

Coaching Mistakes

100 Mistakes You Can Avoid

Most coaches were *born* coaches. We naturally attract people who wanted our support and advice. But, as is true with any profession, there is a learning curve in the process of mastering the coaching skill set. From my experiencing mentoring hundreds of coaches (and my own rather steep learning curve), I have compiled a list of some of the mistakes I have made and/or seen being made by others. All of these coaching mistakes are fixable, once you become aware of them. And, as you find yourself making fewer and fewer mistakes, your confidence will grow, thus adding to the power and effectiveness of your coaching. Fortunately, we get to stand on the shoulders of the hundreds of veteran coaches, a number of whom helped me compile this list.

It is my view that coaches generally make mistakes for two reasons. The first reason is that there has not been enough formal or comprehensive training for coaches. A high level of competence can be reached via the 2-5 years of coach training available from Coach University, accompanied by 2000-5000 hours of coaching clients. The second primary reason that coaches make mistakes is because we do not hear or see all that is occurring with the client, in the client's life, or in a specific situation. Situational training via Coach University is very effective in helping the coach to easily and immediately discern and assess the situation/needs. But we also need to evolve as human beings in order to be aware of the many important nuances present in every coaching situation — in life, really; this process takes time, individual coaching, and willingness. Having a mentor coach helps a lot, as well.

_____ **Your Score**

Check the box if you are making that particular mistake.

1. Wrong focus

- Focusing on the client's goal/achievement to the exclusion of the person
- Working on wants and needs when, in fact, the client's integrity is way off the scale
- Trying to help by sharing tips/techniques when, in fact, the client just needs to be heard
- Getting led down diversionary tunnels by your client because you can't see the real problem, opportunity, or situation
- Letting clients select goals that they have not had much luck with in the past
- Getting sidetracked by a client's personal stuff
- Trying to push clients through blocks instead of helping them fully understand the block's dynamic
- Paying more attention to what the client is saying rather than to what their behavior is saying
- Letting clients set their coaching goals without your full buy-in
- Forcing a topic the client does not want to focus on, even if you feel it really needs to be discussed

_____ **Section score**

2. Weak Coaching

- Passively coaching and responding during the coaching sessions instead of asking for more (much more) from the client
- Focusing on tactical matters or details when strategic coaching is needed, and vice-versa
- Being too nice/patient to the point that you are not saying what needs to be said
- Slipping into the role of motivator or cattle prod of your clients, instead of being their collaborative partner
- Working too hard to make your clients successful instead of inspiring/challenging your client to do that for themselves
- Not setting specific enough goals or focusing enough on performance (unless client wants a discovery-type focus)
- Not directly and immediately addressing the client's personality problems, communication flaws, bad attitude or resistance
- Not knowing or asking the right question(s)
- Accepting what the client says at face value, without clarifying or asking for evidence
- Coaching clients as if they are all the same

_____ **Section score**

3. Communication flaws

- Using jargon instead of simple words
- Interrupting the client's words, in your desire to help/save time
- Not interrupting a client who is rambling because you do not want to be rude
- Being blunt because you feel you are correct, and not being mindful enough of its possible impact on your client's feelings
- Using e-mail with clients without going out of your way to make sure you add extra warmth, encouragement, and respect
- Not being responsible for how you are being heard
- Not sharing the inklings you are having — positive or negative
- Using a patronizing tone with clients, relating with them as someone who needs what you have to say
- Not hearing the often-subtle clues that a client always gives the coach about what is most important to them and the changes that they really want to make
- Trying to teach a concept to the client instead of just taking a piece of the concept and showing the client how to use it in a specific situation

_____ **Section score**

4. Ego-centricity

- Laying your trip, views, or agenda on the client, in your eagerness to help
- Not asking enough of your client, because you are afraid of pushing him/her too hard
- Not asking your client to do more than you would be willing to do in the same situation (do not hold a client to YOUR limits)
- Forcing your client to adopt your life approach, principles, or beliefs
- Getting your emotional needs met via your clients
- Taking/needing credit for your clients' successes, even if you were instrumental in the process
- Thinking that your clients should do what you coach them to do because you are the coach
- Underestimating the client's strengths, willingness, resources and resourcefulness
- Expecting more of the client—because you see their potential -- than they are truly capable of doing right now
- Encouraging the client to step out and follow his/her heart or pursue a dream, before they are emotionally ready or financially secure/responsible

