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As a solution-focused process, Pavese said goal-setting is an incredibly important part of coaching. During the goal development phase, a coachee and coach decide on milestones, exercises and micro-learnings. The goal-setting process will vary by coach, but most goals are derived from the gaps or blindspots illuminated by initial assessments. During a time of organizational turbulence amid COVID-19, Japan Tobacco International (JTI) worked with CoachHub to support its workforce. Recent data shows that 89% of coaches reported that the coaching helped them achieve their goals. Goal-setting exercises are an essential piece of the digital coaching process. Goals may include specific objectives like increasing employee engagement, setting performance targets like strengthening conflict management skills or talent development objectives like empowering first-time managers. Each individual goal is then typically defined using a structure like the SMART framework which is used to create specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound goals. 4. Thoughtful journaling exercises Journaling is a versatile exercise used across contexts and coaching relationships. Coaches may recommend open-ended journaling or teach specific journaling frameworks like the Conflict Coaching Road Map for Journaling, a framework that helps professionals become aware of their conflict style and better manage conflict. SHRM reports that journaling can be used to “...gain awareness of emotions and behaviors and to track progress toward goals.” If a coachee doesn’t know where to begin with journaling, a coach may offer prompts. Organizational Behavior Professor, Nancy Adler, recommends journaling in responses to questions like, “How am I feeling right now?” and “What deserves my highest-quality attention in my leadership, my life, and the world?” Pavese said another common type of journaling is future self journaling. Future self journaling asks a coachee to envision and describe their future—detailing what it feels and looks like. “As they create that vision of their future self,” shared Pavese, “...it can help them along their journey by figuring out how to better align their goals to get in more alignment with their future self?” 5. Identifying core values and principles Values exercises are popular in digital coaching because, as Pavese said, “Clearly defined core values provide a really strong and important starting point for understanding what’s important to you. A coachee’s core values often serve as an important compass—helping coachees make decisions and take aligned action.” Research also shows that values alignment can drive employee engagement. Coaches will often assign microtasks to help coachees define their core values and increase their sense of purpose. Common exercises involve ranking values from a list, completing a values card activity, or creating a life-wheel. This is an important step because when a coachee defines their values they can more easily maximize the work that gives them a sense of purpose (and minimize tasks that do not align with their values). In fact, 91% of CoachHub coachees increased their sense of purpose after digital coaching. 6. Gratitude coaching exercises Gratitude practices are a common exercise used in digital coaching because, according to Harvard Health, “...most of the studies published on [gratitude] support an association between gratitude and an individual’s well-being.” Pavese shared that, “If a coachee is looking to develop a more open and optimistic mindset, a gratitude practice can help expand their optimism muscle.” One of the most popular gratitude exercises used by coaches is Three Good Things, a practice created by American Psychologist, Martin Seligman. This exercise asks coachees to write down three things that went well each day and their causes. Researchers found that the Three Good Things exercise led to an increase in happiness and decreased depressive symptoms for six months. 7. Developing and rehearsing communication skills Communication is key, especially and increasingly during the pandemic). In fact, CoachHub research shows that communication is the most frequently used soft skill by middle- and senior-level managers. As a result, many digital coaches focus on helping coachees develop and practice their communication skills using frameworks like nonviolent communication and active listening. For example, to help a coachee develop their active listening skills, they may role-play with their coach by reflecting the emotions of the speaker back to them. This could sound like, “If I understand you correctly, you are feeling frustrated because your manager told you one thing and your colleague told you something different. Is that accurate?” 8. Cultivating emotional regulation and resilience Resilience, or the ability to cope with a difficult or stressful situation, is one of the top professional development goals of coaches. Fortunately, coachees can build resilience and learn emotional regulation, a skill closely tied to resilience. CoachHub data shows that 85% of managers who have received coaching from CoachHub outperform their peers in soft skills such as agility and resilience. To help coachees build emotional resilience, coaches use a variety of different exercises. Common microtasks include having coachees name their emotions (i.e. say how they feel), practice mindfulness techniques, and take detachment breaks. 9. Coaching exercises that celebrate wins and accomplishments Coaching can provide space and time for professionals to slow down, recognize their accomplishments, and celebrate—something a lot of folks struggle to do. Celebrating means giving yourself permission to stop and enjoy what you already achieved. To help a coachee celebrate their accomplishments during a session, a coach may ask something like, “How will you celebrate the achievement?” Depending on the professional, they may treat themselves to a massage, read a great or note it in their gratitude journal. If the individual struggles to celebrate their accomplishments, a coach may encourage them to create a list of celebratory ideas that they can easily pull from the future. 