NEURO-LINGUISTIC PROGRAMMING · VISUAL SUMMARY

# Coaching Foundations

What coaching is, how it differs from therapy, training, mentoring and consulting, and a practical framework and session flow, with NLP tools placed where they fit.




Covers: definitions and history · core principles · coaching vs therapy, training, mentoring, consulting · NLP presuppositions and tools · competencies · GROW and well-formed outcomes · session and engagement flow · ethics and evidence

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01 · DEFINITION

# What Is Coaching?

Coaching is a structured, collaborative conversation that helps a person get clear on what they want, discover their own answers and take action, without the coach supplying the solutions.

**International Coaching Federation (ICF)**

*"Partnering with clients in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximize their personal and professional potential."*

**Sir John Whitmore**

*"Unlocking people's potential to maximise their own performance. It is helping them to learn rather than teaching them."*

*Coaching for Performance* (1992)

## Gallwey's equation

**Performance** (what shows up) = **Potential** (what's possible) − **Interference** (doubt, fear, distraction)

Timothy Gallwey, *The Inner Game of Tennis* (1974): coaching works mainly by reducing interference

## Five defining features

**Client-led**
The client sets the agenda

**Future-focused**
From now towards goals

**Action-oriented**
Ends in commitments

**Question-driven**
Asks more than tells

**Accountable**
Progress is reviewed

## Common types of coaching

| Type | Focus | Typical client |
|---|---|---|
| **Executive / leadership** | Leadership presence, strategy, influence | Senior managers |
| **Performance** | Specific skills and results at work | Employees, teams |
| **Career** | Direction, transitions, job search | Professionals at a crossroads |
| **Life / personal** | Goals, balance, habits, relationships | Individuals |
| **Team** | Shared goals, dynamics, collaboration | Intact teams |

02 · BACKGROUND

# Roots and History

Modern coaching grew from sport psychology, humanistic psychology and the human-potential movement. NLP developed in the same era and many NLP techniques were later taken up by coaches.

**1950s–60s** Humanistic psychology: Carl Rogers, Abraham Maslow, client-centred listening

**1970s** Bandler & Grinder develop NLP by modelling Perls, Satir and Erickson

**1974** Timothy Gallwey publishes *The Inner Game of Tennis*

**1980s** GROW model develops (Graham Alexander, Alan Fine, John Whitmore)

**1992** Whitmore's *Coaching for Performance* popularises GROW

**1995** International Coaching Federation (ICF) founded

2000s onwards: coaching psychology, accreditation bodies, and NLP-based coach trainin

## Influences that shape NLP coaching

### Humanistic

Belief in the client's capacity to grow; empathy and unconditional positive regard.

### NLP

Language patterns, rapport, outcome-setting, state management and modelling.

