



*Contracting comprises the verbal (social) agreement you make with your client and also the written agreement. Contracting is about exercising control before the coaching starts. Your contracting covers coaching **goals** (outcomes), the **boundaries** of your coaching engagement (process) and the nature of your coaching **relationship**. It is also an opportunity to outline who you are as a coach and your expectations of each other.*



Goals (Outcomes)

Coaching goals should be agreed with your client at the outset of the coaching engagement. We suggest these are as **SMART** as possible and may be aligned to any aspect of the client's life or working life that you are prepared to work with.

Often, you will be agreeing performance goals that are known to the sponsor of the coaching, such as your client's line manager. These are **public goals** and you should contract to feedback to the sponsor on progress against these goals. You may wish to agree both short-term and long-term goals.

In addition to public goals, your client will probably want to agree some **private goals** with you, such as developing their self-confidence. It is imperative that you do not agree to feedback progress on these goals to anyone other than your client. Also see Confidentiality below.

This is a sensible place to consider how you will measure progress, such as using informal and formal **evaluation** methods.



Boundaries (Process)

One way to think about the boundaries of the coaching is in terms of time, territory and task.

Time (& Place) – You should contract for the length of coaching sessions and the duration of the programme. The place you hold sessions is very important as it may signify the power dynamic in the relationship. We suggest you are aiming for equality (see Relationship below). The place you hold coaching sessions also acts as a container for the coaching – a safe place to which you both return to hold the space and conversation between you.

Territory – Your territory is coaching. Not consulting, giving advice, counselling or taking on the responsibilities of your client (e.g. management).

Task – This is an opportunity to outline your coaching process and fees. Will you be using specific models or tools (e.g. psychometrics), taking notes, etc?



Relationship

The most critical aspect of your coaching contract is to set out your expectations of each other in terms of roles and responsibilities, confidentiality and equality.

Roles and responsibilities

- You should contract for what happens if either of you has to cancel a session at varying lengths of notice, e.g. when will you charge for a session that is cancelled and when will you be happy to re-arrange it?
- You should also set out the arrangement for termination of the relationship, e.g. if the client does not feel she is benefitting, how can she end the coaching and will you help her find an alternative coach?
- This is a good place to consider ethics – do you coach under a recognised code of conduct? Are you in regular coaching yourself? Do you operate under professional supervision? If so can your coach contact your supervisor if they have a complaint or perceive a conflict of interest?

Your position in relation to **confidentiality** should be explicitly set out, including your privacy and data protection policy and process. See also public and private goals in the Goals (outcomes) section above.

As a coach, you act in servitude to your client and the system in which they operate. Your goal in contracting is to establish a working alliance with them. This means you are equal partners in the relationship. **Equality** helps to build trust.



Remember

Your written agreement should contain both your signatures and a date.

Re-contracting can and will occur throughout the engagement, e.g. on goals, time & place, territory and task. You are less likely to re-contract your relationship, which is why it is very important to explicitly contract for your expectations of each other at the outset.



More ideas

“The ongoing relationship between coach and client exists only to address the goals of the client,” Henry Kimsey-House et al (2011), *Co-Active Coaching 3rd Ed.*, Nicholas-Brealey.

“Where the coach provides (expert) input, he is reducing the client’s responsibility,” Sir John Whitmore.

“When [coaches] talk about their disasters, their conclusion is usually that there was fault in the initial contracting stage,” Peter Block.

Contracting
checklist

This checklist is adapted from Peter Block (2000), *Flawless consulting 2nd Ed.*, Pfeiffer.

The book is written from the perspective of a collaborative (OD) consultant. "Consulting flawlessly requires intense concentration on ... being as authentic as you can be at all times with your client and attending directly, in words and actions, to the business of each stage of the consulting process."

We suggest coaching flawlessly requires intense concentration on being as authentic as you can be at all times with your client and attending directly, in words and actions, to the business of each stage (beginnings, middles and endings) to the process of coaching. Contracting is a key element of the 'beginnings' stage.

Ground rules for contracting:

1. The responsibility for every coaching relationship is 50/50. There must be equality or the relationship will collapse.
2. The contract should be freely entered.
3. You can't get something for nothing. There must be consideration from both sides.
4. All wants are legitimate. To want is a birth right.
5. You can say no to what others want from you. Even clients.
6. You don't always get what you want. And you still keep breathing. You will survive, and you will have more clients in the future.
7. You can contract for behaviour; you can't contract for your client to change their feelings.
8. You can't ask for something your client doesn't have. In coaching, we often assume our client has the resources within them to change. How will you test this?
9. You can't promise something you don't have to deliver.
10. You can't contract with someone who's not in the room, such as your client's bosses. You have to meet with those other people to know you have an agreement with them. Consider three-way contracting where the coaching objectives are predominantly public goals.
11. Write down contracts when you can. Most are broken out of neglect, not intent.
12. Social contracts are always renegotiable. If your client wants to renegotiate a contract in midstream, be grateful that they are talking with you about it and not just doing it without a word.
13. Contracts require specific time deadlines or duration, or - often in coaching – both.
14. Good contracts require good faith and often accidental good fortune.