

Is Coaching Working? A Self-Check

Ed Schaefer · Version 1.0 · September 2026 · edward-schaefer.com/templates/coaching-self-check · Free to share

Run this once at the start, before the first session sets any expectations, and again after the first month, to decide whether to continue, raise a concern, or stop. Fill in the blanks both times and compare. The Coaching Agreement Checklist covers what should already be in writing by the time you run this the first time.

1. Readiness, checked on yourself

Brubaker and Mitchell, writing in Harvard Business Review, named four patterns in executives who weren't ready for coaching. Run each one on yourself:

- Am I blaming circumstances for the problem I brought to coaching, rather than my own part in it?
- Am I actually protecting this time, or letting it be the first thing that moves when the calendar fills up?
- Am I asking for tips and tactics because reflection feels slower than I want it to be right now?
- Am I still holding out for a better-sounding coach, or a better moment, when the work is already in front of me?

Any pattern I recognized in myself just now: _____

2. Who fills the silence

When every answer starts with asking the coach what they think, dependency has set in. When the coach supplies solutions before being asked, the coach has overreached. The earliest sign of either is a missing pause: no moment to reflect before the coach says what they see.

After a session, did I do the thinking, or did the coach:

3. The relationship is the thing to check

A 2016 study of 1,895 coach-client pairs found that personality match didn't predict a good outcome. What did was the working alliance: the felt quality of the relationship between coach and client, rated directly by both sides. Neither the number of sessions nor how long the engagement runs moved the needle either. If the relationship feels thin, raise that directly.

How the relationship actually feels right now, in a sentence: _____

4. What to watch for

Roughly two-thirds of people who've been coached report at least one negative effect, most often mild. Watch for the coach shifting your goals without your explicit agreement, the coach surfacing a problem they aren't equipped to handle, or a flatter sense of satisfaction with work that wasn't there before coaching started. A stronger working alliance predicts fewer of these, which is one more reason the relationship is the check that matters most.

Anything from that list I've noticed: _____

5. When to raise it

The ICF (International Coaching Federation, the largest membership body for coaches) holds its members to a code of ethics that includes a duty to notice a stall and name it, before the client has to. If a month has passed and neither of you has named one, raise it yourself.

What I'd actually say, if I raised it today: _____

6. How this ends

Either side can end the relationship at any point, for any reason, subject to what the agreement says about notice and refunds. Nothing about coaching requires finishing a package or waiting for a natural stopping point once this check says it's time.

7. Revisit this self-check

Run this self-check again at one month, and after that, on whatever cadence keeps it honest. _____ (your own trigger, if different)