



INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION
FOR HEALTH COACHES

International Certification Exam Study Guide

Overview and Table of Contents

This guide serves to supplement your study and revision for the International Health Coach Certification Exam. The guide defines 14 critical coaching skills and provides key learning points for each. You will be tested on these critical coaching skills, all of which should be familiar to you from the IIN Health Coach Training Program. Questions are situation-based and designed to challenge, encourage critical thinking, and provide a clear assessment of your ability to coach.

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Critical Coaching Skill #1: Establish the Coaching Agreement

Definition: Ability to understand what's required in the specific coaching interaction and come to an agreement with the prospective and new client about the health coaching process and relationship.

- Understands and effectively discusses with the client the guidelines and specific parameters of the health coaching relationship (e.g., logistics, fees, scheduling, inclusion of others if appropriate, etc.).
- Reaches agreement about what's appropriate in the relationship and what's not, what is and isn't being offered, and the client's and coach's respective responsibilities.
- Determines whether or not the prospective client is a good match for his/her coaching method.

Definition: Establish clear boundaries and come to a mutually beneficial agreement with the client on what happens during a coaching session and throughout the program.

- Discuss what the coaching sessions require and outline the responsibilities of coach and client
- Communicate logistics around schedule and fees
- Outline the boundaries of the coaching relationship
- Assess whether you and your potential client are a good match
- Explain how the program works. Include length and time of each meeting (50 minutes, every two weeks); whether you will meet by phone, in person, Skype, etc.; how long the program will continue (6 months, etc.)
- Provide and have clients complete and sign the appropriate forms: Welcome Letter/Form, Goals Form, Program Agreement to clarify terms of payment, and other organizational information, schedule, etc.
- Discuss payment options – credit card, PayPal, check, automatic, etc. – and have them complete the appropriate forms.
- Explain that they need to fill out and turn in the Goals form prior to the first session. Describe a typical session so the client knows what to expect and prepare
- Answer questions
- Tell them how excited you are to be able to support them
- Pick a start date and ensure that they have it on their calendar
- Thank them and assure them that they will have tremendous results
- Send them a thank you note that:
 - References the goals you're going to help them reach
 - Shares your commitment to their success
 - Reminds them of the start date and provides a payment link (payment must be completed before you begin the program)

Reference forms such as:

- Program Agreement
- Program Schedule
- Credit Card Authorization form (if you take credit cards)
- Welcome form

- Goals form
- Set the stage and establish expectations by explaining to a new client/prospective client what coaching is and is not at the beginning.
 - Gauge client's familiarity with coaching by asking a lot of questions
 - Coaching isn't about diagnosing; a coach is a partner – it's an interactive process. Coaching is about looking at where the client is, where they'd like to be, what's in the way, and how to remove those obstacles. A coach is a guide who invites a client to step out of their comfort zone and grow.
 - Explain to the client how health coaching is different than nutrition therapy, working with a dietitian, doctor, etc.
 - Explain what coaches do/don't do.
 - Explain how coaching is different from counseling/therapy:
 - Coaching: "Partnering with clients in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximize their personal and professional potential. Coaches honor the client as the expert in his or her life and work and believe every client is creative, resourceful and whole . . . supports personal and professional growth based on self-initiated change in pursuit of specific actionable outcomes. Coaching is future-focused. The primary focus is on creating actionable strategies for achieving specific goals in one's work or personal life. The emphases in a coaching relationship are on action, accountability, and follow through." (*Source: ICF Definition, ICF website*)
 - Counseling: "Often focuses on moving people from a state of dysfunction to one of being functional. . . a professional relationship that empowers diverse individuals, families and groups to accomplish mental health, wellness, education and career goals. . . counseling is about helping the client process, understand and resolve his or her past issues in order to live more fully in the present. . . counselors are regarded as experts and must be registered and/or licensed by their state. Most states require a minimum of a Master's Degree in counseling or human services." (*ACA Definition, 2010*)
 - Therapy deals with healing pain, dysfunction and conflict within an individual or in relationships. The focus is often on resolving difficulties arising from the past that hamper an individual's emotional functioning in the present, improving overall psychological functioning, and dealing with the present in more emotionally healthy ways. (*Source: ICF website: "How is coaching distinct from other service professions: Therapy*)
- Create and have your client complete a coachability index
 - How willing are you to change behavior in your life?
 - How willing are you to try new things that you've never done before?
 - How willing are you to do things that make you uncomfortable or feel a little scary?
- Walk clients through the stages of coaching
 - Building awareness (reflection)
 - Teaching tools to help remove the obstacles
 - Becoming their partner so they can create the life they want. After the obstacles are removed, what do you want to create now? What's your vision? (Coach, cheerleader, advocate, etc.)