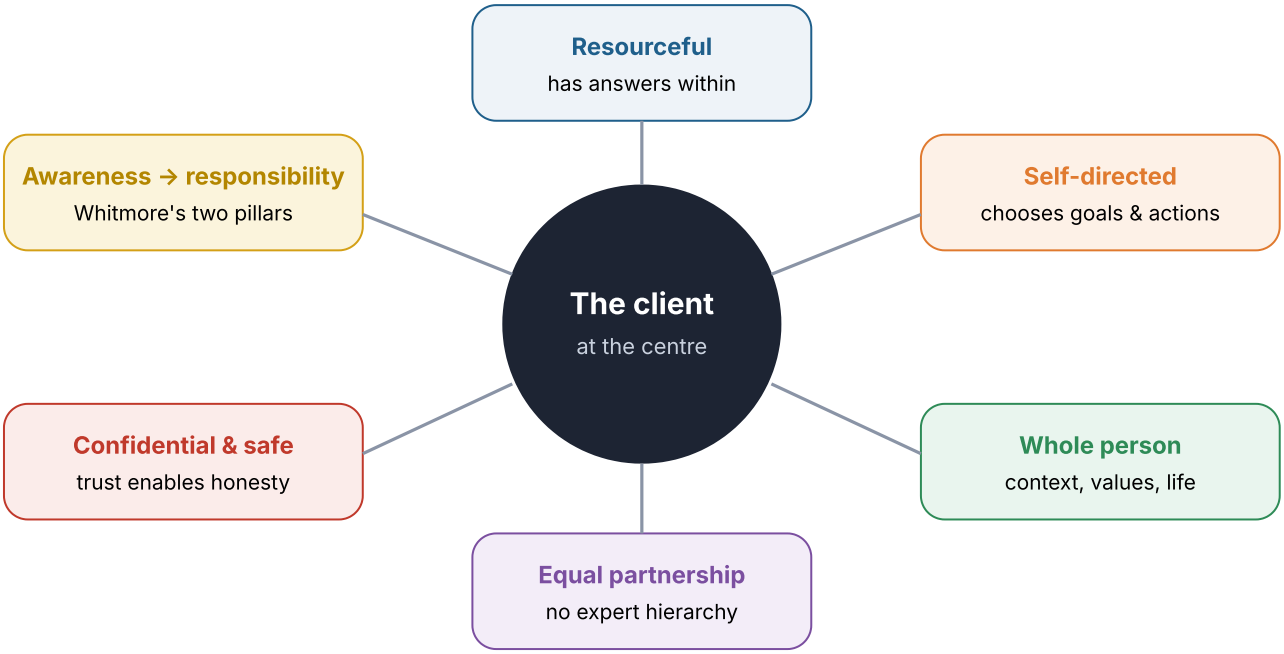
### Sport & performance

Focus, inner obstacles, goals and practice.

03 · PRINCIPLES

# Core Principles of Coaching

Most coaching schools, NLP-based or not, share a set of working assumptions about the client and the relationship.




## What the coach does and doesn't do

**The coach does**

- Ask powerful, open questions
- Listen deeply and reflect back
- Help clarify goals and options
- Challenge assumptions respectfully
- Hold the client accountable to their own commitments

**The coach doesn't**

- Diagnose or treat mental illness
- Give the answer (unless asked, and clearly labelled)
- Decide the client's goals
- Judge or moralise
- Create dependence on the coach

04 · POSITIONING

# The Helping Professions Map

Coaching sits among several helping roles. Two questions separate them: **who provides the answers** (helper or client) and **what the time focus is** (healing the past or building the future).




Conceptual positioning; real practice overlaps, and individual practitioners vary

**Key idea:** the professions are not ranked. Each is right for different needs. A good coach knows when a client needs a different kind of help and refers them.

05 · BOUNDARIES

# Coaching vs Therapy

This is the most important boundary for coaches to understand. NLP has roots in therapy (Perls, Satir, Erickson), so NLP coaches need to be especially clear about it.

| | Coaching | Therapy / counselling |
|---|---|---|
| **Starting point** | Functioning well; wants more or different | Distress, impairment or a clinical issue |
| **Time focus** | Present and future | Often past, and how it affects the present |
| **Main question** | “What do you want, and how will you get there?” | “What's causing this, and how can it heal?” |
| **Goal** | Performance, growth, fulfilment | Symptom relief, recovery, healing |
| **Regulation** | Largely unregulated; voluntary accreditation (ICF, EMCC, etc.) | Licensed or registered in many countries |
| **Training** | Varies widely: days to years | Postgraduate training plus supervised practice |
| **Diagnosis** | Never | Often part of the process |

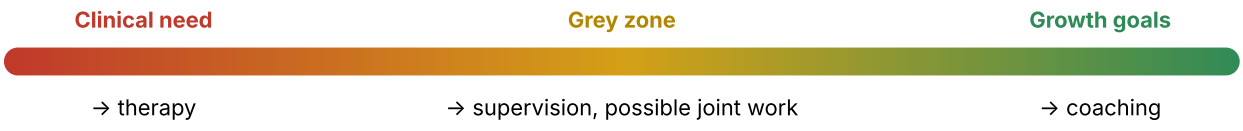
## Red flags: when to refer to a professional

