



# GC-EGC: Being a Group Coach

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## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- To understand the attributes and qualities of a Group Coach
- To appreciate the difference between the approach of a 1:1 Coach vs a Group Coach
- To self-assess and beginning planning for developing the skills you need

## ICF COMPETENCIES

### A. Foundation

#### 2. Embodies a Coaching Mindset

- *Develops and maintains a mindset that is open, curious, flexible and client-centered.*
- *Develops an ongoing reflective practice to enhance one's coaching*

### B. Co-creating the Relationship

#### 3. Establishes and Maintains Agreements

*Partners with the client and relevant stakeholders to create clear agreements about the coaching relationship, process, plans and goals.*

1. *Explains what coaching is and is not and describes the process to the client and relevant stakeholders*
2. *Reaches agreement about what is and is not appropriate in the relationship, what is and is not being offered, and the responsibilities of the client and relevant stakeholders*

#### 5. Maintains Presence

*Definition: Is fully conscious and present with the client, employing a style that is open, flexible, grounded and confident*

1. *Remains focused, observant, empathetic and responsive to the client*

## BEING A GROUP COACH

The Group Coach is a special breed of coach - one who is capable of holding tension in managing the needs and desires of individual participants while they explore and develop these unique aspects of themselves through a group agenda and format. Group Coaches are masters at balancing the needs of one with those of the many. In this module, we'll look at what that means.

The attraction of group coaching is evident – we can reach more people, disseminate our message further and have a greater impact in a shorter period of time. Financially, it's a win-win – for a single investment of 1 or 2 hour of time, we can earn a higher fee with a group while the clients themselves benefit from paying a lower one. It seems like a no-brainer to run a group coaching session but, just as not all clients are suitable for the group coaching process, neither are all coaches. Knowing what makes a group coach truly suited for the work and assessing yourself against those requirements is key.

There are 8 key elements of being a Group Coach. A successful Group Coach has the ability to:

- see the group as a unit while not losing sight on the individual's needs and desires.
- listen powerfully to the unique voice of the individuals while also hearing the voice of the group
- be the coach while allowing the group members to develop interdependence and self-coaching skills
- hold on to the purpose of the group while allowing its members to lead
- create a safe, supportive structure for the group process
- develop intragroup camaraderie and allegiance while supporting members to own their individual choices and actions.
- facilitate the healing of potential rifts or misunderstandings that can develop as the group comes together and grows.
- move the group members to generate and implement action plans and leverage the power of the group as accountability partners.

If you noticed a lot of opposites in that list you're not mistaken. The Group Coach is adept at managing the tension between opposing forces. Take the first point for example:

***The Group Coach has the ability to see the group as a unit while not losing sight on the individual's needs and desires.***

This speaks to the Group Coach setting the expectations for the group and determining the topic and focus of the group. The Coach is the owner of the group and creates the agenda for the sessions; understands the process for the session and designs the activities and questions that will generate the shared experience of the group members. At the same time, once the group is in session, the Group Coach attends to the individual members - their goals and aspirations for themselves; their individual beliefs and perspectives that are keeping them stuck; their story telling and unique ways of being.

The Group Coach understands that the group experience begins with the selection of its members. While the Group itself will share a theme or methodology such as FlipIt for the work being done, the participants must share some qualities as well - willingness to share openly; appreciation for the work of self-development; keen interest in others and their journeys; and the ability to commit wholeheartedly to the process. By choosing carefully and using the contracting phase to identify the right fit member of the group, the Group Coach creates a better chance for themselves to manage the group and the individuals simultaneously.

As Group Coaching guru Jennifer Britton (2015) says, it's important to "get granular together around things such as:

- What people can expect from the coaching process
- What group member expectations are of each other
- Identifying common theme areas, you will be exploring
- Creating shared group agreements
- How you will work together"

In the same vein, the coach must be able to:

***Listen powerfully to the unique voice of the individuals while also hearing the voice of the group.***

By the time you become a Group Coach, you have spent many many hours fine tuning your listening skills. You have moved competently from first level listening and are now working hard at mastering deep active listening - that full body listening that is described as listening to not just what is being said but also to the context and circumstances of the speaker.

Within the group, you are listening to both the individuals and the group simultaneously. While engaged in a 1:1 conversation with the client, you are also picking up on the energy of the group or the members' attention to your conversation. This is the Group Coach's superpower - paying attention to the whole of the group and the individuals within it.

The next 2 elements are equally challenging:

***The Group Coach has the ability to be the coach while allowing the group members to develop interdependence and self-coaching skills AND to hold on to the purpose of the group while allowing its members to lead.***

You've studied hard to learn how to become a professional coach. You've put in many hours of training and practice to get here. And you are rightfully proud of your accomplishment. These coaching skills are very important to the group coaching process but, knowing when to let them go and harvest the energy and dynamic of the group becomes just as important.

***If you want to travel fast, go alone. If you want to travel far, go together.***  
*African Proverb*

Sometimes the Group Coach needs to grab the reins of the coaching and move the group along by using their coaching skills and leadership to cover ground quickly. Other times, the Group Coach needs to take a step back and to harness the collective wisdom and energy of the group members by allowing them the space to coach and support each other.

It takes both courage and confidence to be able to relinquish control over the group when it is clear that the group would benefit from the exercise of shared experience and challenge. Being willing to take a step back isn't the same as checking out - like a parent eagerly watching their toddler take their first steps, the Group Coach is fully present and waiting for the moment to step back in when energy fades or the conversation becomes circular instead of generative.

This next set of attributes speak to the Group Coach's ability to manage group process:

***The Group Coach has the ability to create a safe, supportive structure for the group process; develop intragroup camaraderie and allegiance while supporting members to own their individual choices and actions; facilitate the healing of potential rifts or misunderstandings that can develop as the group comes together and grows.***

You could argue that creating the right environment in which the group will thrive deserves to be at the top of the list. Without a healthy group dynamic, which involves the Coach having a deep understanding of group process, the Group Coaching experience is unlikely to succeed. The group needs the time and support to develop into a mutually beneficial unit. For this to happen, the Group Coach works closely with the group as they move through the common wave of group development best and first described by Bruce Tuckman in 1965.

Finally, the coach has the ability to:

***Move the group members to generate and implement action plans and leverage the power of the group as accountability partners.***

Like 1:1 coaching, there is a focus on goal setting and taking action to move forward in the group coaching experience. The Group Coach energizes the power of the group to encourage stretch action plans and to provide a safe landing place to discuss the learnings from those actions taken.

Being a Group Coach is the epitome of dancing in the moment while holding the tension on the tightrope for your participants to safely cross the chasm from where they are now to where they want to be.

## FURTHER READING & RESOURCES

- [Article] [Tuckman's Team and Group Development Model](#)  
by Emma-Louise Elsey in The Coaching Tools Company, 2014
- [Book] [Ultimate Guide to Group Coaching](#)  
Evercoach by Mindvalley
- [Multimedia] [The Dynamics of Team Coaching](#)  
By Centre for Creative Leadership
- [Article] [Effective Group Coaching 101 - 5 Keys Skills Group Coach Needs](#)  
By Jennifer Britton in The Coaching Tools Company, 2015
- [Slideshow] [Listening in Groups](#)  
By Isa N Engelberg and Dianna R. Wynn, Pearson Education Co., 2010
- [Youtube] [How \(Not\) to: Lead a Group \(humour\)](#)  
By Aaron of Summit Ministries, 2018