

Life Coach

1.0 Training Guide



John Andrew Williams
with Hayden Lee

Life Coach 1.0 Training Guide
Copyright 2022 by John Andrew Williams.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be used or reproduced without written permission except in the case of taking brief quotations for use in class or embedded in articles and reviews. If you want to present a chapter for a presentation, you have permission.

If you want to present more than a chapter,
please contact Coach Training EDU.

For more information, please visit
www.coachtrainingedu.com.

A Publication of
Coach Training EDU
Portland, Oregon

March 2022

Table of Contents

Introduction to Life Coaching	7
The Value of Life Coaching	8
Life Coaching	10
Levels of Listening	22
Structured Improvisation	26
1: Unified Theory of Coaching	30
Hope Theory & Learn-Be-Do	31
Powerful Questions	36
Direct Communication	42
2: Design the Alliance	45
Knowledge v. Empowerment Basis	46
Strategic Agenda	49
Meta-Coaching	52
Asking Permission	55
Bottom Lining	58
3: Coach the Client, Not the Problem	60
Seek the Deeper Agenda	61
Intuition	66
Clearing	69
4: Client's Being	72
Exploring Character and Mindset	73
Acknowledgment	79
Core Motivation	81
5: Client's Learning	92

Meaningful Learning	93
Inquiry	99
Assessment Wheels	102
6: Client's Action	108
Well-Designed Actions	109
Brainstorming	115
Accountability	118
Redesign the Alliance	122
7: Essential Coach Qualities.....	124
Essential Coach Qualities	125
1. Professional	126
2. Empathetic	129
3. Empowering	131
4. Curious	132
5. Courageous	134
6. Confident	135
7. Inspiring	136
8: Vision	137
Vision	138
Vision Recording	143
Building a Vision for Your Business	146
Business Vision Planning	149
9: Assumptions	152
Assumptions, Beliefs, and Perspectives	153
Assumption Chart & Busting Limiting Beliefs	154
10: Perspectives	162
Perspectives	163
11: Values & Passion	167
Clarifying Values	168
Identifying Your Passions	171

Precise Mission Statements	174
Identifying Your Niche	177
The Value of a Coaching Practice	179
12: Systems.....	182
Systems	183
Making Decisions	189
13: Motivation Styles	193
Motivation Styles	194
Using Motivation in Your Practice	202
14: Future Self	204
Future Self	205
15: Inner Critic	210
Inner Critic	211
16: Feedback & Metaphor.....	216
Feedback	217
Questions Based on Core Motivation	221
Sample Template 360-Degree Feedback Form	225
Metaphor	226
Bird's Eye View	228
Reframing	230
Challenge	233
Feedback For Your Business	236
17: Setting Reminders.....	239
Setting Reminders	240
Paraphrase	243
Championing	245
18: Future Pacing.....	248
Future Pacing	249
Self Alignment	251
Your Business Narrative	253

19: Powerful Relationships	258
Powerful Relationships	259
Empathy	264
20: Leadership Legacy	267
Leadership Legacy	268
Leadership with Core Motivation	272
Conclusion.....	276
Completion	277
Celebration	280
Thank You!	282
Acknowledgments	283

Introduction to Life Coaching

Welcome to your coach training program!

This introduction starts at the heart of coaching, with a look at coaching's core elements: the 3 Trusts, 7 Essential Coaching Qualities, and 7 Classic Elements of a Coaching Session. The next sections—Levels of Listening and Structured Improvisation—point to the most important skill a coach employs: empathetic, active listening.

Essential Coach Qualities Covered

All 7

Skill-Check Questions

What are the 3 Trusts and the 7 Essential Coaching Qualities?

What is the difference between Level 1 and Level 2 listening?

Why does empathetic listening rely on a flexible and open mindset?

The Value of Life Coaching

Life coaching emerged for people to have a method for making better decisions and using resources more effectively. Soon after its introduction in the mid-1980s, life coaching spread with incredible speed.¹ Once people realized the immense return on investment of working with a coach, coaching became a way for people to leverage increased mindfulness in decision making, the power of a vibrant working culture, and the benefit of improved professional and personal relationships.² Simply put: people who worked with coaches performed better.

Coaching for Leadership, Performance, and Communication

People come to life coaching for a number of reasons. The most common are to develop leaders and build strengths, though additional motivations include correcting an issue or resolving conflict.

From a life coaching perspective, leadership is articulating a vision and working with others to achieve it while engaging in personal and professional growth.

Many exercises in this 1.0 Training Guide look at elements of leadership. This book also covers aspects of effective communication and conflict resolution that work both personally, and professionally. The Arbing Institute's *Leadership and Self-Deception*³ and *The Anatomy of Peace*⁴ offer a blueprint and guidelines for growth by working through conflicts and building strong relationships. Elements of this work show up in later chapters (such as *Assumptions* and *Powerful Relationships*).

