

By C.J. Hayden, MCC

# Coaching the Winners

How to attract clients you'll love

**In the early years** of my coaching practice, I sometimes found myself dreading the next session. Many of my clients were wonderful, but there were also those who were stuck, resistant, or lacked commitment to their goals. Working with these clients was a chore, and it seemed as if my coaching had little value for them. Nothing I did worked to get them moving and keep them on track, and it made me question my newly-acquired coaching abilities.

When grouching about this situation with a colleague, he offered me a new perspective: "You know, great coaches need great clients." Of course! In order for me to become a powerful coach with a thriving practice, I needed a roster of eager, motivated, coachable clients. If I wanted to succeed in this profession, I would have to fire clients who were holding me back, and be more selective about the people I chose to work with.

That sounds like a simple plan, but if you're struggling to fill your practice, it's hard to let go of clients who are already on board. And if new clients you don't really want show up, can you have the courage to turn them away, hoping that better clients will come along?

What I discovered was that choosing only the best clients to work with



had a payoff that was worth every scary moment. As I eliminated the stuck clients from my practice, I enjoyed coaching more and gained confidence. With a roster of clients who were making progress and achieving results, I finally felt like a real coach.

Instead of marketing becoming more of a challenge, it actually became easier. With a clearer picture of who I wanted to work with, my marketing was more focused. Since all of my clients were now winners, I could confidently enroll new clients by talking about these positive results. And my successful clients enthusiastically referred me to friends and colleagues, something my stuck clients had never done.

Here are three strategies I used that can ensure you land the clients you really want and have the courage to gently refuse those you don't.

## *1) Take a stand for who you want your clients to be*

Selecting a specific market niche is probably the most crucial decision you can make to build a thriving coaching practice. But far too many coaches refuse to make this decision. It seems they fear that choosing a niche will be too limiting. They are afraid to narrow their horizons. They believe they won't find enough clients in just one niche, so they try to sell coaching to everyone, thinking that this will be more likely to produce rapid results.

But the truth about choosing a niche is that it doesn't limit you; it focuses you. It's just like asking your clients to identify a specific goal to work on. If a client came to you and said, "I want to be successful," you would probably suggest that he design a measurable goal for his

success. If your client responded that he found goals to be too limiting, and he preferred to work on his success randomly, you would tear your hair out. How can you coach someone on success if he can't or won't define what it looks like?

Having a defined market niche for your coaching actually makes getting clients easier, not harder. It allows you to effectively and efficiently make new connections, become known for something, and build ongoing relationships with a consistent audience.

can always change your niche and try another one. But if you persist in marketing to anyone and everyone, it will probably take you much longer to both get clients and learn who the best ones really are.

Choose to work with people you really care about, those whose goals and problems are important to you. Don't select a niche just because you think there might be good money there or you happen to have existing contacts in it. The clients who will bring out the best in you will be the ones you have a strong affinity to

team-building for high tech companies. Should you be attending Chamber of Commerce mixers? You might make some contacts there, but wouldn't your time be better spent attending meetings of technical professionals?

Or imagine your niche is midlife women in career transition, and you are marketing yourself by giving talks. You think the service clubs in your area would be interested in hearing about topics like goal-setting or work/life balance. You might find a few potential clients that way.

**“Some niches naturally attract more coachable clients than others.”**

### 2) *Identify a niche you love working in*

The most powerful niche definitions are those that identify both a target market and a professional specialty. For example, your target market could be midlife women, and your specialty could be career transition. Or your market might be small business owners, and your specialty in marketing. Or you could target high tech companies with a specialty of team-building. When you have a niche this specific, it enables you to easily identify and reach out to potential clients.

Particularly when you are new to coaching, choosing a niche can be challenging. Here are some suggestions that might help with this important choice:

It's usually more important *that* you choose than *what* you choose. If you identify a niche and design your marketing around it, you are likely to get clients in that niche quickly. Once you do, you will learn if they are right for you. If they aren't, you

and feel passionate about helping.

Decide on a niche that will enable you to coach more winners. Some niches naturally attract more coachable clients than others. For example, I chose to coach entrepreneurs because I discovered that my entrepreneurial clients were typically some of the most committed and motivated clients I had. If you are trying to decide between two or more niches, pick the one where you think the most winners might be.

### 3) *Market yourself exclusively to your chosen audience*

It seems obvious: plan to pursue and attract only those clients you really want. But straightforward as it seems, this is where many coaches go astray. They make the mistake of thinking that any marketing opportunity is a good one, and they spend time and money reaching out to audiences that simply aren't on target.

For example, suppose your marketing plan includes attending networking events, and your niche is

But wouldn't you produce better results if you spoke at women's business and professional clubs on finding a fulfilling career after 40?

Once you have decided on a niche, you should use it to focus and tailor all of your marketing. That way, you'll begin to attract clients to you instead of having to chase after them. People will easily be able to remember and refer you because you are the coach who “helps midlife women find fulfilling work” or “helps high-tech companies build stronger teams.”

Great coaches need great clients. So don't be afraid to claim your ideal clients and turn away those who won't bring out the best in you. Coaching only the winners will ultimately make you a more confident, successful coach. •

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