- Discuss Logistics
 - Provide payment, cancellation, and timeline policy
 - Whether and how you will communicate between sessions (e.g., text, email, phone calls, etc.)
 - Communication turnaround time between sessions (how fast will you get back to them)

Critical Coaching Skill #2: Follow ethical guidelines and professional standards

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

- Understand and exhibits the ICF Standards of Conduct
- Understand and follows all ICF Ethical Guidelines
- Clearly communicates the distinctions between coaching, consulting, psychotherapy, and other support professions
- Refer clients to other support professionals as needed, knowing when this is needed and the available resources

Scope of Practice: Meet Ethical Guidelines

Scope of Practice Guidelines		
	Go for It!	Avoid It!
Conditions	<p>Do work with people who are generally healthy with mild health concerns such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Headache • Fatigue • Sugar cravings 	<p>Don't say that you can cure disease or work with people with complex, advanced diseases such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cancer • Kidney failure • Serious eating disorders
Age	<p>Do work with adults. Get written authorization from a legal guardian to work with children.</p>	<p>Don't work with minors without written authorization from their legal guardian.</p>
Medical	<p>Do suggest a client:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask their doctor about alternatives to medication • Get a second doctor's opinion if they're unsure 	<p>Don't suggest clients stop or change prescription medication or stop seeing their doctor</p>
Diet	<p>Do suggest ways to "crowd out" the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Caffeine, sugar, alcohol, tobacco, junk food, and dairy 	<p>Don't exclude major food groups or recommend extreme detox programs</p>
Supplements	<p>Do recommend:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fruits, vegetables, and water • Superfoods • Speaking to their doctor about supplements 	<p>Don't recommend controversial supplements or very high doses</p>

Exercise	Do encourage clients to begin gentle, low-risk exercise changes such as walking	Don't encourage vigorous exercise without consulting their physician
Relationship	Do give people time to talk about the important relationships in their lives. Promote participation in social events to meet new people.	Don't promote major changes like divorce or support passive aggressive behavior with friends and/or family
Career	Do recommend that clients explore new hobbies and interests	Don't recommend that your client quit their job
Spirituality	Do advise clients to engage in self-reflection and experience nature	Don't advise your client to change religious affiliation
Liability	Do get liability insurance and contact IIN if any issues arise. Use the IIN agreement when working with clients.	Don't call yourself a registered dietitian or nutritionist

Scope of Practice: Meet Ethical Guidelines (continued)

Scope of Practice	
Health Coaches Do Not...	Health Coaches Do...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diagnose, treat, or prescribe • “Play the game” for their clients 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partner to inspire and co-create transformative growth • Help strategize from the sidelines

Ethical Guidelines	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask powerful and illuminating questions • Provide clients with a safe, non-judgmental space to discuss their celebrations, concerns, and obstacles • Respect personal and physical boundaries • Create sustainable accountability • Define and manage the health coaching relationship with clear agreements • Promote confidentiality, security, and privacy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be clear and upfront in regards to payments • Let the clients know what they can expect from you as a coach • Discuss conflicts of interest • Always be professional • Give good client service by returning phone calls and emails in a timely fashion • Be on time for sessions

How do Health Coaches Differ from Other Health Professionals?

Health Coaches and RDs may work in similar settings such as corporations, food and nutrition-related businesses, private practices, and community centers; however, they provide different services.

A registered dietitian (RD) is defined as “a person who has studied diet and nutrition at a college program approved by the American Dietetic Association, completed 900 hours of supervised practical experience accredited by the Commission on the Accreditation for Dietetics Education, and passed an exam to become an RD.

The term “nutritionist” varies from state to state. In some states you may legally call yourself a “nutritionist,” but IIN trains graduates as Health Coaches and feels strongly that this title conveys the professional as a powerful, supportive client ally who helps clients understand how to nourish themselves with both primary food and secondary food. This serves a broader role than any other health professional, including nutritionists.

What are my practice parameters as a Health Coach?

Health Coaches Do	Health Coaches Do Not
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guide conversations to allow clients to explore areas they feel need attention • Make recommendations for basic, health-supportive behavior changes • Encourage clients to adapt healthy behavior changes, hold themselves accountable for their choices, and support them in their decisions • Work alone or in conjunction with other health practitioners with clients who have minor health concerns deemed manageable through basic behavior modifications. • Encourage health-promoting behaviors • Recommend a client consult his or her doctor or medical provider when changing a medication, making major dietary changes, starting a new fitness routine, or making any significant behavioral changes • Refer clients to the appropriate licensed professional for proper treatment of medical issues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drive conversations in areas a client is uncomfortable with • Diagnose, treat, or heal • Force clients to adopt behavior changes • Work alone with clients on multiple medications or with advanced, chronic, critical, or complex health conditions such as cancer, degenerative illnesses, advanced diabetes, or life-threatening eating disorders • Take responsibility for client success or failure • Advise a client to stop taking medication, stop seeing their doctor or medical practitioner, make major dietary changes, begin a strenuous fitness routine, or make any potentially harmful behavior changes • Assume the ability to handle health issues