Strengths-based coaching relies on the idea that people perform at optimal levels when they cultivate and employ strengths rather than constantly managing and mitigating weaknesses. Such thinking goes against the cultural conditioning in traditional education, which measures performance by ensuring that the weakest areas still pass a standard, rather than focusing on excelling in a single area.

¹Brock, Vikki G. (2014) *Sourcebook of Coaching History*, 2nd Ed.

² Whitworth, Laura. 1998. *Co-Active Coaching*. Davies-Black Publishing.

³ Arbing Institute. 2000. *Leadership and Self-Deception: Getting Out of the Box*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler.

⁴ Arbing Institute. 2015. *The Anatomy of Peace: Resolving the Heart of Conflict*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler.

For example, let's say a student earned all A's, even surpassed the teacher's understanding in every subject except one, where they earned a failing score. With such a report card, the student would not pass the grade and would be forced to focus on the failing subject to get to the next level. Such thinking encourages people to avoid taking risks, and they may also avoid putting too much time into the pursuit of being excellent in only one or two areas. However, outside of academia, being excellent in a few select areas, and working to become even better, is a recipe for success. Strengths-based coaching helps people understand their own strengths and places people in positions that naturally play to their strengths.⁵

Based in Core Coaching Concepts and Theory

Life coaching finds its roots in sports psychology, the mentorship movement, and leadership development programs that became popular in the twentieth century.⁶ Theory from positive psychology also supports the value and efficacy of coaching. The following chapters explore ideas such as Hope Theory, Flow, and Broaden & Build Theory, to name a few.⁷

The Essential Coach Qualities form the foundation of life coaching. These are the qualities that a certified life coach demonstrates in every coaching session to ensure that they are working with a client from an empowerment basis. These qualities align with core competencies, a series of action steps and checkpoints designed by highly regarded coaching organizations. These organizations have created standards for coaching that form the backbone of the coaching profession. This next section explores the elements of life coaching and continues with core life coaching tools.

Welcome to your life coach training journey!

⁵ Rath, Tom. 2008. *Strengths Based Leadership*. Gallup Press: New York, NY.

⁶ Gallwey, W T. *The Inner Game of Tennis*. Toronto: Bantam Books, 1979.

⁷ Fredrickson, Barbara & Losada, Marcial. (2005). The Positive Affect and the Complex Dynamics of Human Flourishing. *The American psychologist*. 60. 678-86.

Life Coaching

Life coaching is a professional relationship between a client and a coach designed to help the client increase self-awareness, generate learning, and identify and accomplish meaningful goals. Over the past thirty years, the life coaching profession has flourished into a booming industry that promises continued growth. With the radical changes ushered in by the Information Revolution, life coaching developed to meet the need of people to live their lives with more intention, clarify goals amid a sea of options, and make more effective decisions on how to spend time, energy, and resources. Based in humanistic psychology and drawing from many different sub-disciplines ranging from leadership development to sports psychology, life coaching and its core ideas have become increasingly supported by positive psychology studies and theory.⁸

Coach Training EDU's model of life coaching is based on Hope Theory: the study of how intentionally addressing both agency and pathways can make a measurable difference in performance.⁹ We will review this concept in more detail in the next chapter. As the science and practice of coaching continue to develop, coaching concepts are weaving themselves more and more into the fabric of our society and influencing the way we approach learning, work, health, and well-being.

Life Coaching is so effective because it puts the client at the center of the process and trusts in the client's brilliance to overcome challenges. However, there are other professions that sometimes get confused with coaching, and it's important to be able to distinguish coaching from these professions.

- Consulting vs. Coaching: A coach does not advise or offer solutions for the client.
- Therapy vs. Coaching: A coach does not focus on the past or offer any kind of diagnosis.
- Mentoring vs. Coaching: A coach does not necessarily need to be skilled in a particular area to coach someone working in that area.

On a pragmatic level, coaching helps clients recognize and identify their capabilities, craft action steps to achieve goals, and design ways to stay accountable and resilient in the face of setbacks. On a deeper level, working with a coach or going through a coach training program transforms you as you mindfully explore your own ingrained assumptions, limiting beliefs, and ideas of

⁸ Brock, Vikki. 2014. Sourcebook of Coaching History, 2nd ed.

⁹ Snyder, et al. 2002. Hope and Academic Success in College. *Journal of Educational Psychology* 94(4): pp. 820-826.

identity. Research finds that the most effective coaches are as dedicated to their own self-understanding and development as they are to their clients'.¹⁰

Central to the practice of coaching is relying on the three coaching trusts: trust the client, trust yourself, and trust the process. Next, we will examine these three trusts and the related seven essential coach qualities of an effective life coach. We will then have a chance to look at some of the reasons why coaching is effective before outlining each of the seven elements of a coaching session. As you continue to explore the profession, you are invited to lean into curiosity: try out the concepts in your work with others, as well as in your own life.