_____ **Section score**

5. Client management

- ❑ Letting the client consistently pay late
- ❑ Trying to coach in a restaurant or other public venue
- ❑ Not charging enough/too much
Assuming your clients are not evolving and thus falling behind their changing/emerging needs
- ❑ Not tightly managing every logistical aspect of your practice (billing, prompt call-backs, etc.)
- ❑ Getting into business with your clients, without first ending the coaching relationship or having a very clear partnership agreement
- ❑ Assuming your practice will build quickly and quitting your day job with that expectation
- ❑ Telling the client about your personal life, successes, failures or problems, unless done so in the direct interest of the client
- ❑ Letting coaching sessions run late or making the client call back in a "couple of minutes"
- ❑ Having call waiting or background noise that the client can hear during the session

___ Section score

6. Unprofessional coaching practices

- ❑ Firing clients because they are not performing/succeeding
- ❑ Collecting a percentage/bonus based on the client's results.
- ❑ Thinking your job is mostly to share useful information and advice (better to be a full, collaborative partner)
- ❑ Telling the client not to "worry so much" or otherwise disrespecting them
- ❑ Taking "sides" with your client against the client's employer, spouse, friend, or other person
- ❑ Getting emotionally invested in the outcome of your coaching of a client
- ❑ Talking about a client to a third party, unless cleared to do so by the client
- ❑ Hanging on to an unsuitable/unproductive client for the money
- ❑ Fining clients who do not take their promised actions
- ❑ Pigeon-holing the client as a 'type'
- ❑ Coaching on a problem/subject that you do not know enough about, unless you first tell the client of your ignorance or lack of experience, and this ignorance cannot hurt the client

___ Section score

7. Marketing/New client selection

- ❑ Over-promising results in any way, instead of under-promising/not promising anything
- ❑ Talking people into hiring a coach, instead of helping them to see or create the value of coaching for themselves
- ❑ Selling people on the value of coaching, instead of selling people on themselves, first
- ❑ Working with the non-coachable client or a client who is not emotionally ready for coaching
- ❑ Coaching friends or family members
- ❑ Coaching clients who need you or coaching too much, thus creating dependency/pressure
- ❑ Asking or pressuring current clients for referrals, instead of finding more professional ways to let them know you have time for more business
- ❑ Not spending enough time learning about your clients' learning styles and ways of doing things
- ❑ Not knowing what to say or do with potential new client who calls you as a result of a referral or web link
- ❑ Assuming someone knows in advance how to be a great/successful client

___ Section score

8. Client retention/Coaching flow

- ❑ Having even one 'bad' client who is causing you stress
- ❑ Not continually planting seeds to help the client see the next objective/focus
- ❑ Not helping the client to see the connection between a recent success and the changes/evolution they have been making
- ❑ Assuming that your clients remember/know how much they have benefited from your coaching
- ❑ Not periodically asking your client to specifically tell you what to do differently/better so that they will better benefit from your coaching, because you have become a better coach
- ❑ Not knowing exactly what the client feels you are contributing to the relationship/coaching process
- ❑ Taking on more clients than you have the intellectual/emotional space for (not just time for)
- ❑ Failing to inquire about why a client terminates the coaching relationship, and making improvements as a result
- ❑ Assuming that because you have made a commitment to the client, the client has made a commitment to you
- ❑ Not initiating or bringing up the themes/issues/foci that your clients will likely benefit from

___ Section score

9. Erroneous assumptions

- ❑ Assuming that X (situation, issue, stress) is a problem for the client, because it is or would be a problem in your life
- ❑ Assuming you can and should coach anyone, if they are ready, willing, and able
- ❑ Assuming that your clients want/are ready to be successful, just because they say they are
- ❑ Assuming that your clients want to/can hear your advice at any given point, even if what you have to say is really good
- ❑ Assuming your clients are just like you, and need the same advice or type of support that you would
- ❑ Assuming the client can 'get it' quickly, instead of giving the client enough time to process/accept your suggestions
- ❑ Assuming shared standards and boundaries
- ❑ Assuming that you are a terrific coach and thus stopping your own learning process
- ❑ Assuming that you have to know everything about coaching before you can be a really effective coach

___ Section score

10. Bad advice

- ❑ Telling the client what to do (co-create the plan/strategy)
- ❑ Giving only one suggestion/option of what could be done
- ❑ Giving the right advice at the wrong time
- ❑ Giving legal, psychological, or medical advice without a license
- ❑ Getting too personal with your client, even if you are close
- ❑ Referring clients to other professionals of whom you are not adequately familiar with their competency or services
- ❑ Using a one-solution-fits-all coaching approach for all clients
- ❑ Making recommendations without having all of the relevant information and knowing the needs of the client
- ❑ Telling the client what will probably happen as a result of them following your recommendation
- ❑ Giving advice to one client that worked for another client, without customizing it

___ Section score