Critical Coaching Skill #3: Explore readiness for change and motivation

Stages of Change:

The Transtheoretical Model of Behavior Change, developed by Drs. James Prochaska and Carlo DiClementa (1983), is a six-stage change model originally developed to help professionals understand their clients with addiction problems and motivate them to change. Health Coaches can use it to assess an individual's readiness to act on a new, healthier behavior, and provide strategies or processes of change to guide the individual through the stages of change. Since each client is different and has unique needs, the time spent in each stage is not set and may vary considerably between clients.

The Stages of Change are:

Stage 1: Pre-contemplation

Client has not yet acknowledged that there is a problematic behavior that needs to change. At this point, they may not even realize there is a problem, or believe that others who point out the problem are exaggerating.

Coaching Actions:

- Coach needs to determine whether the client is ready, willing, and able to make the change. Must have the right conditions both internally and externally, and make sure the time is right.
- **Internal:** Are they mentally, emotionally, and spiritually ready?
- **External:** Do they have a supportive environment? Time in their schedule to do it? People in their lives to support them? They should be ready to make change a priority, even if they have a busy schedule.

Stage 2: Contemplation

Client is willing to consider the possibility that there is a problem, but has not yet made a decision to change. They are highly ambivalent and often interested learning more about the problem (education) and possible solutions to resolve it. They are considering the pros and cons of making the change, and aren't yet sure they are ready. They may lack interest in creating change, have a fear of failure or fear of success, limiting beliefs (e.g., I don't have time or money), or just aren't ready to do anything about the issue yet.

Coaching Actions:

- What might be the cost of not making this change?
- What might the benefits be?
- How much of your energy does this take up?
- What would be available to you if you handled this now?
- How much longer are you willing to put up with this situation as it is now?

Stage 3: Determination (Commitment to Action)

Client has made a commitment to action and is getting ready to change. They may still be ambivalent, but they are ready to make a serious attempt to make the change. During this change stage, Health Coaches can be supportive by helping the client assess what's needed to make the change, what problems and pitfalls they might encounter, and how to overcome them

so that their clients can come up with solutions for themselves with the support of the Health Coach. (Note: Marilena Minucci, MS, calls this the “Preparation” stage).

Preparing to take action and want/need more information

Coaching Actions:

- Share success stories about other clients
- Tell them about the benefits of working with a coach
- Respect the information they already have
- What has/hasn't worked for you in the past?
- What's missing for you right now? Are there any pinnacle decisions you need to make?
- What support do you need?

Stage 4: Action (Implementing the Plan)

Client is implementing the plan and making the behavioral changes. Usually involves some sort of public commitment. Making this commitment helps clients obtain the support they need and creates external monitors and motivators, e.g., if others know they are working toward this change and supporting them, they will be more likely to continue the process. Health Coaches need to be supportive, give positive reinforcement, and serve as cheerleaders during this phase.

Coaching Actions:

- This is prime time for change in clients, but it's also common for clients to run into self-sabotaging behaviors when evolving. Simply pre-framing by letting them know this might happen and they can avoid it if they choose will be greatly helpful.
- Accountability: Clients may get off track and coaches should give them reminders of their goals and check in with them via email, text, or phone – whatever you have agreed to.
- Clients may avoid communication as a self-sabotaging behavior – coaches should not abandon them.
- Break goals down into manageable action steps.
- Trust their inner wisdom and truth.

Stage 5: Maintenance, Devolution, and Recycling

This phase may take 3-6 months to complete because clients are learning to adapt new behavioral patterns, which takes time. Clients may have challenges during this time around maintaining the new behaviors and returning to previous behaviors. Devolution may occur and is a normal part of the change process. The Health Coach needs to be aware of the potential for roadblocks, ensure the client knows they're normal and natural, and help the client to prepare for them.

Coaching Actions:

- Celebrate their successes
- The client will not be perfect – they need to understand it's normal to take steps backward
- It's not about perfection, it's about progress – help them live this mantra

- Use stumbles as a way to help them course correct and move forward
- If clients internalize failure over and over again, it's time to change the pattern and partner with them to turn these issues into successes. They should learn more about themselves each step of the way.
- Use “coachable moments” to tweak their plan

Stage 6: Termination/Transcendence

By the time the client reaches this stage, he or she has made shifts, integrated new behaviors, and is confident that they're unlikely to return to old behaviors. At this point, the client feels so great about their new lifestyle that they don't have a reason to revert to old patterns. They may no longer need a Health Coach, although they may choose to check in occasionally to keep their momentum up.