### Refer when the client shows

- Persistent low mood, hopelessness or loss of interest
- Talk of self-harm or suicide (act on this immediately)
- Signs of trauma, panic attacks or severe anxiety
- Substance misuse or eating difficulties
- Inability to function in daily life
- Issues that keep returning to the past despite a future focus

### How to refer well

- Agree referral terms in the initial contract
- Name what you notice, kindly and plainly
- Suggest the right professional: GP, psychologist, counsellor
- Pause or adjust coaching as appropriate
- Discuss with your supervisor



06 · BOUNDARIES

# Coaching vs Training, Mentoring and Consulting

These roles are directive to different degrees. The main difference is **where the expertise and the answers come from**.

### Training

Transfers a defined skill or body of knowledge, usually to a group, using a set curriculum.

"Here's how to do it."

### Mentoring

A more experienced person shares advice, networks and lessons from their own path.

"Here's what I did."

### Consulting

An expert diagnoses a problem and recommends or delivers a solution.

"Here's what you should do."

### Coaching

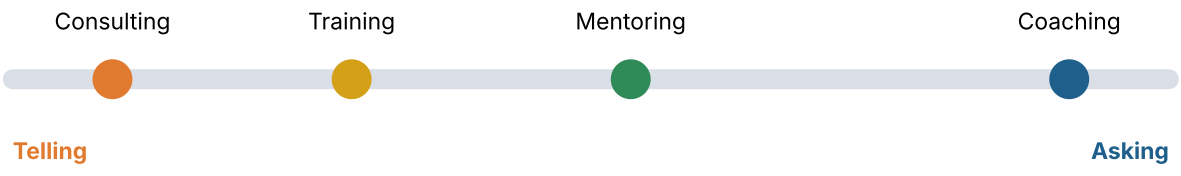
Helps the client find their own answers. "What do you think you could do?"

## Same problem, four responses

**Situation:** a new team leader says, "My team meetings run over and nothing gets decided."

| Role | Typical response |
|---|---|
| **Trainer** | "Let's do a workshop on running effective meetings: agendas, timekeeping and decision rules." |
| **Mentor** | "When I led my first team, I started sending agendas a day early. It changed everything." |
| **Consultant** | "I've reviewed your meetings. Cut them to 30 minutes, use a RACI chart and assign a facilitator." |
| **Coach** | "What would a great meeting look like for you? What have you tried? What's getting in the way?" |

## How directive is each role?




Conceptual spectrum. Skilled practitioners move along it as the situation needs, but say when they switch.

