Starting a Coaching Practice

How do I start a Coaching Practice?
One of the most common questions in the coaching world right now is “How do I start a coaching practice?” followed very closely by “How do I get people connected to me as a coach?” Opportunities for effective coaching and for highly-skilled coaches are cropping up every day. More people are beginning to understand the value of coaching, and more people are training to serve as coaches. Now is a great time to launch a coaching practice!

The CoachNet Team gathered some tips from experienced coaches on how to get your coaching practice started. Although all of our examples come from the CoachNet world, the same principles apply whatever your context, business or ministry.

So, here are some thoughts about launching your coaching practice:

• **Get a coach:** Launching a coaching practice would benefit from the same advice as you would give to anyone with a big goal: get a coach! Being coached is the single most effective way of reaching your goal.

• **Pray and reflect.** There is no substitute for hearing the voice of God. Spend time listening and reflecting. What does God really want you to do? Knowing that you’re on the path God intends for you will provide the confidence you need to keep going when things get tough.

• **Find your niche.** Even if you are open to coaching in a variety of areas, who are you most passionate about coaching? Where do you want to focus your investment? Starting a practice geared toward parenting coaching will look quite different from starting a practice coaching church planters. If you’re uncertain, try imagining your ideal client.

• **Pump up your credentials.** Anyone looking for a coach will want some form of documentation that you’re good at what you do, especially seeing as the area of coaching is still largely unregulated. NOTE: This is especially important when you’re first starting your coaching career. Find ways to document that you’re good—and also that you’re continuing to get better. Get certified. Take annual assessments that can document your growth. Attend advanced coach trainings to keep up with the growth of the field. In short, get trained as a coach, and then keep on growing. Starting any new business requires a significant investment of time and money, and coaching is no exception.

• **Get incorporated.** Structure your organization, getting all of your I’s dotted and T’s crossed legally. Doing your homework now will make your taxes and record-keeping down the road much easier. For the protection of your personal assets, if you are serious about coaching as a business, seek legal counsel.

• **Don’t quit your day job... yet.** Many new coaches have visions of doing coaching full time, yet building a coaching practice is often slow going. Keeping your primary source of income separate will allow you to make better, stress-free decisions about how-to
develop your coaching practice. You will feel the freedom to refer clients who you are not well-suited to coach. And you will often gain extended experience in another field related to your coaching. Some of the most effective coaches do the same type of day-job as their clients.

- **Take Speaking Engagements.** Public speaking is one of the best ways to get people connected to you as a coach. Speak at every opportunity. Just getting your face out there and meeting people can help you build a reputation.
- **Network to find clients.** In addition to public speaking, networking is also a good way to find new clients and become known as a coach. Many clients come to you by word-of-mouth or by referrals from others. Some organizations serve as clearing houses for coaches within certain niches. Research your niche and know what organizations and networks to become a part of.
- **Get a coach mentor.** Not only can getting a coach provide helpful direction for you as you start your practice, it can also help you improve your coaching skills as you go. Just as new counselors start out with a supervisor to help them stay on track, the same system can work well for coaches even though it’s not legally required yet. A side bonus of this arrangement can sometimes include getting referrals from your coach mentor.
- **Coach within an organization.** Look at in-house opportunities within organizations. More and more organizations (i.e. mission organizations, denominations, businesses, educational institutions) are hiring in-house coaches, and that can be a great way to gain more experience than you can get on your own.

### Setting Your Fees

Any coach’s fee structure must be commensurate with skill and experience levels. A beginning coach cannot charge the same rate as a master-level coach. Before setting your rates, get an objective assessment comparing your skills to other coaches. Coaches who are receiving coach mentoring and ongoing training can likewise expect to earn more. Always maintain a portfolio of your recent training and assessment results to document your ongoing development.

As a reference, slot your coaching skills into one of the following categories.

- **Beginning coach:** $50 - $75 per hour**
- **Experienced coach:** $125 - $150 per hour
- **High-performing coach:** $250 - $300 per hour

These ballpark figures are only estimates, and are based on a cross section of coaches connected to CoachNet.