10. Identifying and activating individual strengths As part of CoachHub’s holistic coaching framework, coaches work toward their purpose of discovering their strengths. Strengths-based coaching is a common approach used by many coaches in the digital coaching space. The strengths approach in coaching encourages development by building on existing strengths rather than focusing on weaknesses. “Becoming more of who you actually are is at the core of my coaching,” shared CoachHub Coach, Dieter Wunderlich, “My trademark is that of the strengths coach. I help people discover and use what they are naturally strong and great at.” Although coaching is a very individual and personalized process, research points coaches toward proven exercises and frameworks. Self-assessments are often effective starting points because they help coachees better understand themselves, and they help coaches better understand their clients. Coaching sessions are also psychologically safe spaces where professionals can discuss tough workplace feedback and cultivate emotional resilience. Through digital coaching, folks can grow into highly effective, inspiring leaders. First impressions matter. Your first coaching session will set the tone for your entire coaching relationship. It is an opportunity to establish trust, clarify expectations, and create a solid foundation for your client’s future progress. Coaching experts at Forbes indicate that a powerful relationship can take root from the beginning when approached intentionally. A well-planned and structured first coaching session can help clients feel confident in their decision to seek coaching and motivated to continue with you and take their next steps. This guide offers practical planning tips to prepare for a powerful first session. Start Your Coach Training With Co-Active If you were planning a road trip with a friend, you’d need a map to guide you toward your destination. The first coaching session serves as that map by aligning the coach and the client. Your initial meeting establishes the coaching relationship, identifies key goals, and sets expectations for the coaching journey. This session involves setting the coaching agenda, clarifying the coaching goals, and creating a safe space for the coaching relationship. The coaching plan and agreement, mutual expectations regarding roles, responsibilities, and desired outcomes. Next step: Outline actionable items for the client to approach upcoming sessions. Setting up an impactful first coaching session requires thoughtful preparation and a predetermined approach. Here are some proven tips to guide you: Having a successful first session requires preparation. You can lay the groundwork for a fruitful coaching-client relationship by following these ten intentional steps: Understand their background, goals, and challenges Review pre-session forms or assessments (if available) Conduct preliminary research to tailor your approach Define what you aim to achieve during the first session Establish goals such as building rapport and clarifying client expectations Use SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound) goal-setting techniques Prepare open-ended questions to encourage deep reflection Develop questions that explore motivations and aspirations Practice mindful questioning techniques to keep the conversation productive An effective session structure can enhance efficiency and focus. Here is our suggestion: Establishing trust with your client is crucial for a successful coaching journey. As you host your first session, you can create a comfortable, conversational atmosphere by taking the following steps: Start with small talk to ease into the conversation Express empathy and genuine curiosity in their experiences Mirror their communication style to create a comfortable environment Showcase your expertise while remaining humble and vulnerable Understanding your client’s aspirations and obstacles upfront is crucial to beginning your professional relationship. We suggest you do this by the following steps: Identify key hurdles they know they face Ask powerful questions like: What changes do you hope to see? What does success look like for you? What are your biggest challenges? How do you feel about the current situation? Document scheduling and preferred communication methods Keep an account of weekly assignments and expectations Productive partnerships grow when coaches set clear expectations upfront. Do that by the following three steps: Discuss the coaching process and timelines Define your role and the client’s responsibilities between sessions Establish ground rules for communication and scheduling When coaches and clients plan collaboratively, it improves alignment and client commitment. Outline the coaching framework together Set achievable action steps before the next session Establish success metrics and tracking methods Providing a roadmap for future interactions keeps clients engaged. Here’s how you can do that: Recap key takeaways from the first session Confirm the date, time, and focus of your next session Plan feedback mechanisms for future sessions Register for ICF-Accredited Coach Training & Certification Asking the right curious questions can unlock valuable insights and set the foundation for success. Engage active listening as you encourage your new client to talk. What motivated you to seek coaching at this time? What challenges or obstacles do you feel are holding you back? What strengths or resources can you leverage to achieve your goals? What does success look like for you at the end of our coaching journey? Have you worked with a coach before? If yes, what worked well, and what didn’t? What do you expect from me as your coach? What small step will you commit to take between now and our next session? If you want to build trust quickly and set the stage for a meaningful client transformation, how you conduct your first coaching session is a critical first step. By following the insights in this guide and using a structured approach, new coaches can establish a more impactful experience for their clients. Coaches who want to take their practices to the next level can join a free demo webinar with Co-Active Training Institute and discover how our evidence-based practices and tools can help you become a professional change agent. The Co-Active Training Institute provides individual support from gifted standard coaches to elite coaches and corporations. Our proven training methods have launched over 150,000 coaches and individual practitioners with trust and empathy. We have helped thousands of coaches and individuals to introduce a grounding exercise such as box breathing, Box breathing, or square breathing, is a great technique to start a session - particularly where coachees need to let go of their busy day and become fully present. The benefits of box breathing include: Calms the nervous system, Relieves stress and eases anxiety, Increases focus of the mind, And strengthens sustained attention. The technique has four main parts - inhale, hold, exhale, hold. Each of the four parts should be down while visualising the side of a box. As you move to the next step, you draw the next side of the box in your mind. Download our FREE Box Breathing script to support the process. 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