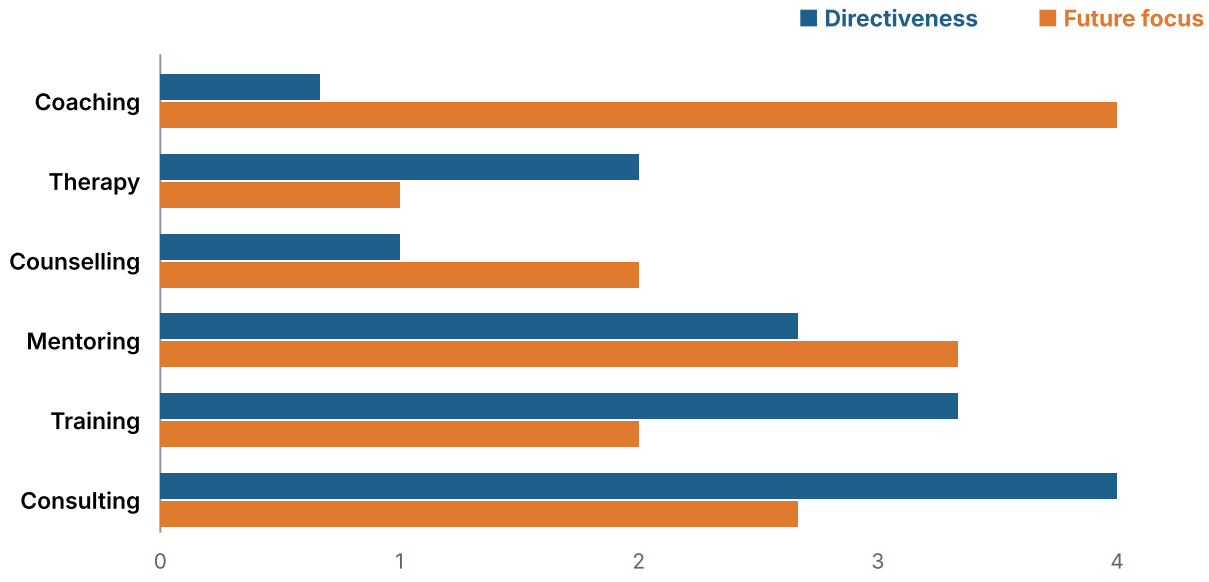
07 · OVERVIEW

# Comparison at a Glance

A side-by-side summary of the six helping roles.

| | Coaching | Therapy | Counselling | Mentoring | Training | Consulting |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Who sets the agenda?** | Client | Shared, clinically guided | Client | Shared | Trainer / curriculum | Client's problem, expert's method |
| **Who has the answers?** | Client | Shared | Client | Mentor | Trainer | Consultant |
| **Time focus** | Future | Past → present | Present | Future | Present | Present |
| **Helper's expertise** | Process | Clinical | Emotional support | Domain experience | Subject matter | Technical |
| **Typical length** | 3–12 months | Weeks to years | Weeks to months | Often long-term | Hours to days | Project-based |
| **Main output** | Awareness + action | Healing | Coping, clarity | Guidance | Skills | Solution |

## Directiveness and time focus, scored




Illustrative 0–4 ratings summarising the table above; they are not measured data.

**In practice:** many coaches combine roles, for example coaching with a short teaching segment. Good practice is to make the switch explicit: “Would it help if I shared a model here?”

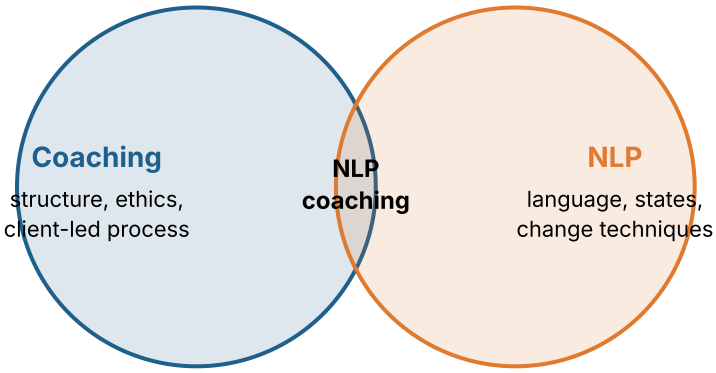
08 · NLP CONTEXT

# Where NLP Fits: Presuppositions for Coaches

NLP isn't a coaching model in itself. It is a set of working beliefs and techniques that many coaches add to a coaching framework. Its **presuppositions** fit the coaching mindset closely.

| NLP presupposition | What it means in a coaching session |
|---|---|
| **The map is not the territory** | Explore the client's view of the situation rather than arguing about "facts" |
| **People have all the resources they need** | Look for past successes and strengths the client can use now |
| **There is no failure, only feedback** | Treat setbacks as information for the next attempt |
| **The meaning of communication is the response you get** | If a question doesn't land, the coach adapts, not the client |
| **Every behaviour has a positive intention** | Ask what an unwanted habit is trying to achieve before changing it |
| **The person with the most flexibility has the most influence** | Help clients widen their range of responses |
| **If someone can do something, others can learn it** | Model role models' strategies for a skill |
| **Mind and body are one system** | Notice posture and state; shift physiology to shift thinking |

## How NLP adds to a coaching conversation




Coaching provides the frame; NLP supplies extra tools inside it.