Coaching Actions:

Keep them plugged into your community. Ask them what they need and how you can continue to support them. Engage through social media, email marketing, or other tactics that are effective for you.

Critical Coaching Skill #4: Establish trust and intimacy

Definition: Ability to create a safe, supportive environment that fosters ongoing mutual respect and trust.

- Show genuine concern for the client's welfare and future.
- Continuously demonstrate personal integrity, honesty, and sincerity.
- Establish clear agreements and keeps promises or consciously agrees to course correct with client's permission.
- Demonstrate respect for client's perceptions, learning style, and personal well-being.
- Provide ongoing support and advocates for new behaviors and actions, including those involving risk taking and releasing fear of failure.
- Ask permission to coach clients in sensitive, new areas.
- Show that you're happy to see your client.
- Ask what's new and good
- Ask about significant people in your client's life
- Be honest; keep agreements and promises
- Show genuine concern for your client's welfare
- Ask them to tell their story
- Ask them where they're stuck
- Don't provide too many solutions; use high-mileage questions and active listening; let them process for themselves

Critical Coaching Skill #5: Build rapport while clarifying intentions

The coaching relationship is different than a relationship with a therapist, doctor, nurse, or other healthcare provider. It's okay to share something about yourself to help them feel comfortable and get to know and trust you as a real person. Start building rapport upon meeting, but keep in mind that you're not their friend; you are their partner and guide. It's important to maintain boundaries and step fully into your role. Empower them to be honest with you and remain accountable. Check in with them. Support them in creating positive rituals, practices, and habits that will help them move toward change.

Stage 1: Create Connection

- Choose positive words like *goals* and *dreams*. Avoid words like *problems*.
- Listen more than you speak. When people feel heard they will connect with you and share openly, allowing you to learn more and guide them in getting results faster.
- Focus on the client's needs and desires, not on your own projections of what they should have, do, or be.
- Ask high-mileage questions to dig deeper. Figure out who they are and what they really want.

Stage 2: Set Intentions and Create a Safe Space

- Acknowledge and thank them for being there
- Share that you're happy they took action to work with you and improve their lives
- Remind them everything they share is confidential
- Tell them you will not judge them; they can be themselves
- Tell them you are there to support them
- Pay close attention to what they say
- Breathe and listen
- Examples of what to say:
 - "This is an opportunity for you to share about yourself – your goals for your life and your health and what you've always wanted. We'll also discuss what's getting in the way of you reaching your goals and how to overcome those challenges to create a healthy and happy life."
 - "You'll also have an opportunity to learn about my coaching program and how I can support you to reach your goals. How does that sound?"

Stage 3: Set up the Close

- Remember key points and words and write them down. Mirror your client's language by using some of their exact words. For example, the client says, "I want to lose 10 pounds so I feel more confident with men." Then, when recapping her goals, you might say, "So what I'm hearing is that you really want to lose 10 pounds to increase your confidence in relationships." Let the person see that you're engaged.
- Show how you understand and relate, but don't talk too much about yourself. Use a quick anecdote about your life or a simple, "I so understand where you're coming from," or "I can definitely see that happening for you."
- Speak as if you are working together already
- Use light humor when appropriate

- Examples of what to say
 - “What are your top three goals for the next six months?”
 - “What’s in the way of you achieving your goals?”
 - “What negative impact do these challenges have on your life?”

Stage 4: Create the Possibility

- Thank them for sharing. Let them know you appreciate getting to know them better and learning about their goals.
- Examples of what to say:
 - “How will your life be better by overcoming your obstacles and reaching your goals?”
 - “What is the most valuable part of our conversation so far?”

Stage 5: Offer Your Program

- Check in to see how the session is going for them
- Examples of what to say:
 - “How do you see yourself succeeding by working with me?”
 - “How would you like my support to reach your goals?”
- Mention your commitment to supporting them and making their goals a reality, then talk about your program.

Critical Coaching Skill #6: Develop coaching presence

Definition: Ability to be fully conscious and create a relationship with the client, employing a style that is open, flexible, and confident.

- Be present and flexible during the coaching process.
- Access your own intuition and trust one's inner knowing – listen to gut instincts.
- Be open to not knowing all the answers.
- See many tools to use with the client and chooses what's most effective from moment to moment.
- Use humor effectively to create lightness and energy.
- Confidently shift perspectives and experiment with new possibilities. Acknowledge that there is no one way.
- Demonstrate confidence in working with strong emotions without becoming overinvolved personally.

Coaching Actions

- Be fully present and flexible
- Ask questions when you're unsure
- Trust your intuition
- Use humor to make clients comfortable
- Stay confident when clients show strong emotions
- Breathe
- Let the client lead
- Love them up
- Ask, "What's new and good?"
- Keep it simple
- Share bits of your life (rapport)
- Make it your own – customize your coaching practice to your own knowledge and experience. Acknowledge your strengths and leverage them.

