

Anatomy of a Coaching Meeting

Coaching meetings typically last 55 minutes. What happens during these meetings? Let's take a look at a standard meeting structure.

First, we make sure that we are able to focus and that there are no distractions. If there's anything that might be a distraction (just had an argument, expecting a call, etc), please bring it up.

Next, we talk about how things have gone since the last meeting. What successes, challenges, or insights did you have? Is there any new information that might be helpful? (I sometimes call this the "skinny".) If you or I had an assignment from the last meeting, we talk about that and anything that we learned doing the assignment. Something may have happened that we didn't expect, and we can reflect on that, and adjust accordingly.

You direct our conversation toward what you believe will be most helpful. You know yourself and your situation best. I work with you to understand what's going on and how to proceed, but I challenge you to do most of the thinking and talking. I ask questions, and clarify and synthesize what we talk about. I share my relevant experience and ideas if we think that will be helpful. I may challenge what you're saying, if I feel that it's not quite right. I may also add some observations, based on what I see and hear during the meeting.

While we are talking, I try to keep our conversation as productive as possible. I avoid dwelling on the details. We often get lost in the details and lose sight of the more important underlying issues. I look for patterns and try to synthesize the details, to get us back to thinking about your goals and vision.

We will focus on recent and planned behavior and actions, the "what", rather than reaching back into time or trying to understand "why". We know that we're doing good work when you have an "Aha!" moment, when you say something like, "I see now! Here's what I think is happening."

Then we explore the new insight and do some brainstorming. What can we do with this information, how can we use it? Does it clarify a goal, or identify a strategy or obstacle? We try to come up with a lot of ideas related to the insight and its implications. Then we figure out which of these you would like to pursue.

Once we have identified that, it's time for some planning. What do you want to do to put this idea into action? We think about your work environment, and what factors or people would support or resist your actions. We work on a strategy that we think will succeed, then outline a plan.

With five minutes left in the meeting, we stop and review what we've accomplished. We talk about your insights, and you write them down in your notebook if you haven't already. We identify what you can work on before our next meeting, and come up with specific actions that you commit to taking and when you'll take them by. I may ask you to do more than you otherwise would, to stretch you beyond your comfort zone. But ultimately, it needs to be something that you believe you will do. It may be to come up with a list of 5 ideas about how you could do something. You may commit to emailing me your ideas the day before the next meeting. In your notebook, you record the details of what you've committed to. We talk about what support you'll need from me, perhaps a check-in email mid-week or bringing a relevant article to the next meeting. Finally, we will confirm the next meeting date and time.

That's it. Painless, and I hope valuable.

We often are so busy that we do not take the time to invest in ourselves, and we suffer down the road despite our best intentions. In coaching, we focus on you, your needs and goals. You spend a few hours each month really thinking about your situation, your goals and how to achieve them. Doing this on a regular basis, and acting on this thinking, is a long-term investment in you.