09 · NLP CONTEXT

# The NLP Coaching Toolkit

Common NLP tools and the coaching stage where each is most often used.

| Tool | What it does | Stage (GROW) |
|---|---|---|
| **Rapport** | Matching tone, pace and body language to build trust | Throughout |
| **Well-formed outcomes** | Turns a vague wish into a clear, checkable goal | Goal |
| **Meta Model questions** | Recovers specifics from vague language | Reality |
| **Logical levels** | Locates the issue: environment → behaviour → capability → beliefs → identity → purpose | Reality |
| **Perceptual positions** | See a situation as self, other and observer | Reality · Options |
| **Reframing** | Changes the meaning or context of a situation | Options |
| **Anchoring** | Links a resourceful state to a trigger | Way forward |
| **Future pacing** | Mentally rehearses the action in a future context | Way forward |

## Logical levels (Robert Dilts)




Logical levels is a practitioner model adapted from Gregory Bateson's ideas; it is widely used but not empirically validated.

# Core Coaching Competencies

The ICF's updated Core Competency Model (2019) sets out eight competencies in four domains. It is a widely used benchmark, whatever toolkit a coach uses.

### A · Foundation

- 1 · Demonstrates ethical practice
- 2 · Embodies a coaching mindset

### B · Co-creating the relationship

- 3 · Establishes and maintains agreements
- 4 · Cultivates trust and safety
- 5 · Maintains presence

### C · Communicating effectively

- 6 · Listens actively
- 7 · Evokes awareness

### D · Cultivating learning & growth

- 8 · Facilitates client growth
  turning insight into action, and supporting autonomy

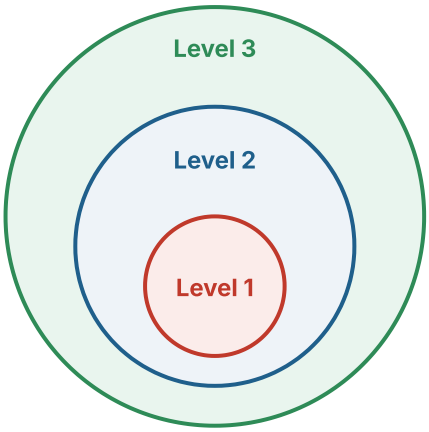
## NLP skills that support each domain

| ICF domain | Supporting NLP skills |
|---|---|
| **Foundation** | Ecology checks; presuppositions such as respect for the client's map |
| **Co-creating the relationship** | Rapport (matching and pacing), calibration, managing one's own state |
| **Communicating effectively** | Sensory acuity, Meta Model questions, noticing predicates and metaphors |
| **Cultivating learning & growth** | Well-formed outcomes, future pacing, anchoring resource states |

# Listening and Questioning

Listening and questions are the coach's main tools. The Co-Active coaching model (Whitworth, Kimsey-House & Sandahl, 1998) describes three levels of listening.

**Internal listening**
"What does this mean for me?"
Useful in life; limited in coaching




**Global listening**
energy, mood, what's unsaid, the whole environment

**Focused listening**
full attention on the client's words, tone and meaning

## Types of question

| Type | Example | Use |
|---|---|---|
| **Closed** | "Did you send the email?" | Checking facts, getting commitment |
| **Open** | "What happened when you sent it?" | Exploring, widening awareness |
| **Clarifying (Meta Model)** | "Who, specifically, disagreed?" | Recovering missing detail |
| **Scaling** | "On 1–10, how confident are you?" | Measuring and tracking progress |
| **Hypothetical** | "If you knew you couldn't fail, what would you do?" | Unlocking options |
| **Powerful** | "What do you really want here?" | Shifting perspective; deepening insight |

**Better questions are…**

Short, open, start with "what" or "how", and focus on the client's agenda.

**Avoid…**

Leading questions ("Don't you think you should…?"), stacked questions, and "why", which can feel like an accusation.