Critical Coaching Skill #7: Establish a line of accountability and boundaries

- Have a clear communication plan – how often and when you can communicate between sessions.
- Use tough love.
 - Challenge them gently to keep them on track, e.g., “I notice that every time you come to a session you talk a lot about xxx, but in between sessions, you don’t do anything about it...”
 - Help them to be clearer, e.g., “This is a little hard for me to talk about, but I’m just wondering why you keep coming back to the session but you don’t follow my recommendations. Should I not give you recommendations?”
 - Ask, “How can I serve you today?” Remember that it’s about the client, not about your agenda.

Establishing relationship boundaries and program policies before your program begins allows you to have more effective, powerful, and enjoyable sessions with your clients. It also encourages your clients to take you seriously and have more confidence in you and the coaching process. It’s important to establish boundaries around:

- Communications between sessions: When and how can clients contact you? What’s your turnaround time?
- Missed sessions: Can they reschedule, and if so, how many sessions?
- Cancellations: How much notice do you require?
- Refunds and discounts
- Lateness
- Payment expectations
- Session length

Coach’s Role/Responsibility to the Client

- The success of the coaching relationship is the client’s responsibility. The coach guides and helps them to move out of their comfort zone, but their success depends on the degree to which they’re willing to show up. The coach should NOT take responsibility for the client’s success or failure.
- You are not their friend; remain professional yet relaxed in all communications. Use humor where appropriate.
- Your job is to empower them with the tools to see their obstacles and what they need to overcome them and change their behavior and mentality so that they can move forward.
- Your job is to ask: “What’s your vision?” Tell them you’re there to help bridge the gap between where they are and where they want to be.
- Help them build awareness and give them tools, then work in partnership with them to help them lead the life they want. Share your own success story or another client’s story.
- Explain that it’s not your job to save them, fix their problems, or have all of the answers – that’s their responsibility. They have all of the answers inside themselves. Your job is to show up fully present and judgment-free, and take good care of yourself so you have energy to help them.

- A coach's job is to take a stand for clients – support them using your strengths, practice active listening, and avoid judgment and jumping to conclusions. Remind them of the positive things about themselves, their potential, and their strengths.
- The client is the expert on himself or herself – it's not about "your way."
- Hold the client accountable by being curious. Notice if they haven't done something they said they would do and ask why they haven't completed this task.
- Remind them if they aren't holding themselves accountable and help them stay on track.
- Ask them specific questions to keep them on track: When are you going to do that? What's your timeline? How much time are you going to spend on that and when?
-
- Check in with them frequently.

Qualities of True Accountability

- Be gentle yet firm
- Agree upon responsibility
- It's about trust and honesty, not shame, judgment, or hiding
- Specifically follow up with the client on previous recommendations and celebrate each success, big or small

Critical Coaching Skill #8: Communicate effectively

Definition (Direct Communication): Ability to communicate effectively during coaching sessions and use language that has the greatest positive impact on the client.

- Use clear, articulate, and direct language when sharing and providing feedback.
- Reframe and articulate to help the client understand from another perspective what s/he wants or is uncertain about.
- Clearly state coaching objectives, meeting agenda, and the purpose of techniques or exercises.
- Use language appropriate and respectful to the client (e.g., non-sexist, non-racist, non-technical, non-jargon, etc.).
- Use metaphor and analogy to help illustrate a point or paint a verbal picture.

Be able to:

- Clearly state the session goals and purpose of the exercises
- Give direct feedback
- Ask straightforward questions that get right to the point
- Reframe information to help clients see a new perspective
- Use language that has a direct, positive impact
- Keep clients on track if they're going off on tangents by saying, "We only have X minutes, and I know you want to cover XYZ."
- Use an open, non-judgmental tone
- Understand that the energy behind what you're saying is more important than what you're saying
- Use a tone of curiosity
- Use a tone of compassion
- Use "I" language

Critical Coaching Skill #9: Listen actively and document

Definition: Active listening is the ability to focus completely on what the client is saying and not saying to understand the client's desires and support self-expression and authenticity.

