START
with the Agreement

The International Coaching Federation (ICF) breaks agenda setting into four primary elements that should be explored by the coach and client in order to create alignment around the client's desired outcome for the session:

1 Help the client share their topic for the session.

2 Help the client explore the significance of their topic.

3 Ask the client how they would like to approach the topic.

4 Confirm the client's desired outcome for the session.

These elements of agenda setting do not need to be explored in any particular order, and coaches should not feel restricted to only using one question or reflection to explore each element with the client. The ICF's primary expectation is that the coach and the client spend some time on the agenda to inform the rest of the exploration.

Coaches should not rush agenda setting, but they should generally avoid setting the agenda beyond the first third of the scheduled time for the session. Once the agenda has been set, the coach should ask questions that help the client make progress in better understanding the topic and themselves. During the session, the coach should prompt the client to consider how what they learn helps them get closer to their desired outcome for the session.

On the next page you will find a model to help guide your agenda setting.

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START
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S

Subject

- How would you like us to get started today?
- Based on your learning from action…what would you like to focus on today?
- What is most important for us to focus on today?

T

Transformation / Top of Mind

- What makes this the topic for us to work on today?
- What makes this important for us to spend time discussing?
- As we work on this, what difference do you want to see in your life?
- Who will you be able to be if you work on this topic?

A

Areas to Address

- Wow, this is a big topic. What part is most important today?
- What will we need to chat about to work on this topic?
- What are some of the things we need to address to help you think and plan around this situation?

R

Result

- As we talk about _____, what would you like by the end of the session?
- What practical takeaway do you want from today's session?
- What type of takeaway do you want by the time we are done today?

T

Teaming Up

- After agenda is set, a coach may offer an initial question such as, "How would you like us to get started on this topic?"
- Focus on the client's objective for the session using open questions, reflections, and other coaching skills and tools.
- Periodically ask questions to check in on the direction of the session.

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START
T - Questions

The following questions demonstrate the quality of questions a coach can ask to help explore the "T" of the client's agenda (potential for transformation, what makes the session top of mind, and the significance of the topic)

Less Effective

- What makes **this** important to talk about today?
- What's the significance of all of **this**?
- What's making **this** top of mind for you today?

These questions help explore under the surface of the client's agenda, but they are a clear miss in terms of demonstrating empathetic listening. Without using the client language, the client may not follow what the coach is referring to with the use of demonstrative pronouns (this, that, these, those). When reflecting on our language as coaches, we should consider any demonstrative pronoun as a blank in the sentence that probably should be filled with the client language.

More Effective

- What makes **Friday's "Debate"** important to talk about today?
- What is the significance of **these really challenging decisions**?
- What's making **waking up with purpose** top of mind for you today?

START
A - Questions

The following questions demonstrate the quality of questions a coach can ask to help explore the "A" of the client's agenda (subtopics, what should be discussed as part of the topic, obstacles that can get in the way of the client making progress with their topic).

Less Effective

- What areas should we address as part of **this topic**?
- What obstacles get in the way of you solving **this problem**?
- With the time we have, what part of **this issue** should we focus on today?

More Effective

- What areas should we address as part of your **"once in a lifetime" opportunity**?
- What obstacles get in the way of you coming up with a **"repair the ship" plan**?
- With the time we have, what part of the **"path to promotion"** should we focus on today?

START
R - Questions

The following questions demonstrate the quality of questions a coach can ask to help explore the "R" of the client's agenda (measurable result for the session or desired agenda outcome). It is important to note that these questions are not the same as action or planning questions that tend to be asked near the end of the session. Instead, these questions are asked near the beginning of the session to help guide the exploration.

Less Effective

- What do you want by the end of our session today?
- What could be a measure of success by the time we are done today?
- What do you want to accomplish by the end of our coaching session today?

More Effective

- Decision: What do you want by the end of our session to help you with this **"pivotal moment"**?
- Peer Situation: By the time we are done today, how will you know you are more prepared to **"avoid stirring the pot" with your peer**?
- Preparing for Friday's Meeting: You said you are an **"8/10 with nerves"** preparing for this meeting. Where do you want to be on that scale by the end of our conversation today?

This final question illustrates how a coach can ask about one of the elements of agenda setting without using a template question. The question helps the client explore what they want to accomplish by the end of the session while using their own words to frame the idea of accomplishment or outcome by the end of the session.

WE START
Setting the Long-Term Coaching Agreement

W Welcome and Introductions

Get to know one another often with the coach going first. Keep in mind that the length of your introduction sets the expectations of how long the client will share. Consider keeping your introduction to about one minute on your side. Review the nature of confidentiality within a coaching relationship. Note that the conversation is meant to be for the client and that you will not be reporting back to the organization (or if you will, to what degree you will be reporting back based on the company's contract). Confidentiality would be breached in cases of fear of harm to self or harm to others. If recording the session for training purposes, make sure to confirm permission to record (having already obtained general permission via contract).

E Explore Coaching

Describe what coaching is and what it is not. Highlight how coaches use skills such as powerful questions, agenda setting and active listening. Describe your own unique coaching style. This is an element that is very important for you to create for yourself and practice ahead of time.

S Story and Overall Subject of Coaching

Invite the client to share where they are with their life and career and how they see coaching supporting their journey. Avoid asking questions about today's agenda specifically and focus more on longer term focus of coaching relationship.

T Potential for Transformation during the Engagement

Ask about what the client would like to see change in the next 6-12 months as a result of the coaching. Also explore the significance of the changes they would like to see.

A Areas to Address and Topics to Cover

Explore what sub-topics would need to be covered in order to help with the longer term change the client would like to experience.

R Results of the Coaching to Measure Success

Help the client determine how they will measure the success of the coaching. If looking at 6-12 months for the "T," then how will the client know that the coaching is making progress in 3-4 months?

T Teaming Up

- If less than 15 minutes: Offer space to explore what the client has learned so far by talking through their long-term goals for the program. Ask what potential first steps they may take as initial experiments. If no clear first action step present, ask what question they would like to reflect on to prepare for the next session. Offer a reflection question if needed.
- If more than 15 minutes: Set individual session agreement. Usually start with "A" by asking "What part of these big goals should we start with today? You may only ask about the "A" and the "R" depending on how much time you have remaining. Explore as normal and end with action or reflection.

Aligned with ICF Competency 3, Establishes and Maintains Coaching Agreements:
https://coachingfederation.org/credentials-and-standards/core-competencies

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