What

The Three Trusts

1. Trust Your Client.

Trusting your client means being empathetic: listening to such a degree that you imagine you *are* the client. You have to trust that the client has all the inner and outer resources at hand to overcome whatever challenge they are facing. From this stance, you empower your client to set the coaching session agenda, guide the direction of the session, and design action steps.

2. Trust Yourself.

Trusting yourself points to the power of your own curiosity when you actively and empathetically listen. As you listen, you will sense glimpses of certain ideas and emotions. Your job as a coach is to trust your natural curiosity. When you ask yourself what you are genuinely most curious about and trust in your intuition, you will find yourself asking questions that raise your client's awareness in powerful ways. Your job then is to have the courage to ask uncomfortable questions and speak to the hard areas when you think it will be the most useful to your client.

¹⁰ Welch, et al. 2014. Strengths-Based Leadership Development: Insights from Expert Coaches. Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research 66(1): pp. 20 — 37.

3. Trust the Process.

Trusting the process allows you to develop a strong sense of confidence and safety in the energy of your coaching sessions. You are comfortable with your client's emotion and even actively go deeper into the feelings, looking to draw out meaningful insights.

Trusting the process allows you to coach the client, not the problem, and enables you to expect that the power of insight will provide clarity on what action steps your client needs to take. Action steps that arise from increased awareness and are well-designed to achieve certain outcomes are exciting. A coach inspires a client's effective action by trusting the process and crafting all the useful work of a coaching session into meaningful action between coaching sessions.

The 7 Essential Coach Qualities

A coach must display each of these competencies at all times during a coaching session, from setting the coaching session agenda at the beginning of a coaching session to designing action steps toward the end. The 7 Essential Coach Qualities are briefly described below, including example scoring questions for each that an evaluator might use to assess a coach's skill. Chapter Seven in this text further explores each of these qualities in more detail.

1. Professional.

A coach sets ethical coaching agreements with clarity and cultural awareness. The central aspects of this competency are establishing clear expectations between the coach, client, and sponsor (if present), maintaining confidentiality, designing an alliance, and addressing accountability.

Skill-Check Questions:

"How well did the coach clarify expected outcomes or address accountability on a client's recent action steps?"

"How well did the coach use the T.I.M.E. model when setting a strategic or session agenda?"

2. Empathetic.

A coach actively listens empathetically, using imagination and intuition while staying curious and attuned with a client to pick up on even subtle shifts in a client's emotion.

An effective life coach asks questions designed to provoke insight rather than gather information for the coach's sake.

Skill-Check Questions:

"How well did the questions provoke new insights for the client, as opposed to seeking information or implying solutions?"

"To what degree did the coach recognize subtle shifts in a client's energy, tone, or perspectives?"

3. Empowering.

A coach sees the client as the expert on their own life, inviting the client to be proactive in crafting both the coaching session agenda and eventual action steps. In this sense, a coach is a guide who empowers the client's own leadership. A coach offers expert knowledge with curiosity to empower the client and adapts coaching tools to fit the client's unique situation.

Skill-Check Questions:

"How well did the coach focus on the client, not the problem?"

"How well did the coach balance expert knowledge and information with empowering the client?"

"How well did the coach adapt the client's language and adjust standard coaching questions and tools to fit the client?"

4. Curious.

An effective coach remains curious, even when clients experience strong emotion or realize epiphanies. A skilled coach keeps an open mind and asks questions that lead to new insights, exploring a deeper agenda when looking at the session topic. A coach uses powerful questions that are short and open-ended (usually starting with *What*, *Why*, or *How*), and the coach invites the client to do most of the work of uncovering insights in a coaching session.

Skill-Check Questions:

“How well did the coach ask short, open-ended questions using a balance of Learn-Be-Do questions that addressed a client's agency and pathways?”

“To what degree was the coach willing to lean into intuition while staying curious and holding space for the client to explore?”

5. Courageous.

A coach's job is to create a safe space. They demonstrate connection and vulnerability, without compromising direct and sometimes uncomfortable questions. Effective coaches model courage during coaching sessions to set the stage for their clients to do the same.

Skill-Check Questions:

“How well did the coach address prickly points, ideas, or observations? (Either directly or through sharp questions.)”

“To what degree is the coach willing to take risks and share intuition and ideas without attachment to being right?”

6. Confident.

A coach is confident in the client, inviting the client to do much of the work of exploring ideas and emotion in a coaching session. A coach trusts the coaching process and embraces pausing and silence while holding space for the client to arrive at useful action steps. Strong coaches show confidence that their client can build appropriate accountability.

Skill-Check Questions:

“How well does the coach demonstrate trust in the coaching process and comfort with pausing and silence during a coaching session?”

“To what degree does the coach trust that the action step will come from the client if sufficient learning and insight happens?”