# The GROW Framework

GROW is the most widely used coaching framework. It gives a conversation a clear arc while staying client-led. It is often used iteratively, returning to earlier stages as new insight appears.




| Stage | Sample questions | NLP additions |
|---|---|---|
| **Goal** | What would you like to get from this session? What would success look like? How will you know? | Well-formed outcome criteria; sensory evidence |
| **Reality** | What's happening now? What have you tried? On a scale of 1–10, where are you? | Meta Model; logical levels; perceptual positions |
| **Options** | What could you do? What else? What would someone you admire do? | Reframing; modelling; second position |
| **Way forward** | What will you do, and by when? What might stop you? How committed are you, 1–10? | Ecology check; anchoring; future pacing |

Variants include T-GROW (adding *Topic* first) and GROWTH or GROWER (adding review and evaluation stages).

# Well-Formed Outcomes

NLP's **well-formed outcome** criteria take the "G" in GROW further. They check that a goal is clear, within the client's control, and fits the rest of their life.

| # | Criterion | Coaching question | Why it matters |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | **Stated in the positive** | "What do you want, rather than what you don't want?" | Points attention towards the goal |
| 2 | **Self-initiated and maintained** | "What part of this is in your control?" | Avoids goals that depend on others changing |
| 3 | **Sensory-based evidence** | "What will you see, hear and feel when you've got it?" | Makes success measurable |
| 4 | **Context defined** | "Where, when and with whom do you want this?" | Prevents over-general goals |
| 5 | **Resources identified** | "What do you already have that will help? What do you need?" | Builds confidence and a realistic plan |
| 6 | **Ecological** | "What will you gain or lose? Who else is affected?" | Surfaces hidden costs and objections |
| 7 | **First step identified** | "What's the first thing you'll do?" | Turns intention into action |

## From a vague wish to a well-formed outcome

**Vague wish**

*"I want to stop being so stressed at work."*

7 criteria →

**Well-formed outcome**

"By the end of March I want to finish work by 6pm on at least four days a week, feeling calm and in control. I'll know because my calendar shows it and I'm home for dinner. First step: block 4–5pm tomorrow for priority tasks."

### Compared with SMART

SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound) covers measurement and timing. Well-formed outcomes add positive framing, personal control, sensory evidence and ecology.

### Tip

Ask "And what will that do for you?" to find the deeper value behind a goal. This often reveals a more motivating version.

14 · FRAMEWORK

# An NLP-Integrated Coaching Framework

NLP describes change as moving from a **present state** to a **desired state** by adding **resources**. This lines up neatly with GROW and gives a seven-stage flow.




The coaching question: "What resources would help you move from here to there?"

## Seven-stage flow

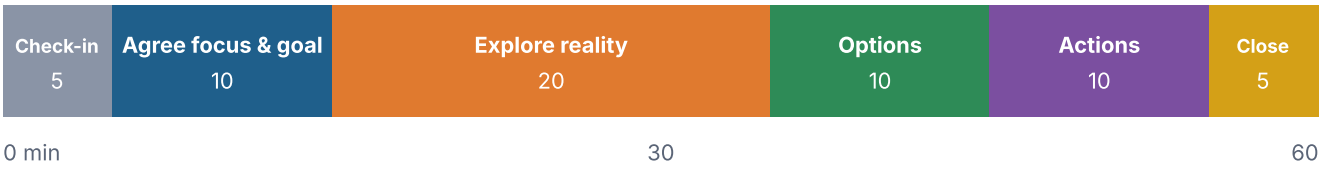



| Stage | Coach's aim | Example NLP tool |
|---|---|---|
| **1 · Rapport & contract** | Build trust; agree the session focus | Matching and pacing |
| **2 · Outcome** | Define a clear, positive goal | Well-formed outcome criteria |
| **3 · Present state** | Understand the current situation and blocks | Meta Model; logical levels |
| **4 · Resources & options** | Generate choices and access strengths | Reframing; perceptual positions; anchoring |
| **5 · Ecology** | Check the plan fits the client's whole life | "What would you lose?" |
| **6 · Action** | Agree specific steps and accountability | First step; commitment scaling |
| **7 · Future pace** | Rehearse success; anticipate obstacles | Mental rehearsal in context |

# The Flow of a Single Session

A typical 60-minute session follows a predictable arc, though a skilled coach adjusts to the client. Times below are a guide, not a rule.

