

The Coach Evaluation Sheet

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One page for choosing a coach: what to check before you sign on, and how to tell afterward whether it's working. Fill in the blanks. A companion piece on whether coaching is the right purchase at all covers the decision this sheet assumes you've already made.

1. Name the kind of help you need

A mentor draws on their own experience, an advisor recommends a move, and a consultant diagnoses and prescribes. A coach does none of that, asking questions instead so you find your own answer.

What I actually need help with: _____

2. The one rule

Don't work with a coach who won't offer a free fit session first: a short conversation where you decide whether to work together before any money changes hands. Fit runs in both directions. The coach is deciding too.

3. What to ask

- **Find three candidates before you talk to any:** a referral, the ICF directory, a marketplace listing. The ICF (International Coaching Federation, the largest membership body for coaches) tells buyers to interview at least three and ask each for two references.
- **If your employer is paying:** check now whether they require an ICF-credentialed coach. Many will only cover one.
- **Do you stay in a pure coaching stance** (the role you occupy moment to moment), **or do you also mentor and advise, and how will I know which is happening?** A good answer names the shift out loud, or asks first.
- **What have you understood so far about what I've shared?**
- **Do you keep up coaching supervision,** structured reflection on your own practice with a more senior coach? Ask how they think about what they bring into the room from their own life.
- **What's your credential, if any?** The ICF's two common levels, the ACC (Associate Certified Coach) and the PCC (Professional Certified Coach), require 100 and 500 hours of logged coaching, plus training and an exam. A credential shows real investment; it doesn't settle quality on its own.

4. What to expect, stance by stance

Stance	Expect it?
Doing the work, or telling you what to do	Probably not
Counseling	Probably not
Consulting or advising	Minimal at best
Teaching or training	Sometimes, when a skill gap needs it
Mentoring	Deliberately and with intentionality
Facilitating a room or workshop	Never
Coaching itself	The primary stance, and often the only one

Put your own answers to this table in writing before you start. The ICF's ethics code also settles how it can end: either party may stop at any point, for any reason, once the agreement says so.

5. Signals during the fit call

Watch how they ask questions and what they seem to understand about what you've told them. One conversation gives you real information about fit without settling it: doubtful first impressions sometimes turn into good engagements, and confident ones sometimes fail once the coach turns out too similar to you to see what you can't.

6. After the first sessions: the self-check

Notice who fills the silence. Always asking the coach what they think is dependency; a coach who keeps offering solutions is overreaching. The earliest sign: you aren't getting time to reflect before the coach speaks.

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

7. Revisit this sheet

Revisit this sheet after the fit call, and again if coaching starts to feel like direction. _____ (your own trigger, if different)