

Life Coach Training

Lesson 10

Opening Your Coaching Session

How you begin your coaching sessions make a significant difference in how the session goes and how it turns out. By analogy, if you are about to start a journey and you change direction by one degree at the outset, you will end up at a far different place miles down the road. So take care to begin your session on the right foot.

Here are some tips to help you start your sessions well:

Begin on time.

Be ready and in place a few minutes before the session and be sure you have done your preparation as suggested in lessons 8 and 9. Start the session at the appointed time. This will set a note of intention and integrity that will carry through the session. If you will have repeated meetings with this client, starting on time will set the practice for both of you to meet and begin as scheduled.

Offer a positive note of welcome to the client.

Help the client feel at ease, relaxed, and confident by offering her some congenial words. Some clients are nervous about their session. When you help them relax you open the door for successful results together. You might say something like:

"I'm glad we can get together. Thanks for inviting me to connect with you for this session."

"I've been looking forward to meeting with you. I think we are going to have a productive time together."

"It's my pleasure to be working with you. I am holding the space for you to receive all you want and need."

"Let's get going and start opening doors for you."

Feel free to say what is sincere and spontaneous in the moment. If you can share a brief laugh, that will help. Do not strain to make a joke or say anything that sounds forced or phony. Realness rocks.

Give the client a brief overview of what the coaching session entails.

Many people have not had a life coaching session before, and even if they have, they may have experienced a different coaching style. Letting your client know the framework of your session, including both of your roles, will put him at ease and point him in a productive direction. For example:

“Our session is an opportunity for you to get clear on any issues you are facing or make progress toward your chosen goals. Whatever is most important to you is valuable for us to look at. Our session is confidential, and your authenticity will be a big help. My role is not give you answers or tell you what to do. Instead, I will help you come to your own answers and empower you to move in the direction you choose. If it’s okay with you, we will start with a brief opening centering process, and then we can explore whatever you like.”

Offer an opening centering exercise, affirmation, or prayer.

Establish a positive energy for your interaction before you delve into the material of the session. Most clients like a simple opening exercise, as it relieves any tension at the beginning and helps both of you move into energy conducive to productive movement.

The simplest centering exercise is to invite the client to take several long, slow, deep breaths. Join the client if you like. While she is breathing deeply, offer some simple suggestions such as, *“Let’s relax and come into the present moment together. Release any experiences from your day and drop into a sense of openness and allowance for the best possible results of our meeting together.”* Keep this process going for a minute or two until you feel yourself and/or the client coming into a peaceful space.

An affirmation might take a form such as:

“We now open the door for [Name of client] to receive the most valuable information, inspiration, and direction as a result of our time together. We recognize that the answers you seek are available to you, and we see you manifesting the clarity, peace, and direction you require. We envision and claim positive, practical, observable results from our meeting. We enjoy the journey as we go. And so it is.”

A prayer might take this form:

“Great Spirit, we invite you into our presence today to give [Name of client] all that he needs to move ahead on his journey of personal growth. We call forth guidance from Higher Power to soothe and empower [Name of client]’s inner being and make healthy, successful, rewarding decisions. For this we are grateful. And so it is.”

Use an opening exercise in alignment with your client’s beliefs and comfort level. Some clients do not consider themselves on a spiritual path or might have resistance to anything that sounds “religious,” so a generic opening centering exercise would be more appropriate than an affirmation or prayer.

I have found in my practice that everyone understands and appreciates an affirmative statement. The practice of affirmations has worked its way into our culture so that even conservative business people understand and use them. Practically all businesses, including large corporations, have vision and mission statements, so when you make a vision or mission statement for your coaching session, your client will be aligned with this practice.

Regarding prayer, consider your client as you decide if this is appropriate. Most people believe in prayer (surveys have demonstrated this) and if someone is in pain, she is even more open to prayer. Most of the people I attract in my work have a prayer practice or appreciate its power. If your client is new to you or you do not know their predilection, open the session with a more generic exercise.

Give the client a clear invitation to express himself:

“What would you most like to talk about?”

“What’s happening in your life that motivated you to have this session?”

“What would make this session really valuable for you?”

“Is there something specific you would like to address?”

“What shift in your life would be most meaningful to you?”

Do **not** ask, *“What can I do for you?”* or *“How can I help you?”* or a similar question that puts you in the driver’s seat as an authority figure. The purpose of the session is to empower the client to find his own answers with your support.

Do **not** ask a pat question like, *“How are you?”* or *“What’s up?”* or *“What’s going on?”* While some clients might use such generic questions as a venue to express themselves, you serve better to invite the client to be as specific as possible regarding her intention for your meeting.

Offer the client a “permission slip” exercise to begin sharing.

If your client is hesitant to express or does not have good communication skills, you might use a “permission slip” exercise to jump start the session. For example, a psychotherapist I know keeps a “magic wand” on the table next to the chair where her clients sit. (The one she uses is a long thin clear tube containing viscous liquid filled with lots of colorful little stars, crescent moons, and sequins.)

When a first-time client sits in the chair, she hands him the wand and asks him, “If you could wave a magic wand and change something in your life for the better, what would it be?”

She told me that all of her clients love this exercise, even rigid people, and it always opens the door for the client to share what is troubling them or important to them.

You might also ask the client, “Let’s fast-forward (three months) (six months) (a year) (five years) down the road of your life. In this scenario what positive changes have occurred that make your life better?”

These are just a few examples of methods you can use to stimulate clients toward movement. Feel free to be creative.

Regarding all opening exercises, keep them:

- Light and welcoming
- Brief — a minute or two at most
- Positive and affirmative
- Open-ended so that the client has a blank slate on which to write her session. (Do not try to lead the client in a particular direction or set up a response of your choosing.)

As you gain experience you will develop your own style of opening that works for you and your clients. Trust what works!

