training and development each year, and It's a widely held opinion within the training industry that between 50 and 90% of training is utterly wasted. Coaching is a much better solution to many situations.)

On the personal and life coaching side each year individuals spend hundreds of millions of dollars on books they never read and workshops whose content they quickly forget.

Many of the traditional approaches of imparting new knowledge do not translate into changes in behavior. Coaching is a far more effective solution. Coaching engages the uniqueness of the individual. Coaching is an ongoing relationship that raises awareness, connects the client with their passions and deepest desires and holds them accountable to get the results they want. People grow and change with a coach. Coaching doesn't just get results; it gets the most meaningful results.)

2. Take Your Business Seriously

I suspect that many of you who are well along in your coach training, can already see a significant increase in the value you can add to your clients. You are simply a better coach; more competent and able to add far more value to your clients. The same principle applies to your competencies as a solo business professional. **There is critical information you need to learn and apply if you are going to improve your chances of commercial success as a coach.**

Always remember there is the process of coaching. (Which coaches love.) And then there is the process of making a good living at coaching by building a successful coaching business. (Which too many coaches ignore.) Even before you jump into coaching, you will want to ask yourself if you are cut out to be an entrepreneur? (See the SBA's checklist of entrepreneurial

qualities at Small Business Association. By the way, the SBA web site has a wealth of free information to help you build your business.)

Assuming you feel you can make it as an entrepreneur; you still need to have a plan for your business. You need to think through some of the rudimentary concerns such as:

- Who are your ideal clients that are the best fit for my interests and experience?
- What are their problems that could be better solved with coaching?
- Can your clients afford you, and if they can what is your optimal pricing?
- Who is the competition?
- What is your competitive advantage or why should your clients choose you?
- How can you best "package" your coaching so your clients recognize it as the best solution for their problems they are prepared to spend money to resolve?
- How do you reach large numbers of clients, quickly and cheaply, and get yourself well known?
- How do you get your clients to try this new service you offer?
- How much time, and by what best method, will you need to market each week to keep your practice filled? (Most new coaches only put in a fraction of the marketing time they need to get the clients they want.)
- How long, and how much investment, will it take to become profitable?
- What support do you need to master all the business competencies, keep you on track when times get tough and hold you accountable?

I remember a slogan from an old business infomercial that said, FAILING TO PLAN IS PLANNING TO FAIL. In starting a coaching business, failure to attend to building your competencies in business is a very risky proposition.

3. Pick a Niche (Focus)

Do you know what a disco ball is? You might remember that round, multi-faceted, mirror-ball that is a fixture at high school dances. It was fantastic at

breaking up a beam of light and scattering it into a million, faint, fleeting images across the dance floor.

Too many coaches market like a disco ball. Being highly intuitive, feeling, inclusive souls we do not want to say no to anyone. So we send a bunch of weak, general and ineffective marketing messages out into the market.

In contrast to a disco ball, a laser so concentrates a beam of light that it can cut through anything. The marketing equivalent of a laser is developing a niche, or focus, for your coaching practice, and it's important. (However if you are in your first 6 months of coaching, don't worry about finding a niche yet. Experiment with coaching different people to build your confidence and competence, and learn who you really like working with.)

In picking a niche, you differentiate yourself from the rest of the world of coaches. **You find a place where your passions, experience, and strengths meet an aching need in the marketplace.** And then you get noticed by communicating a clear and consistent message in the language of the problems your clients already have. When you find a good niche, you get to a place in your practice where suddenly your clients recognize the tremendous value you offer, and start to come to you.

When considering a niche, as a minimum, it is important to pick a group of people:

- That you love to work with.
- That would appreciate or value much of your life experiences, training and accomplishments.
- That have big challenges or problems they are spending money on now.
- To whom you will be able to add a lot of value.
- To whom you will have credibility as a solution provider.
- Where the competition is not too entrenched.
- That you can reach in large numbers, quickly and cheaply.

The fact that you pick a niche does not mean you cannot keep coaching your current diversity of clients, or that you have to turn down any future clients who may not be in your niche. It's simply about being more effective with your marketing efforts because with a niche you will:

- Understand your ideal client's problems.

- Speak their language.
- Know how your service delivers specific benefits they value.
- Know the competitive landscape.
- Know how to reach large numbers of your ideal clients. (Their magazines, meetings, associations, etc.)
- Be able to stand out as a recognized solution provider so they start to come to you. (I.E. - a big fish in a small pond.)

My best estimate is that a carefully chosen niche gives you about 10 times the return on a given investment of marketing, than the disco-ball approach. (Here is a free tool to help you find your coaching niche.)