**Illustrative 60-minute session (minutes per stage)**




Roughly a third of the time is spent understanding reality; the rest is split between goal, options and commitment

| Stage | What happens | Useful phrases |
|---|---|---|
| **Check-in** | Re-establish rapport; review actions from last time | "What's happened since we last met?" |
| **Agree focus** | Client chooses the topic and the session outcome | "What would make this session valuable?" |
| **Explore** | Deepen understanding; raise awareness | "What's really going on?" "What else?" |
| **Options** | Generate and evaluate choices | "If there were no limits, what would you try?" |
| **Actions** | Commit to specific next steps | "What will you do, by when, and how will I know?" |
| **Close** | Capture learning; check the session met its outcome | "What are you taking away?" |

## Signs the session is working

**Client talks most**

A common guideline is that the client speaks for most of the time.

**Insight moments**

Pauses, "Oh...", or a shift in posture often signal new awareness.

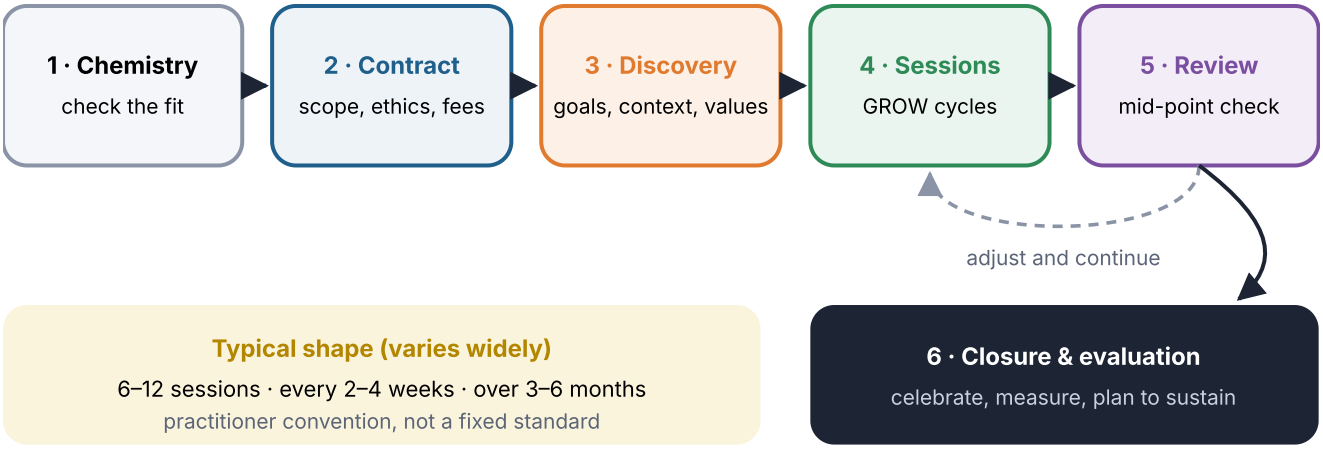
**Clear commitment**

The client leaves with actions they chose themselves.

16 · FLOW

# The Flow of a Coaching Engagement

Beyond the single session, a coaching relationship has a lifecycle, from first contact to closure. In organisations, a sponsor (often the manager or HR) may also be part of the agreement.




## The coaching agreement (contract)

| Element | What to agree |
|---|---|
| **Purpose & scope** | Overall goals; what coaching will and won't cover |
| **Logistics** | Number, length and format of sessions; cancellations; fees |
| **Roles** | Client's and coach's responsibilities; the sponsor's role if any |
| **Confidentiality** | What is shared, with whom, and the legal or safety limits |
| **Referral** | What happens if issues arise that need other professional help |
| **Evaluation** | How progress and success will be measured |

**Three-way contracting:** in workplace coaching, agree openly with client and sponsor what the sponsor will hear (usually themes and progress, not session content).

# Ethics, Boundaries and Evidence

## Ethical essentials

**Confidentiality**

Protect client information, within legal and safety limits that are explained up front.