Active listeners:

- Attend to the client's agenda and not their own agenda for the client
- Hear the client's concerns, goals, values, and beliefs about what is and isn't possible
- Identify the tone behind words and body language
- Summarize, paraphrase, reiterate, and mirror back what the client has said to ensure clarity and understanding and develop trust
- Encourage, accept, explore, and reinforce the client's expression of feelings, perceptions, concerns, beliefs, suggestions, etc.
- Integrate and build on the client's ideas and suggestions
- "Bottom-line" or understand the essence of the client's communication and help the client get there rather than engaging in long, descriptive stories
- Allow the client to vent or clear the situation without judgment or attachment in order to move on to the next steps

Skills listed:

- Fully focus on your client
- Listen carefully to your client's concerns, beliefs, and goals
- Pay attention to your client's body language and tone of voice
- Reiterate what your client expresses to make sure you understand

Active Listening	Poor Listening
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attending and acknowledging • Restating/rephrasing • Reflecting • Mirroring • Summarizing • Probing • Supporting • Allowing silence • Full body engagement (face the client fully) • Eye contact 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being abrupt • One word answers • Being easily distracted • Interrupting • Finishing client's sentences • Changing the subject • No eye contact • Poor body language (turning away from the client or sitting with your body at an angle)

Remember:

- Don't dominate the conversation
- Take good notes and write down what you'd like to ask them
- Remember the names of important people in their life, write them down
- Create a safe space for the client
- Allow the client to be heard and tell their story

- Read between the lines to what is being said and what is not being said without making assumptions
- Distinguish words, tone of voice, and body language (verbal/non-verbal cues)
- Focus your full attention on the client
- Set aside distractions, avoid multitasking
- Maintain connection with the client
- Let the client lead and meet them where they are
- Allow for silence
- Involve reflection or mirroring – summarizing or rephrasing what the client said:
 - “So what I’m hearing is that you’re wishing you had...”
 - “So what I’m hearing is that you’re really...”
 - “So what I’m hearing is that you’re feeling...”
 - “So what I’m hearing is that you thought...”
- Let clients express themselves freely and without fear or judgment
- Don’t draw conclusions
- Don’t worry about the next coaching question or statement
- Don’t share your point of view or give advice
- Don’t talk someone out of their feelings or beliefs about themselves or the situation
- Don’t move too quickly to solve the problem

Listening Zone

- Focus your full attention on client
- Envision holding the space for the client
- Listen with your ears and gut for what the client is telling you and not telling you
- Listen to the client in the context of their dreams and goals
- Notice any somatic (body) signals you pick up from the client
- Stay curious about the client
- Let go of worrying if you’re doing a good job or solving the problem or your overall performance as a coach
- Get comfortable with silences in the coaching conversation (people may be reflecting on, absorbing, or processing what was said)

Critical Coaching Skill #10: Ask powerful, high-mileage questions

Definition: Ability to ask questions that reveal the information needed for maximum benefit to the coaching relationship and the client.

- Ask questions that reflect active listening and an understanding of the client's perspective.
- Ask questions that evoke discovery, insight, commitment, or action (e.g., those that challenge the client's assumptions).
- Ask open-ended questions that create greater clarity, possibility, or new learning.
- Ask questions that move the client toward what they desire, not questions that ask for the client to justify or look backward.

Powerful Questioning: What is a High-Mileage Question?

High-mileage questions are open-ended questions that require more than a “yes” or “no” response. They open the space for in-depth conversation around your client’s issues, values and goals, and encourage clients to connect the dots and create their own solutions. High-mileage questioning skills include:

- Asking open-ended questions that require more than a “yes” or “no” response
- Asking questions that show you understand the client’s point-of-view
- Asking question that evoke informative, in-depth responses
- Asking questions that help clients move closer to their goals

Examples of High-Mileage Questions:

- Relating to the future, past, and present
- Action-oriented
- Goal/value-related
- Relating to people/places/things
- Self-coaching
- Coach involvement
- Going further

Critical Coaching Skill #11: Support client's growth of self-awareness

Definition: Creating awareness – ability to integrate and accurately evaluate multiple sources of information and make interpretations that help the client gain awareness and achieve agreed-upon goals.

- Go beyond what's said in assessing client's concerns, not getting hooked by the client's description. Ask questions without assuming.
- Invoke inquiry for greater understanding, awareness, and clarity.
- Identify 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; and disparities between thoughts, feelings, and actions.
- Help clients to discover for themselves the new thoughts, beliefs, perceptions, emotions, moods, etc., that strengthen their ability to take action and achieve what's important to them.
- Communicate broader perspectives to clients and inspire commitment to shift their viewpoints and find new ways of doing and being.
- Help clients to see the different, interrelated factors that affect them and their behaviors (e.g., thoughts, emotions, body, and background).
- Express insights to clients in ways that are useful and meaningful for the client.
- Identify major strengths vs. major areas for learning and growth, and what is most important to address during coaching.
- Ask the client to distinguish between trivial and significant issues and situational vs. recurring behaviors when detecting a separation between what is being stated and what is being done.

Key points:

- Past is in the past – focus on the power of now
- What do you want to see happen?
- Empower them – what are you willing to do?
- What's new and good?
- Ask thought-provoking questions
- Ask difficult questions diplomatically, e.g., "I'm not sure how to ask this or if it applies to you, but..."