4. Offer More Than 1 on 1 Coaching

Most coaches make the mistake of only having one service on their metaphorical store shelves - 1 on 1 coaching. While this is the most common and powerful way coaching is delivered, restricting your offerings to just 1 to 1 coaching eliminates many other ways you can work with clients. It also limits the impact of coaching. Not everyone can afford 1 to 1 coaching. However, if you offer group coaching, you can lower the price of entry by a considerable amount. If you offer teleclasses, you can further lower the price for a potential client wanting to work with you, and in so doing double or triple the size of your potential market. (Naturally to offer group coaching, teleclasses or any other products you might create and see, you need a theme that is of common interest to your ideal clients, like making a great career transition.)

5. Make It Easy For Clients To Say Yes

Most people do not understand coaching. They haven't tried it yet, and they might not know anybody else who has tried it either. They wonder if they will get value from it. They wonder if you are any good at it. They may be confused by all the different offers, expertise and certifications of competing coaches. Simply put, most clients come to a new service like coaching with their share of doubts. It takes a fair bit to move the client from this place of heightened consumer wariness to agreeing to actually work with you. (A very powerful sample session on something important to them, where there is a good payoff for them, can work magic. Better yet a carefully marketed message or nicely packaged program highlighting your coaching solution to the niche's most pressing unmet need, will ultimately begin to attract clients.)

My point is that however you get a client to the point where they are seriously considering working with you, **MAKE IT EASY FOR THEM TO SAY YES.** Put yourself in the consumer's shoes. How would you feel, if as

potential coaching clients you finally worked through all your doubts about the coaching and decided to try it, only to be told by the coach that you needed to:

- Sign a yearlong contract.
- Pay months in advance.
- Commit to a rigid time schedule.
- Pay extra for a previously unmentioned intake session?

Chances are you would run for the door.

The point is, **the easier you make it for clients to sample and commit to coaching, the more clients you will have.** (Remember, 98.5% of clients love their coaching. They just don't know this before they start. So make it easy for them to start.)

In my practice there are no contracts or long-term commitments. I tell clients they are free to leave if they do not get value out of every session. I don't even invoice them until we have had our first session. And I don't force them to talk to me each week whether they want to or not. At the end of each session I simply ask, "When would you like to talk again?" (My typical client average 2 - 3 sessions a month.)

Also, to the extent that you "package" your coaching so that it has a clear beginning, a focus, some specific benefits or features, and a time frame; the easier it is for a client to understand the process, appreciate the potential benefits, and say yes. As a consumer would you find it easy to say yes to paying \$300 - 500 a month, on an open ended basis, for a service that is sold as, "well, just show up and we will work with whatever comes up, for however long it takes"?

In the executive coaching and training work I do it is far easier to sell a 6 month package of coaching that includes; an initial design and goal setting meeting, various assessments as required, bi-weekly coaching calls that integrate any leadership curriculum or mentoring, as needed laser calls, and a wrap up session to review progress and plan further development - than it is to sell generic executive coaching at many hundreds of dollars a month. In fact the more you package your coaching, the higher the perceived value, and thus the more you can command.

6. Price Yourself to Market

If you are just starting out in coaching, practice is more important than pricing. You need to work with clients to build the confidence and competence required to excel. However once you commit to support yourself

from your coaching activities, pricing your services is a critical part of your success. Many coaches, because we tend to be kind, giving souls, are reluctant to ask for money for their services or perpetually under price themselves. If you do want to give coaching away, carefully consider how much of your time you may choose to devote to pro bono work. However for the rest, price yourself to your market, not to your insecurities.

There is a guideline in pricing services called the 20% rule. Simply stated it says that if you are priced accurately for your ideal clientele, on average 1 in 5 of your prospects should be objecting to your pricing. If less than 1 in 5 object, you are priced too low. If more than 1 in 5 object, you are priced too high. Periodically reviewing your pricing will ensure you never miss business or leave too much on the table.

7. Raise Your Profile

Here is a paradox. When you are starting out in a new undertaking, most people like to keep a low profile, so they make their mistakes without a big audience. However, to attract large numbers of clients, you really need to stand out, get noticed, put yourself out there. Many coaches really struggle to claim their gifts as a coach and begin to raise their profile, so they stay under the radar far too long. At some stage you simply have to decide to move forward, even though you may feel you are not quite ready. Yes you will be a better coach a year from now. But if you don't get out there and talk to people, you may not be a coach a year from now. **Connect to the passion you have for this work.** Connect to your calling to coach. Feed all those forces pulling you forward so you can stand up in front of the world and tell them how you can help them.