7. Inspiring.

An effective coach helps clients discover inspiration within themselves and use it to power their journey of self-development. A coach inspires clients to take bold actions between coaching sessions while balancing learning with action steps. This is accomplished by designing ways to help clients stay accountable and follow through on action steps.

Skill-Check Questions:

“How effective was the coach at helping the client develop inspiring Well-Designed Actions?”

“To what degree does the action (pathways) also include aspects of Learning and Being (agency)?”

Why

Everyone loves a good listener, especially if that listener keeps the attention on you and keeps asking outstanding questions. So, it makes sense that people love working with life coaches, people who are literally trained (and hopefully certified) to be professional listeners. As a participant in a life coach training program, it's important for you to experience first-hand the benefits of coaching to get an idea of what truly provides value from the client's perspective. People gain tremendous value from simply processing ideas and emotions out loud, and working with a coach is a great excuse for a fresh start.¹¹ Having someone help you determine what's most important in your life, design action steps, and hold you accountable is going to have a positive impact on your life. And when that person is trained, operates within a theoretical framework grounded in positive psychology, is skilled in the essential coach qualities, and has a toolbox of effective exercises, the client's coaching experience becomes that much more impactful. The following section examines a few of the major theoretical pillars that form the foundation of life coaching to give a sense of why the profession is so effective.

A. Trust in the client on the journey of personal and professional growth.

The pursuit of knowledge and understanding of the highest aims of a human being have captured the attention of people for centuries. Humanistic studies can be traced back to Socrates and other ancient philosophers. While the Renaissance led to a revival of many

¹¹ Grant, A. M. 2003. The impact of life coaching on goal attainment, metacognition, and mental health. *Social Behavior and Personality* 31(3): pp. 253-263.

ancient ideas, such as exploring the human experience and potential, the field of humanistic psychology arose in the 1950s in response to psychoanalysis and behaviorism. Humanistic philosophy and psychology posit that everyone inherently wants to do well and that a holistic approach is the best way to address challenges.¹²

One of the most recognized concepts in humanistic psychology is Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. In *Motivation and Personality* (1954), Abraham Maslow theorized that at our core, each of us strives for self-realization, or the full realization of our potential to be human. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs points to the importance of having foundational resources in place to experience higher levels of well-being.¹³ He also emphasized the usefulness in shifting focus away from pathology to looking at beneficial traits of being healthy.

C.R. Snyder introduced the concept of Hope Theory in the mid-1990s.¹⁴ Hope, he proposed, is the product of strong agency and the ability to develop and follow pathways to achieve goals. Agency is looking at what you believe about your capabilities surrounding goal creation. Based on your past, do you think you can accomplish what you are going to accomplish? Or, based on *what you think you can learn*, do you think you can accomplish what you want to accomplish? Pathways are the steps/links between actions and results. They're the strategies you design to execute a plan toward achieving a goal. Practical research using Hope Theory in athletes, academics, and other fields has demonstrated that hope is measurable, and—even more importantly—you can actively grow it to increase your capabilities surrounding goal achievement.

In *Emotional Intelligence*, Daniel Goleman outlines five important skills for managing one's own emotions and establishing healthy, strong relationships.¹⁵ Such emotional skills balance the rational stream of thought and can be better indicators of success than tests designed to measure logic or knowledge acquisition. Goleman's work underlines the importance of the inner work of self-understanding, as well as developing stamina and skill to be more empathetic.

¹² Maslow, A. H. 1954. *Motivation and Personality*. Addison Wesley Longman, Inc.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Snyder, C.R. 1995. Conceptualizing, Measuring, and Nurturing Hope. *Journal of Counseling and Development* 73(3): pp. 355 - 360.

¹⁵ Goleman, D. 2005. *Emotional Intelligence*. Bantam.

B. Increased awareness of executive functioning provides a structure to explore elements of human flourishing.

In 1989, Carol Ryff advanced well-being theory and put it into practice, marking it as landmark work in positive psychology research and kicking off decades of positive psychology research. Ryan and Deci (2001)¹⁶ cite Ryff (1989)¹⁷ as foundational in the field of eudaimonic well-being research, as opposed to hedonic well-being research. Hedonic-focused research is measured by pain avoidance and pleasure attainment, whereas eudaimonic well-being research emphasizes meaning and fulfillment. Her work marked a shift in approach from the hedonic pursuit as a proxy for happiness to a more holistic model of eudaimonic well-being. The eudaimonic well-being research that Ryff kick-started uses self-realization, fulfillment, and meaning to understand optimal human functioning. The Greek term “eudaimonia” is defined as “the feelings accompanying behavior in the direction of, and consistent with, one’s true potential.”¹⁸ In *Flourish*, psychologist Martin Seligman identified five elements of well-being and arranged them in the handy acronym PERMA: Positive emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Achievement.¹⁹ Each element in PERMA is desirable, pursued for its own intrinsic value, and can be measured individually. The PERMA model posits that when all elements are sufficiently present, well-being or flourishing occurs.