Critical Coaching Skill #12: Design goal-setting steps

Definition: Ability to partner with the client in creating opportunities for ongoing learning, during coaching and in work/life situations, and for taking new actions that will most effectively lead to agreed-upon results.

- Brainstorm with and assist the client to define actions that will enable them to demonstrate, practice, and deepen new learning.
- Help the client focus on and systematically explore specific concerns and opportunities that are central to agreed-upon coaching goals.
- Engage the client to explore alternative ideas and solutions, to evaluate options, and to make related decisions.
- Promote active experimentation and self-discovery – where the client applies what has been discussed and learned during sessions immediately afterward in his/her life.
- Celebrate client successes and capabilities for future growth.
- Challenge client's assumptions and perspectives to provoke new ideas and find new possibilities for action.
- Advocate or bring forward points of view that are aligned with client goals and, without attachment, engages the client to consider them.
- Help the client take action during the coaching session, providing live support.
- Stretch and challenge the client while maintaining a comfortable pace and checking in with the client to see if things are moving too slowly or too quickly.

Goal Setting: Ability to identify and work toward goals in partnership with the client.

- Consolidate collected information and establishes a coaching plan with the client that addresses concerns and areas for learning and development.
- Create a plan with results that are attainable, measurable, specific, and have target dates.
- Course correct as necessary with permission from the client.
- Help the client identify and access different resources for learning, such as books and complementary professionals.
- Identifies and targets early successes that are important to the client and celebrates them fully.

Goal of coaching: Get client from current state to desired state as efficiently and effectively as possible.

- Start with the end in mind, but realize that goals may change or there may be detours on the way
- Use high-mileage questions to clarify goals: What? Why? Where?

Examples:

- What do you/don't you want?
- What is your passion/pain?
- What do you want to move towards/away from?
- What is your current availability to do this?

- What is your level of commitment?
 - What could get in the way?
 - Who else could support you?
 - On a scale of 1-10, how meaningful is this to you?
- What is your client's motivation to achieve their goal?
 - What or who motivates you the most?
 - What three motivators can I remind you of when you need to rebuild your momentum?
 - What will success look like for you?
- Set SMART (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Time-sensitive) Goals with your client
 - A shorter list is better than a longer list for clients to be successful; you can always add more as you go
 - Single-pointed focus takes us the fastest and farthest
 - Goals need to be very clear and specific
- Be flexible and willing to pivot to reach the client's goals
 - Predictors of success:
 - Level of goal detail
 - Goals written down
 - Goals reinforced and reminded
 - Bigger vision attached to goal
 - In touch with motivators
 - Manageable, relevant steps
 - Consistent action over time
 - Accountability in place
 - Having a coach
- Coaching is client-centered (how):
 - Client is in charge
 - Clients set the pace and agenda
 - We follow their lead, energy, and enthusiasm
 - Coaches do NOT give advice or "fix" clients.
- Coaching is about the journey, not the destination. An effective plan:
 - Is made from small consistent actions over time that move us towards the current goal or destination
 - Includes powerful accountability
 - Is flexible
 - Handles procrastination and other forms of self-sabotage

- Is filled with coachable moments
- Reminder: It's okay for people to get off track at times; you do not want to punish them – you want to support them to get back on track.
- Create an effective plan – small, consistent actions, accountability, flexibility, and tools for handling procrastination and self-sabotage.

Tips for Great Recommendations/Action Steps (Goals)

- Have the client suggest the initial recommendations based on what was discussed with the coach
- Check in with the client to see if this is a step they want to take or feel that they “ought to” or “should” take – they are more likely to work on goals for things they WANT to do and be successful than “should” goals
- Goals and steps should be manageable – small enough that they are achievable, but big enough that they feel a little bit of stretch and get excited about that
- Be sure client understands how recommendations and action steps will bring them to their goals
- See if there are other things going on that may keep them from meeting their goals (e.g., life events, stressful situations, etc.)
- Check in with the client and ask them if and how they want to be held accountable for their actions other than what was agreed upon

Critical Coaching Skill #13: Manage setbacks and progress

Definition: Ability to hold attention for what is important for the client, and to give the client responsibility to take action.

- Define and support actions that will move the client towards the goals s/he has explicitly committed to.
- Demonstrate follow through by asking the client about the actions they committed to during the previous session(s).
- Acknowledge the client for what they have done, not done, learned, or become aware of since the previous coaching session(s).
- Effectively prepare, organize, and review information obtained during sessions with your client.
- Keep the client on track between sessions by reviewing the coaching plan and outcomes, agreed-upon courses of action, and topics for future session(s).
- Focus on the coaching plan while staying open to adjusting behaviors and actions based on the coaching process and shifts in direction during sessions.
- Move back and forth between the big picture of where the client is heading and the daily actions they need to take to get there.
- Promote your client's self-discipline and hold the client accountable for what they say they are going to do.
- Develop the client's ability to make decisions, address key concerns, and develop himself/herself (to get feedback, to determine priorities, set the pace of learning, and to reflect on and learn from experiences).
- Positively confront the client with the fact that s/he did not take agreed-upon actions.