**Coaches who have not completed certification from CoachNet or another recognized training program should not charge for coaching services.**
Two Paths to a Coaching Practice
Here are two different roads to launching a coaching practice. Where do you see yourself in each of the two stories?

Beth & the Donor Base: Beth was part of a mission organization when she found Natural Church Development to be an important resource to improve church health. Through NCD Beth was introduced to coaching. She expanded her coaching range beyond the NCD context and became a certified coach through CoachNet. She informed her donors of her desire to spend a majority of her time doing coaching. Most were happy to continue supporting her financially. As her coaching income increased, Beth saw that she could support herself as a coach. She began actively to market herself. Gradually the tide turned and less income was generated from her donor base than her coaching practice and now she supports herself.

- What did Beth bring into the conversation?
- How do you think the conversation with her donor base went?
- Who could you talk with about support?
- What specific area(s) could you focus your coaching?

Hamish & His Marketing Plan: When Hamish took CoachNet’s Certification, he scored above 60 on his Online Assessment. This gave him incentive to seek out clients aggressively. He spent two days every two weeks on marketing. At the beginning, he was flexible on his rates just to get practice and experience. With those he coached, he asked, “Who else do you know that I could talk to about becoming their coach?” He said yes to speaking engagements on any and every topic, and brought in the subject of coaching no matter what else he spoke about. He sought out natural partners, people doing similar work, and asked about working together. One avenue he wishes he had pursued is to call up Coach Mentors (people who supervise coaches-in-training) to request that they refer potential clients to him. While Hamish was building his coaching practice, he was working on the staff of a church. He was transparent with his bosses and they gave permission for him to pursue this area.

- Who could you reach out to to inquire about potential clients?
- What flexibility do you have about rates/costs that you could offer to potential clients?
- How could you find speaking engagements?
- How could you network with other coaches?
Coaching questions for those starting a practice

Pray and Reflect - spend time listening and reflecting
- What do I know God has called me to?
- What do others say about my coaching abilities?
- Where do I feel a sense of God’s leading?

Find your niche – identify your specialty
- What are your areas of passion?
- Who is your ideal client?
- Where does your experience lead you?

Pump up your credentials – get and remain competitive
- What assessments might you take?
- What type of training or continuing education might be helpful?
- Who might serve you well as a coach mentor?
- What endorsements could you get from previous clients?

Get incorporated – make it legal
- What coaches in similar situations might you talk with to get ideas?
- What type of organizational structure would be most beneficial to you?
- How could you find out more about your options?
- What are the tax ramifications?
- What types of legal protection might you need if a dispute arose?

Don’t quit your day job... yet – consider the cost
- What benefits and connections might your day job continue to provide you?
- What are some of the costs keeping your day job might entail?
- What credibility does your day job lend you?

Take speaking engagements – find the right venues
- What public speaking venues might be open to you? Consider churches, businesses, special interest groups, etc.
- What speaking venues fit well with your coaching specialties?
- Who might you help who is already doing this type of public speaking?

Network to find clients – making connections
- Who could you tell about your new coaching practice?
- Who do you know in the fields you’re interested in coaching?
- What organizations might be important to be a part of? (coaching organizations, special interest organizations)
- What events, trainings or conferences might be helpful to attend?
Get a coach mentor – make steps toward growth
• What coach do you most want to model yourself after?
• What might you be able to learn from them?
• What are some of the ways a coach mentor might be of help to you as you build your practice?

Coach within an organization – become part of a team
• What organizations do you know of that offer in-house coaching?
• Which organizations work within areas of interest for you?
• Where might you do some volunteer coaching?
• What are some other ways you might gain experience within a larger system?

Select an appropriate fee structure – what to charge
• What is your skill level in coaching?
• How could you determine that with greater accuracy?
• How much experience do you have?
• How are you intentionally continuing to grow?
• What are other coaches in your area charging?