C. Clients tap into the benefits of positive emotion and scheduling time to experience flow.

Barbara Fredrickson, in her book *Positivity*, outlines the benefits of tapping into positive emotion as a way to broaden one’s agency while building more capability to meet increasingly difficult challenges.²⁰ Coaching helps clients design ways to stay engaged in meaningful work and more mindfully experience an increasing skill set.

¹⁶ Ryan, R. M. and E. L. Deci. 2001. On Happiness and Human Potentials: A Review of Research on Hedonic and Eudaimonic Well-Being. *Annual Review of Psychology* 52: pp. 141-66.

¹⁷ Ryff, C.D. 1989. Happiness is Everything, or Is It? Explorations on the Meaning of Psychological Well-Being. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 57(6): pp. 1069 - 1081.

¹⁸ Waterman, A. S. 1984. *The Psychology of Individualism*. New York: Praeger.

¹⁹ Seligman, M. 2011. *Flourish*. Free Press, A Division of Simon & Schuster, Inc. New York, NY.

²⁰ Fredrickson, Barbara. 2009. *Positivity: Top-Notch Research Reveals the 3-to-1 Ratio That Will Change Your Life*. Three Rivers Press. New York, NY.

Fredrickson's theory ties into Mihaly Csikszentmihályi's work, which describes a state of performance where level of ability matches level of challenge²¹. Flow is a state of engagement when someone is immersed in the present moment, completely focused on the task at hand, and performing or working at an optimal level. Focus with a clear goal, instant feedback, and a challenge that pushes a skill set are three of the conditions most conducive to flow. When an individual engages in an activity that pushes the boundaries of their performance, skill levels increase. Flow requires ever-increasing challenges to match the ever-increasing skill set. Much like the psychological equivalent of Wolff's Law, which states that the body adapts to the load under which it is placed, someone who experiences flow will adapt to the challenges that are present.²²

D. Life Coaching helps clients to use both growth and fixed mindsets to develop increasingly empowering perspectives that lead to effective action.

In her book *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success* (2006), psychologist Carol Dweck made an important distinction between two common mindsets based on an individual's perspective on talent and ability.²³ A fixed mindset points to innate talent as the source of ability. Someone with a fixed mindset would agree with the statement “everyone has a certain amount of talent.” They would argue that a person's talent level is fixed but that it can be increased within a certain range. The upside to a fixed mindset is confidence and a short-term boost in effort. The downside is that a fixed mindset can cause a person to avoid mistakes at the expense of learning as they attempt to prove their talent or natural ability.

A growth mindset points to effort and persistence as the source of ability. Someone with a growth mindset would agree with the statement, “Success is 1% talent, 99% perspiration.” The downside of a growth mindset is its rarity. The upside is that people who have a growth mindset put more attention on effort, developing stamina, and learning from success and mistakes. Mistakes are seen as an excellent chance to learn. Goals become more about creating a focus point and ensuring continued effort than a way of proving talent.

²¹ Csikszentmihályi, M. 1975. Play and Intrinsic Rewards. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* 15(3): pp. 41-63.

²² Stock, Jay T. 2018. Wolff's Law (bone functional adaptation). John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

²³ Dweck, C. S. 2006. *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*. Ballantine Books. New York, NY.

Individuals with a growth mindset are more likely than those with a fixed mindset to continue working and putting in effort, even in the face of challenges and setbacks. From a growth mindset perspective, talent is simply the starting point, and failure and success are feedback for continual improvement. While a fixed mindset views maximum potential as measurable and knowable (such as earning a 100% on a test), a growth mindset rejects the idea of a known full potential. From a growth mindset, potential is unknowable and continually increases with feedback and effort. The effectiveness of coaching relies on a coach's ability to help clients shift toward a growth mindset as they take on increasingly challenging goals.

E. Effective development of action steps.

Behaviorism points to the importance of a cue in the environment prompting a certain learned action, ultimately leading to a reward. This cue-action-reward system forms our understanding of habits and provides clues regarding how to create habit change. Habit and behavior change theories can inform coaches on which areas are useful to explore when helping clients identify and change habits.²⁴ Designing those habits and systems with a coach is a tremendous opportunity to take a struggling area and make it thrive. In this training program, you will learn how to help clients establish well-designed actions and create systems to add structure conducive to behavior change. Accountability is a huge part of what makes a coaching relationship powerful and helps clients follow through on their well-designed actions.

How

7 Elements of a Coaching Session

A standard coaching session is 30 to 60 minutes in duration and includes these 7 elements:

1. Connecting (about 2 minutes).

Description: This is your opportunity to connect with your client and continue to build rapport and trust.

