

Reproduced with the permission of choice Magazine, [www.choice-online.com](http://www.choice-online.com)

Reproduced with the permission of choice Magazine, [www.choice-online.com](http://www.choice-online.com)

# choice

the magazine of professional coaching

## Helping Leaders SHINE

How coaches bring out the best  
in leaders and their teams

Perspectives  
on Leadership

Essential Tools for  
Leadership Coaching

Developing  
Future Leaders



# How can I convince my clients to put a higher priority on coaching?

## the situation

*"In coaching business leaders, I am finding that they don't take their development that seriously. If their organization is paying for their coaching, they put business first and coaching comes second or even last to their other day-to-day responsibilities. How can I work with my clients to put a higher priority on coaching?"*

## the experts weigh in



By Suzi Pomerantz, MT, MCC

It's important as coaches to ensure that we are always in service to our clients' needs and priorities. It's a fine line to walk, because we have our own (often unconscious) biases and judgments about our clients that can get in the way if we are not consciously stepping outside of them in service to our

clients' agendas. When an organization is paying you to coach one of its leaders, you have two client agendas to balance; that of the leader as an individual and that of the organization as a whole. Your main priority may be coaching, because that is your business, but it is not usually your clients' main priority, nor is it their business.

Notice your biases and judgments any time you have an assessment about your client's performance with respect to you, as in the situation you describe. For instance, who says your clients need to put a higher priority on coaching? Do they have that need, or do you? If you put yourself in the shoes of your clients – if you step into the mindset of a business leader – then *of course* business would come first and coaching would rank second or lower. Business leaders must lead the business first and foremost, and their day-to-day priorities for leading the business are absolutely more important than any development or coaching they may have taken on. If you were a stakeholder in the business, wouldn't you want the leader to be focused on leading the business? That's their job.

The real question here is, why do you want your clients to make coaching a higher priority? What are your judgments, assessments, assumptions, or 'shoulds' that you are projecting onto your clients? Does this way of thinking serve your clients? How do you know your clients aren't taking their development seriously? Is it possible that your clients, like most business leaders today, are juggling competing commitments? If so, your clients' commitment to their development may be quite strong, yet other commitments take precedence given the role of leadership and its demands.

What conversation could you open up with your clients to explore whether or not a higher priority on coaching would truly serve them? Or, alternately, what biases, whether conscious or unconscious, could you release and let go to free yourself to be more fully present with your clients? You can still create tremendous value and results with your clients even if coaching and development is not their highest priority.

By Victoria Trabosh, CDC®

I think this question is relevant whether in business or life coaching. I know self-development is something in any area of life that can be difficult to see through to completion. I see it for those who start any self-improvement process, whether for their physical health, nutrition or relationships. In business, professionals are constantly juggling priorities and all of them have an informal or formal must-do list, should-do list, and if-I-get-around-to list. If coaching is not on the must-do list, it will certainly fall off as soon as something else prioritizes in front of it. Here's my solution for helping busy professionals stay focused on the value and benefits of coaching in which they, or their company, invest.

1. Connect their core purpose and passion to the coaching. Without the 'why' coaching matters at the clients' core, it will definitely lose value and priority. If the company is insisting on the coaching, it may just feel like another program that clients need to complete. Does the coaching program you're taking them through have a clear beginning, middle and end? Will you be measuring the stated goals of this program at the end?

2. Define what accountability looks like on your side of the relationship and on their side of it. Make no assumptions. Silence is NOT acceptance. This pre-work will set the tone for their participation in the coaching. Make sure you have permission to call them on any behaviors (they will tell you

what is typical for them in the questions I list below) before the behavior takes place. If you have that conversation, decide quickly and decisively what next steps will be taken to get the coaching back on course.

3. Coach regularly but not too often. People get excited about coaching and commit to too much without realizing life and business don't always make room. I've found with my busiest clients, once a month for a couple of hours face to face is better than two to three hours over the phone. This also ensures less distractions and more focus.

Who is paying for the coaching becomes less of a reason not to be engaged if you know the signs that tell you they are not, or are no longer, engaged. I suggest on your client intake form you ask some or all of these questions:

- What does being coached mean to you?
- How will you know how effective our coaching has been?
- How might you sabotage our professional relationship?
- Do you understand that I stand for YOU, not your goals?
- Do you understand that hiring a coach is an investment in you?

These questions (and others you include that reflect your system) will help your client stay focused and not get lost along the way. It is easier for any of us to stay engaged if we know and agree that the payoff is one we want, one we can work toward, and one that gets us to our biggest dreams and goals.



**I believe you have to prove your worth, especially when you are in a situation where you're put in front of a client who did not personally hire you.**

By Craig Carr, PCC, CPCC

Coaches have been talking about "coachability" forever, and with good reason. There comes a point of distinction in which a coach must ask: "In this instance, did I fail to build a strong enough relationship to further the coaching, are we just not a good fit, or is this client someone who is not amenable to what coaching is all about?" I'm sure there is a percentage of people (I'll guess 14.8 percent!) who simply will not abide with what it takes to be in a coaching relationship.

That said, I'm not sure from your first sentence if you are making a general statement about business leaders or wondering about a specific situation that isn't going well. I'll assume it's the latter and address that in a moment. First, though, just in case you are reaching a conclusion that business leaders don't want coaching, I invite you to explore a stance saying, "Any executive that doesn't take his or her development seriously is not going to remain a business leader for very long."

Check in and see how that shifts your attitude. When you know the client's development is on the line, your objective is to create an atmosphere in which the client believes their *first responsibility of the day* (not the second or the last!) is to their coaching session with you. If they are in that 85.2 percent coachable category, you'll get their buy-in because real business leaders will take their development seriously and

they *definitely take their organizations seriously*.

You asked how to get clients to put a higher priority on coaching. I believe you have to prove your worth, especially when you are in a situation where you're put in front of a client who did not personally hire you. If they don't take you seriously, they certainly aren't going to value what you do. And if you think the organization telling a leader to talk to you is enough, going to work could get very rough on you. If a client resents having to spend valuable time with you, the coaching relationship goes on immediate deathwatch.

When phone coaching, I am a big advocate for doing shorter sessions when working with busy executives who have a lot to do. Do 20- to 30-minute sessions more frequently and pack them with value and urgency. Don't ever waste anyone's time.

If you do find yourself with one of the 14.8 percent who find a way to end the coaching, maybe someone else is better for this client. You can decide that, but realize that coaching the way it has been designed is not working and may even be counterproductive. Never make the client wrong; better to make a case for how your approach is not meeting his or her needs and suggest alternatives if appropriate. •

### Are you grappling with a sticky situation?

You don't have to go it alone. Let our senior coaches give you some different perspectives to consider. Email your situation to: [submissions@choice-online.com](mailto:submissions@choice-online.com) and put "sticky situations" in the subject line.