8. Don't Try to Do It All on Your Own

Your clients hire you because they learn quicker and advance further with your assistance. The more feedback, learning, awareness raising and general support you get, (particularly through the tough and often discouraging early days of starting a business), the faster you will move ahead. Knowing this, why do so many coaches try to start a new business and master their coaching skills all by themselves?

If you can afford a coach, great. Chances are you will get at least a 500% return on your investment. However, if you are building your business on a budget, as so many coaches do, look for other ways of getting the support you need. Set up a coaching dyad or triad with some other coaches. Participate in the community of your ICF chapter or the virtual chapter. Join the list serve or online forum at your coaching school. Establish a mastermind group. In other words get people around you that will tell you when you are stuck, support you when you need it, and hold you accountable for moving ahead. Don't try to do it all alone.

9. Don't Let Your Fear Be Your Marketing Manager

Fear and self-doubt will be your biggest obstacles. You can gather all the information you need about the business of coaching fairly quickly. You can become a competent coach with your school. However, if you do not find a way to overcome your fears, you will never put that information into productive use. The single most common self-defeating thought new coaches harbor are: "I am not ready yet." Thinking that they are not yet the perfect coach, causes too many coaches to play small, hold back, sit on the sidelines or otherwise rob the world of their gifts - waiting for some imagined date in the future when they will feel better. IT DOESN'T COME.

Most coaches who have proceeded even half way through their training have enough skill to add considerable value to clients. Yes you will be better next year. 10 years from now you will be a star. But for your business to succeed (so that you will be around next year) you have to walk through your doubts and get out there and share your gifts, now. (Besides most coaches will candidly admit they have always been able to add value to other people, even before they stumbled onto the new profession of coaching.)

Fear is like a boomerang, it keeps coming back. In a situation where you are growing, learning, moving out of your comfort zone, fear will be a constant companion. You will greatly benefit from recognizing that you need to manage your fear on a daily basis. You will benefit from developing a daily practice that centers you in your most open, unattached, value-added, focus on the client place from which you are far more likely to impress prospects and manifest the business you desire.

Consider for a moment how extraordinarily complex, variable and subjective the "inner workings" of your mind can be, and how managing this is critical to your success. Let's say you just learned that a coaching prospect did not accept your request for a meeting. How would this event affect you? First, you have the challenge that the only part of the actual sensory data enters your mind.

Then the portion of the information that does make it through is immediately labeled, judged and compared to what you were expecting, through the filters of your self-image, moods, stress level, conceptual model of how the world works and your spiritual or philosophical outlook. As what was assumed to be happening would typically differ from what was expected, this would trigger a negative emotional response.

This feeling of being under attack would see your hypothalamus trigger a flood of stress hormones (adrenalin and cortisol) into your bloodstream. This would elevate your blood pressure and respiration and even restrict the flow of blood to your brain. Quickly you would lose any real chance of testing reality or communing with your creativity or intuition and coming up with a positive response. More likely you find yourself stuck in an anxious round of

disaster scenario planning which would echo away in your mind for hours, distracting you and de-motivating you from any further forays out of your comfort zone back into the marketplace, because it would all be too painful.

Learning to understand how you create your own "reality", raising your awareness as to your habitual responses, and learning how to grow to better manage and direct the whole process, can lead you to joy and success. Ignoring this area can sentence you to ongoing struggle.

10. Master Your Art and Keep Growing

Whatever you chose to do for your career, you should commit to be really good at it. The better coach you are, the more value you will be able to provide to your clients. No matter how long you have been coaching, there is always more to learn. Our field is so young the pool of knowledge continues to expand each year. There are lots of good programs out there, many are free such as ICF virtual chapter presentations, some very inexpensive. (Needless to say, I think it is a very good idea to obtain your ICF credential. It is emerging as the most universal, best known, gold standard, that we can all hold in common as independent verification that we are an ethical professional that is great at what we do.)

Many coaches make a big deal about the difference between coaching and marketing. They love coaching, but hate marketing. Good marketing is very similar to good coaching. You listen first, and ask powerful questions. What are your problems, challenges, changes you want to make? What are you spending money on? What is working well, what is not working well? How much would it be worth to you to solve this problem? What associations do you belong to? What magazines do you read? etc.

COACHES ARE THE BEST LISTENERS AND QUESTIONERS IN THE WORLD. Channel your inner coach into your marketing, you can be great at it.

Finally, remember that the more you grow, the bigger the market you can coach. Who you can effectively coach, and the amount of value you can create for them, is tied to your overall level of growth and development on a wide range of cognitive, emotional, and spiritual competencies. If a potential client ascertains that they are further along than you, it is doubtful you will get the job. So please keep growing as a human being.

When you get to the place where you truly believe in the power of coaching, and have confidence in your ability to add value to client's lives, businesses or careers, your marketing life will be much easier.