²⁴ Duhigg, Charles. 2014. *The Power of Habit: Why We Do What We Do in Life and Business*. Random House. New York, NY.

The purpose: To greet each other and set the space. It's important because it establishes a safe space for coaching and allows the client to clear away any distractions and get focused on the present. It's also your first opportunity to gauge the energy your client is bringing to the session.

Useful coaching questions: How has your week been? What's something exciting or new that's happened since our most recent session? What are you looking forward to most in this upcoming week?

2. Accountability (about 3-7 minutes).

Description: This is your opportunity to follow up with your client on their actions from your previous session together.

The purpose: To explore follow-through with your client, which can reveal their commitment to themselves, others, projects, and their goals. Making space for accountability at the beginning of a session provides a strong framework and sets a good habit for both the coach and client.

Useful coaching questions: How did your action items go from our last session? To what degree were you successful with your actions from our last session? What got in your way of following through? Who do you need to be to follow through next time?

3. Session Agenda (about 3-5 minutes).

Description: This is a discussion about the topic for the session, including the importance of the topic and how success will be measured for the session.

The purpose: To create focus and clear criteria for determining the success of the session. A strong agenda sets the foundation for a productive coaching session and provides the infrastructure to come back to when your client takes tangents or seems to be getting away from what they wanted to accomplish.

Useful coaching questions: What would you like to discuss today? What would you like to focus on today? What area of your life would you like to be even better?

4. Exploration (about 20-40 minutes).

Description: This is where coaching skills, tools, and exercises are brought to the coaching session.

The purpose: To leverage coaching skills, tools, and exercises that increase the client's awareness of themselves. This is the portion of the session where the coach explores with the client their Learning and Being, using the agenda as the foundation for

exploration.

Useful coaching questions: What are you learning about yourself? Who do you need to be to make this happen? What do you need to learn to move in the direction you want to go? What character traits do you need to draw from within yourself?

5. New Actions and Accountabilities (about 5-10 minutes).

Description: This is when you co-create well-designed actions with your client, which become the accountability topic for the next session.

The purpose: To transform the learning from the coaching session into tangible action. Co-creating well-designed actions with clients empowers them to be resourceful, drawing on their own knowledge and experience. It empowers them to become the expert on themselves.

Useful coaching questions: What action would you like to take based on what you learned today? What's the very first step toward moving in that direction? When will you have this action completed? What might get in your way of taking this action?

6. Agenda Check-in (about 2 minutes).

Description: This is a check back on the original agenda to determine the success of the session.

The purpose: To empower the client to acknowledge the growth they experience, and for you to determine your own success as a coach. It is also another opportunity to build accountability into the coaching relationship.

Useful coaching questions: How did we do today? To what degree did we accomplish our original agenda for today? What do we still need to explore?

7. Logistics for Next Meeting (about 2 minutes).

Description: This is your opportunity to plan the details of your next session, including date, time, and location (if necessary).

The purpose: To minimize the back and forth in planning the next session. Discussing the logistics of the next session at a time when your client just experienced a successful session is also the most likely moment for them to choose to continue with coaching.

Useful coaching questions: What day and time works well for our next session? How frequently would you like to meet?

Levels of Listening

What

The most common distinction made in listening is whether or not someone is paying attention. Listening occurs when someone is hearing the words and making sense of them. Paying attention is required to listen, but in life coaching, an important distinction is made by examining the perspective of the coach in attending to the client's words. The perspective the coach takes as a listener matters, and empathetic listening has a measurable positive impact on the person who is speaking.^{25 26} Those different perspectives make up the three modes of listening:

- **Level 1: Listening for the sake of yourself.**

Level 1 is when the coach listens for the sake of themselves. It is necessary and useful when the coach is learning something and needs to know how it applies to their own life. When a coach is in Level 1 listening, they are often asking themselves the following questions while the client is talking:

- Is this really going to be useful for me?
- Oh, that reminds of me of that time when [fill in the blank].
- When is it going to be my turn to talk?
- How does what this person is saying apply to me?
- I wonder what I could say to look really good right now?

- **Level 2: Listening from the perspective of the speaker.**

This also relates to empathy, and coaches who are skilled at empathetic listening are able to effortlessly offer their own intuition and curiosity for the sake of the client.²⁷

²⁵ Bodie, G. D. 2011. The Active-Empathic Listening Scale (AELS): Conceptualization and Evidence of Validity Within the Interpersonal Domain, *Communication Quarterly*, 59:3, 277-295.

²⁶ Myers, S. 2000. Empathic listening: Reports on the experience of being heard. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, 40, 148-173.

²⁷ Cissna, K.N. and R. Anderson. 1994. Communication and the ground of dialogue. In R. Anderson, K.N. Cissna & R.C. Amett (Eds.), *The reach of dialogue: Confirmation, voice, and community* (pp. 9-30). Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.

