



GC-ECA: Groups and the Coaching Agreement

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- To understand the different coaching agreements required in Group Coaching
- To appreciate the difference between the contracting with a 1:1 Client vs a Group
- To understand the role of negotiation and mediation in the contracting phases

ICF COMPETENCIES

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. Establishes agreements for the overall coaching engagement as well as those for each coaching session.

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*
3. *Reaches agreement about the guidelines and specific parameters of the coaching relationship such as logistics, fees, scheduling, duration, termination, confidentiality and inclusion of others*
4. *Partners with the client and relevant stakeholders to establish an overall coaching plan and goals*
5. *Partners with the client to determine client-coach compatibility*
6. *Partners with the client to identify or reconfirm what they want to accomplish in the session*
7. *Partners with the client to define what the client believes they need to address or resolve to achieve what they want to accomplish in the session*
8. *Partners with the client to define or reconfirm measures of success for what the client wants to accomplish in the coaching engagement or individual session*
9. *Partners with the client to manage the time and focus of the session*
10. *Continues coaching in the direction of the client's desired outcome unless the client indicates otherwise*

[See all competencies](#)

THE COACHING AGREEMENT

ICF Competency #2, *Establishes and Maintains Agreements*, refers to the two types of contracting a Coach must undertake with a client. In Group Coaching, both of these take a refined form and, to complicate matters, there is a third form of contracting to consider. In this module, we look at creating the overarching contract for the group as well as sessional contracting with both the individual client and the whole group.

Purpose of the Contracting in Group Coaching

It is the bugbear of all novice coaches - from beginner to new graduate coaches the plea is the same "I need help with my coaching agreements!" At the heart of these agreements is a simple idea: there needs to be an understanding between the coach and the client as to what they expect from each other and how they are going to work together. Without this clear understanding, there is no agreed upon frame of reference for the conversations that follow and one or both parties may feel disappointed or, worse, cheated by the arrangement. As the Coach, and therefore the 'owner' of the coaching, it is our responsibility to know how to contract well.

Before we dive into each agreement in more detail, let's consider the 2 parties and their vested interests:

The Coach

Sometimes we get so wrapped up in the idea that the client leads the session and is responsible for their own outcomes that we forget that we are 50% of the equation of any coaching relationship. If effective contracting means that both parties agree on what they expect from each other, what do you expect from this group coaching process? It is worth considering this question as you enter into the group coaching realm.

Some of the things that might be on your list include:

- Money and increased ROI
- Desire to help more people in a shorter period of time
- Opportunity to use Flip It in a fun setting with interesting people
- Opportunity to focus on your passions/interests and share your knowledge
- Build your network and client referral potential
- Build your coaching and group coaching skills

There may also be things you need to protect - such as your reputation, your intellectual property and the sanctity of the group space. Thinking about these kinds of expectations also helps prepare you for contracting.

If you don't know what you want from the group then you are unlikely to be able to contract well and will potentially set yourself up for an unsatisfying group coaching experience.

The Clients

When setting up your group, you need to consider what need you are filling. The next step is to identify those people with that need. Once your marketing is successful and those people start reaching out to join your group, you need to understand and anticipate their expectations. Some things you need to consider:

- How do they think group coaching works and is it in alignment with what you plan to offer?
- What do they think you will do?
- When will the group meet and how?
- How much do they need to invest financially? Timewise? Emotionally or intellectually?
- What is expected of them in terms of participation? Behaviour? Ethics such as confidentiality?
- What will they get out of it? How will they know?
- And many other considerations.

Once you have given consideration to what both of you need and want from the coaching relationship, you are ready for the contracting!

The 3 Key Coaching Agreements for Group Coaches

There are 3 kinds of contracts to consider with group coaching:

1. The initial contract for the formation of the group.

This is the overarching agreement made for the purpose of the group. Here's where your expectations for the group and your clients' expectations initially come together. In your excitement to have members signing up, it can be easy to forget that you only want the right people who can fully commit to the program you want to run. It is your responsibility to ensure that the prospective clients are going to work well together and that everyone will benefit from the group experience.

This is also where the topic and outcomes for the group are discussed and agreed upon. It's an opportunity to explore the group coaching process and help the client(s) to understand what to expect each week.

In this first stage, you also set the rules for the group - things like confidentiality and sharing of materials. Ensuring that each member of the group agrees to the same set of rules for the group is paramount to a successful group coaching experience.

In this initial stage you also need to work out logistics such as fees, payment and cancellation policies, how long the group will run and what will happen if either the member or the coach is unable to fulfill their obligation to the agreement.

Once you and your group members have come to agreement and have a contract between you, you're ready to go.

2. The session contract for the individual coaching within the group.

In most group coaching programs, there is an opportunity for each member to be coached as an individual while the rest of the group observes and supports. When we coach individuals within the group itself, we co-create the agreement as we would for any 1:1 session. However, there may be some differences that need to be considered.

For example, is the individual coaching session designed to reflect the planned content of that day's session? If so, there may be some presumed pre-agreements around the topic for the session. Are you assigning days for each group member to be the individual client? In that case, there could be a reduced commitment to the process or a reduced perceived need for the coaching.

As a group coach, you need to be prepared for these challenges and willing to both manage the agreed upon expectations and the client's right to be coached effectively.

- 3. The session contract for the group at the beginning of each session. At the beginning of each group session, the coach needs to reach agreement with all the members as to what will be accomplished in that session.*

Part of the group coaching program is establishing the session plan for the program. If the group runs for 8 consecutive sessions, each week will likely have a prescribed topic and content plan. As the Coach, part of the agreement process each week is to ensure that the group members as a whole are in alignment with the proposed topic and that they understand what to expect that day.

Additionally, the Coach needs to contract with the group about the behavioral expectations that that session demands. This includes things such as the type of exercises that might be done that day or the role of the group members during individual coaching sessions - do they observe quietly or are they expected to participate? What are the ground rules for their participation in an individual's coaching session?

While some of this may be covered in the initial contracting phase, the successful coach recognizes that each session is a new experience for the group and contracting with the whole group ensures clear understanding around each participants' expectations.

Clear contracting is a skill that requires commitment and confidence on the part of the coach. It provides a solid foundation for moving forward and ensuring a successful group coaching experience for both you and your participants

A note on 3rd-Party or sponsored group (team) coach contracting.

The introduction of a Sponsor to the contracting equation shifts the dynamic considerably. This happens when you are hired by someone to provide group (team) coaching services to someone else. The Sponsor will have their own expectations that need to be considered in the initial contracting phase.

As the provider of the service, it is the Coach's sole responsibility to ensure that they are clear on the expectations and deliverables and have dealt with any ambiguity in the contracting phase. For more information, see David Clutterbuck and John H Fielder & Larry M Starr in the recommended reading list below.

RECOMMENDED CLASS READING

[Article] [Contracting for Success - ICF Research Portal](#)
By JL Bennett, 2008

FURTHER READING & RESOURCES

- [Blog] [5 Contracts your Coaching Business Needs](#)
By Yasmine Salem Hamdan JD, 2019
- [Article] [What's the Big Deal About Coaching Contracts?](#)
By John H Fielder and Larry M Starr in International Journal of Coaching in Organizations, 2008
- [Sample] [ICF Coaching Contract Sample](#)
By ICF, 2017
- [Youtube] [Managing the Three Way Contract in Executive Coaching and Mentoring](#)
By David Clutterbuck, 2015