A Health Coach can help clients get back on track by:

- Checking in to make sure the goal is still right for the client, on track, and doable.
- Creating awareness of “success” and “failure” beliefs. Does the client believe they can succeed? Are they expecting to fail?
- Asking them what will change if they succeed, what will not change or happen if they don't meet their goal(s), and what they will miss out on if things stay the same?
- Where else have they experienced successes? What did they learn from those experiences?
- Explore client fears and level of risk aversion. What is the risk of changing this now? What is the risk of not changing it now? Should we change the pace? How else can I support you?

Signs of Self-sabotage

- Client is not following through
- Client comes up with all kinds of seemingly-rational excuses to miss sessions
- Client comes up with reasons to put others ahead of him or herself
- Client says this isn't the right time after all
- Client disappears altogether

Why pre-framing helps clients cope with derailments/challenges

- Pre-framing challenges clients to recognize self-sabotaging patterns and so that they can navigate them with curiosity instead of judgment
- Without pre-framing, the client who falls off track will likely feel bad about themselves and want to give up
- A client who feels bad will likely drop out or disappear
- Pre-framing helps the client trade in judgment for curiosity and move toward healing

Pre-framing Phrases

- “You’re doing so great and I want you to continue to do great...”
- “Next week is classic self-sabotage week...”
- “It may seem/look/feel...but actually it’s the opposite...”
- “If it does happen, just notice it with amused curiosity. No judgment, only curiosity.”

Critical Coaching Skill #14: Facilitate the tracking of progress

- Create a safe space – this is “their” space.
- Set up an accountability system for them, such as a spreadsheet.
- Talk about advantages of participating in group coaching; encourage them to be fully present, participate, and share openly. This will help them build connections and they will make more progress and feel more confident about moving forward.
- Ask clients how they like to be kept accountable and what system works best for them.
- Discuss client responsibility and ownership and how that shows up in the sessions versus taking individual ownership through the program for their progress and development throughout it.
- Keep notes of all action steps on spreadsheets and check in at each session. If more accountability is desired, they can email the coach with progress updates.
- Use a lot of high-mileage questions
- Offer to help and support them outside the session if needed/desired. With groups, create a support network through a forum, like Facebook, and encourage them to reach out to the group so that they can get different perspectives.
- Proactively check in with them via email, particularly if there was a challenging issue that came up and/or they seem to be having issues with confidence.
- Celebrate their successes and achievements and be proactive about asking clients about these milestones, otherwise clients may not share them.
- If a client is feeling overwhelmed, ask high-mileage questions around issues and help them decide on small steps they can take right now that will move them towards their goals and ease tension. Encouraging them to take one small step each day can build huge momentum – after 30 days they’ll have taken 30 action steps.
- Encourage group coaching members to support and share with each other.
- Thank them for their honesty about their challenges and highlight that this honesty is what will help them move through issues and help others as well.

Remember to:

- Use a Program Summary in each session and write down all of the improvements they have made.
- Halfway through the program, go through goals to make sure they are on track – make it personal, not in a spreadsheet.
- At the final session, read the progress to them and describe how they have changed during the sessions.
- Help them create a vision board at the beginning. Ask about long-term goals and how they envision feeling.
- Have them paint a detailed picture of what they want their life/business to look like, through words and images, and hold space for their vision.
- Help them move towards their vision by setting two daily, weekly, and monthly goals. Check in to make sure they are attainable.
- Track goals against actions and review them with your client in each session. This helps clients in continuing to take small, achievable steps. It’s all about sticking to attainable steps, while keeping the bigger picture in mind.
- Each month, send them an email with the accomplishments they have made in that month.

- Send a recap email after each session to make sure you're on the same page and list their action steps for the week.
- Celebrate by sending them a gift, if appropriate.
- Keep them in a positive mindset by asking them what's new and good.
- Encourage journaling. It's their journey, and it helps them pay attention and record their progress.

Tools for Accountability

- Revisit forms
- Email
- Journals and logs
- Talking about it

Managing Accountability - Preparing Before Sessions

- Come in prepared
- Review goals and progress
- Collect any resources you want to share
- Set intentions for the session

Managing Accountability - During Sessions

- Greet client, go through what's new and good
- Review the last session and recommendations
- Celebrate their success
- Brainstorm what worked and what didn't
- Cover session content

Managing Accountability - After Sessions

- Track client progress
- Set up reminders
- Check in by email
- Keep motivating the client