Still, Level 2 listening goes further than just empathy (being able to identify correctly the emotion the client is feeling) to experiencing what the client is saying from their point of view. Such deep listening is powerful because it removes the interests and biases of the coach.²⁸ It forces the coach to be much more present and focus on what the client is really saying and feeling.

- **Level 3: Listening from the perspective of an outside observer looking in on the conversation.**

For a coach, listening in Level 3 feels as if they are standing on one side of the room listening to both the client and the coach and asking themselves questions like:

- “How does what is being said relate to my client?” or
- “If I were an outsider watching this coaching session, what would occur to me?”

It is a powerful exercise to help the coach understand that communicating this deeply influences and shapes the conversation. At first, it can seem surreal or artificial, but with practice, it becomes comfortable for the coach to step outside the conversation to observe the interaction between coach and client, yet be fully present with the client.

Why

Why Level 2 and Level 3 listening are more effective in coaching than Level 1 listening:

A. Level 1 listening is not as effective in serving clients.

People listen in Level 1 most of the time. However, it can be easy for us to naturally slip into empathetic listening. For example, when a manager and employee are talking and listening deeply to one another, this can move into Level 2 listening, which better serves the speaker because it promotes deeper understanding and connection.

B. Level 2 listening is a gift to the speaker.

For the coach, it feels like you are in flow with your focus on your client's every word, while also gathering the larger meaning and listening between the lines. Such a quality

²⁸ Stewart, J. & C. Logan. 2002. Empathetic and dialogic listening. In J.S. Stewart (Ed.), *Bridges, not walls: A book about interpersonal communication* (8th ed., pp. 208-229) Boston: McGraw-Hill.

of listening is an acknowledgment that what the client is saying is so important that the coach is eager to put 100% of the focus on the client. It is rare in everyday life that clients have someone dedicated to listening to them with the intention to seek deeper understanding from their point of view. Clients feel heard, which is an incredibly powerful and rewarding experience for them.

C. Level 2 listening takes practice and requires focus.

In most life coaching sessions, a coach will primarily be in Level 2 listening. The tricky thing about Level 2 listening is that it's not as easy as it sounds. New coaches tend to think about the next question or get caught up in the client's story and think about a similar story in their own lives. Coaches also might be so concerned with doing the coaching "right", and become more concerned about their performance than the client's experience. However, Level 2 listening begins to feel more natural with practice and focus, allowing the coach to be more effective in a coaching session.

D. Level 2 feels good.

Another phenomenon that happens with new coaches is that they will slip into Level 2 for an extended period of time. It feels amazing. It feels like they can really understand the client on a deeper level and get lost in the client's words. In Level 1 listening, a coach is essentially listening to two people because they're focusing on what the client is saying while also processing their own internal dialogue. Level 2 listening is incredibly freeing because a coach is listening only and wholly to the client. It is a tremendously creative and fulfilling experience for a coach.

E. Level 3 uses a third perspective.

Level 3 listening is an important way for the coach to attend to the client-coach relationship. It helps the coach think about the conversation from a different perspective and point of view to make sure that they are strengthening the relationship and the professional bond. It is a chance to shift slightly and expand focus to be an even more effective listener for the client.

How

An effective coach is self-aware and skilled in choosing the mode of listening that is going to be the most useful to the client.

1. How to listen in Level 2:

- Begin by paying close attention to the words that your client is saying.
- Allow yourself to listen so closely that you could say the same words silently to yourself as your client says them. When you are listening that closely, it feels like an intense form of concentration. Allow your thoughts to be centered on the client.
- Ask yourself, “How does what this person is saying apply to them?” Allow yourself to be curious for the client’s sake.
- If you find that you have slipped back into Level 1, simply consciously return to Level 2. At times, Level 2 listening feels like you are constantly recovering from Level 1 back to Level 2. Such an experience is okay, as long as you remember to consistently recover. Gradually, you will find it easier to be in Level 2 with your client for longer periods of time.

2. How to listen in Level 3:

- Begin by listening deeply to your client in Level 2.
- As you are listening, ask about something you are curious about.
- While your client answers your question, imagine that you are on the other side of the room, both listening to the client and watching yourself listen to the client.
- Ask your client another question, and try to stay in that third-person point of view. It may feel a lot like mental gymnastics at first, but as you get used to thinking and listening in this way, you will find it to be incredibly powerful in helping you listen more actively.

Structured Improvisation

What

A strong structure (clear session agenda, action steps, and accountability), gives you, the coach, increased flexibility to play with ideas, take tangents, and follow your client wherever your client wants to explore. Such exploration functions like improvisation. Improvisation is the skill of fully partnering with your client to co-create the coaching experience. It requires being comfortable with the unknown and dancing with the unforeseen. It has two primary rules (which are more like guidelines):

1. Accept what is offered.

2. Add value.²⁹

The same rules apply in improvisational acting. There is no script, but there is a structure. One of the first rules of improv acting is the “Yes, and” rule. In Improv 101, whenever your acting partner offers an idea, you reply with “yes, and,” and add to the scene, rather than over evaluating or dismissing the idea.