**Competence**

Work within your training. Use supervision. Refer when outside your scope.

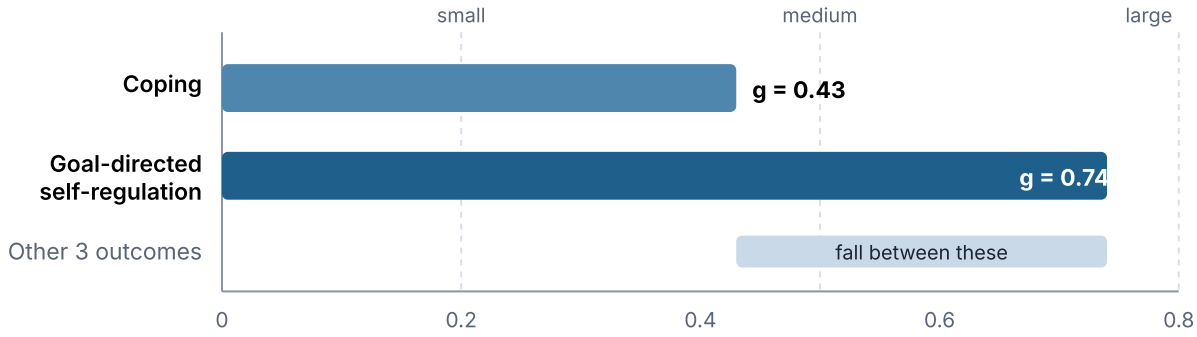
**Integrity**

Be honest about methods, results and credentials. Avoid conflicts of interest.

Professional bodies such as the ICF and EMCC publish codes of ethics that coaches can sign up to.

## Does coaching work?

Theeboom, Beersma and van Vianen's meta-analysis (2014, *Journal of Positive Psychology*) of workplace coaching studies found positive effects on all five outcomes studied: **performance and skills, well-being, coping, work attitudes** and **goal-directed self-regulation**.




Hedges' g effect sizes; benchmarks follow Cohen's conventions (0.2 small, 0.5 medium, 0.8 large)

**Coaching in general**

A growing evidence base, including several meta-analyses, supports workplace coaching. Many studies are small, and outcomes are often self-reported.

**NLP specifically**

Reviews of NLP research (e.g. Witkowski, 2010) find weak support for its distinctive claims. NLP tools are best seen as practical techniques inside an evidence-informed coaching frame, not as proven methods in themselves.

# Summary and Quick Reference

**What coaching is**

- A client-led, future-focused partnership
- Helps people find their own answers and act
- Works by raising awareness and responsibility

**What it isn't**

- Not therapy: no diagnosis or treatment
- Not training, mentoring or consulting: no default expert answers
- Know when to refer

## Framework cheat sheet

| Stage | Key question | NLP tool |
|---|---|---|
| **Rapport** | "How are you arriving today?" | Matching, pacing, calibration |
| **Goal** | "What do you want, and how will you know?" | Well-formed outcomes |
| **Reality** | "What's happening now, specifically?" | Meta Model; logical levels |
| **Options** | "What else could you do?" | Reframing; perceptual positions |
| **Ecology** | "What would change for others, or for you?" | Ecology check |
| **Way forward** | "What will you do, and by when?" | First step; commitment scale |
| **Future pace** | "Imagine it's done. What's different?" | Mental rehearsal; anchoring |

## The helping roles in one line each

| Coach | Therapist | Counsellor | Mentor | Trainer | Consultant |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| asks, so you find answers | helps you heal | helps you cope | shares their path | teaches a skill | gives the solution |

**Key sources:** Gallwey (1974) *The Inner Game of Tennis* · Whitmore (1992) *Coaching for Performance* · Whitworth, Kimsey-House & Sandahl (1998) *Co-Active Coaching* · Dilts (1990) *Changing Belief Systems with NLP* · ICF Core Competency Model (2019) · Theeboom, Beersma & van Vianen (2014) *Journal of Positive Psychology* · Witkowski (2010) *Polish Psychological Bulletin*.