Life coaching (and life, for that matter) operates effectively on these same two guidelines. A coach does not know what is going to happen in any session or how the client is going to be when they show up. However, the coach is open to accept whatever the client offers, and the skill of coaching is to go with whatever comes up. Such mental flexibility requires you to be grounded in the present moment and confident that you can dance with the unexpected. Coaching feels easy, effortless, and immensely fulfilling when you learn to trust yourself, your client, and the coaching process because you know your client is receiving tremendous value.

The opposite of accepting what is offered is called blocking. Blocking denies the client’s idea or the premise of the scene. It can be direct: “I don’t think that idea will work.” However, it is most effective when the coach uses blocking or accepting consciously and for a purpose. Far too often in a school, family, or business setting, people tend to block out of habit.

With a few exceptions, it is essential for a coach to accept what is offered in a life coaching session. Yet having a structure behind accepting the offer and adding value to it are equally

²⁹ Hines, W. 2016. *How to be the Best Improviser on Earth*. Pretty Great Publishing.

important. The structure behind accepting the offer is for a coach to hold the focus on the client's agenda, ask powerful questions, and use any other life coaching principles and exercises that apply.

Why

A. Structured improvisation works well because it mirrors the natural flow of experience.

Something comes up. A coach has a choice to block it and actively work against it. Or, the coach can accept it and use it for future action. Sometimes it is best to block. Other times, it is best to go with what the client wants.

B. Being flexible while having a useful structure is ideal.

The life coaching process contains a balance between flexibility and structure, and it is one of the reasons coaching is so effectively employed in a myriad of personal and professional situations.

C. Structure provides freedom.

Clients become stressed when the system they are using cannot handle the demands placed on it. "Stress" originates from a technical term describing the strain placed upon a certain material, such as steel used in a bridge. A steel beam can easily support a great deal of weight, but it becomes stressed and begins to bend when it reaches a certain point. Hans Selye, who first observed that homeostasis could not protect organisms from outside pressures, introduced the concept of stress into everyday vocabulary.³⁰

D. Structured improvisation leads to changing methods, tools, and systems.

When dealing with stress, most clients rely on the same methods, tools, or systems they use every day — they just try working harder. This method may work for the client. It certainly requires the least amount of creativity to solve the immediate problem. However, in the long run, it would be so much more effective for the client to take time to create new methods, tools, and systems to handle more work sustainably. This is possible through structured improvisation. Essentially, the core life coaching principles

³⁰ Fink, G. 2010. Stress: Definition and history. *Stress Sci.* 3-9.

form the structure for clients to handle whatever comes up in their life and work. The stronger the structure, the more the client and coach can handle.³¹

E. Improvisation is unusual in most conversations.

In any conversation, most people are thinking, “How does this apply to me?” It’s a perfectly reasonable way to listen to someone and relate to other people based on our experiences. However, in a coaching setting, the coach can accept what the client brings and build from it. When a coach can effectively improvise, it adds value to the conversation and works with what the client is already thinking, augmenting it with the coach’s natural curiosity.

How

The best way to master structured improvisation is to practice. The core coaching principles and the coach training sessions will give you the structure that you need to be a competent and confident coach. The challenge is how to get into the habit of accepting whatever your client brings to the coaching session.

1. Accept what your client says.

Judgment gets in the way. Judgement usually comes in two forms: either judging what your client is saying, or judging yourself as a coach. This is especially true when coaches judge how well they are doing, or how great their questions are, or what value their clients are getting out of the process. Allow your precious focus and energy as a coach to remain completely on your client.

2. Offer a question based on what you just heard.

A helpful technique is picking out the most interesting word from what your client just said, and building your next curious question around that word. For instance, if we were to pretend that a coaching client said something similar to the paragraph above, we could create a question based on the word “judgement,” such as “What’s the impact of judgment in your life?”

³¹ Yodo, N. and P. Wang. 2016. Engineering Resilience Quantification and System Design Implications: A Literature Survey. *Journal of Mechanical Design* 138(11).

3. Stay curious.

Your natural curiosity will provide a fruitful path forward for your client. You can trust your curiosity—and Level 2 listening—to move your client forward.

4. Have in the back of your mind one of the concepts in the coach training program.

Build your next question based on one of the concepts in the program. For instance, if you're working through a *Wheel of Life*, you can ask your client about the relationship between two areas on the wheel.

5. Bounce back and forth between following the client and following the concept.

As you continue to work with your client, structured improvisation requires bouncing back and forth between following the client on tangents led by your curiosity and using the concepts of the program to inform your intuition on what to ask next.