

## **The Ten Keys to Building Your Coaching Business Beyond the Next Level**

By Suzi Pomerantz, MT., MCC.

[www.innovativeleader.com](http://www.innovativeleader.com)

[www.sealthedealbook.com](http://www.sealthedealbook.com)

*[This article first appeared in the International Journal of Coaching in Organizations, 2005, 3(4). It can be downloaded and printed for personal use only. Please obtain prior written permission for wider printing and distribution from John Lazar, IJCO Co-Executive Editor, at [john@ijco.info](mailto:john@ijco.info).]*

When you sit back and think about your business, what are the questions that you wrangle with the most? Are they questions of expanding your business, of how to stay competitive in the market, of how to expand your operation to include your network of colleagues into multi-coach interventions in organizations?

You have been selling coaching services long enough to know that there are natural, seasonal cycles to the market and you've probably already found business development systems to support you as you ride the waves of that current. Maybe you've overcome the hurdle of building your business while billing time and sustaining the momentum of sales so that you can balance your time between doing the work and getting more work. Perhaps you've mastered the use of the Lessons Learned Meeting to cut your sales cycle time in half and expand the sale while serving the client. Now you want to define what is next for your business. Where are you headed? Survival is no longer the goal, now you can focus on growth. Or not. What is the next level for you? What would represent a quantum leap beyond the next level? Do you even want that?

Whether you are an experienced coach who has built a sustainable business grappling with questions about where you'd like to take your business next, or you are seeking a selling system for building your business, you will need a systematic action plan that integrates three distinct domains: networking, marketing and sales. Of course, the first step is to strategically assess what the next level of your business will look like. Do you know what you want to do and what it will take to get there? Are you doing all you can to create the coaching opportunities you want? Do you have a concrete, systematic format for developing new business and new coaching clients? Are you methodically implementing a strategic plan? Take a few minutes to explore the ten keys below to see where you might be able to perform a minor mindset adjustment to tweak your business development efforts in a way that will get you what you want for your business and for yourself. None of these is rocket science, or truly new information, however you may not have thought of them in the context of business development before.

### 1. How Big is Big Enough?

To expand or not to expand? That is the question. If so, how? Stop to think about if your business is big enough. That means you have strategically created an entity separate from your profession that has the capacity to hold the systems, people, strategies, financial goals, streams of income, and outreach methodologies that will attract and create the business that matches your values, vision, purpose, goals, intentions and dreams. Does your business serve you while you serve your clients? Are you leading your business, or is your business running you? If you trade your time for money without additional streams of revenue, then you are self-employed, which is distinct from being a business owner. Did you intentionally choose that? If so, and it has been working for you, is it time to explore what it would take to go from a self-employed practitioner to a business owner? Business owners focus their strategies on systems and people: there are two ways to make money ...either people work for you or your money works for you. To build a million dollar coaching business you need to leverage other people. Do you want to manage people and create systems or do you find that by remaining more of a free-lance self-employed coach you have more flexibility to create joint ventures and alliances and partner with colleagues to expand your market offering without having to build a business to do so? Do you define yourself as a practitioner, manager, entrepreneur, or all three? There are a few great resources that will guide this inquiry further: [The E-myth](#) by Michael Gerber, [Rich Dad, Poor Dad](#) by Robert Kiyosaki, and [www.liveoutloud.com](http://www.liveoutloud.com) website which has free downloads and free teleseminars that

support financial literacy and strategic business building. If you want to multiply your income, you will likely need to change what you are doing. The business strategy you choose will determine the size of the business you can build, providing you have done the pre-work to clarify for yourself how big is big enough for you. Having said all that, I hereby give you permission to not grow your business at all. It is okay to accept that running your own coaching business may not be the highest and best use of your personal coaching strengths, and you might be better served to take an internal position in an organization in which you can use your coaching skills with your peers and employees.

## 2. Building Business While Billing Time

We are all familiar with the frustration of the cycle that has us, as coaches, generate a full pipeline of leads that suddenly start to pop like popcorn, generating business that we then devote our time to delivering. While we are focused on client service and deliverables, we often lose our focus and momentum on marketing and sales, thus resulting in the discomfort of finding ourselves wrapping up projects or client engagements with no further gigs on the horizon and we must start all over again to build up the business development bench strength. “But, I’m too busy to do any marketing or sales now...I need to focus on being billable, and the time I spend selling is not billable time”. Does this sound like anyone you know? In a systematic business development strategy, you can utilize two strategies that will allow you to continue to build business while billing time, thus cutting your overall sales cycle in half and expediting your acquisition of additional billable time while reducing the amount of time you spend in-between gigs. One strategy is the Lessons Learned Meeting as a business development tool, and the other is actively building your business through referrals. The Lessons Learned Meeting is a structured interview with your clients and key decision-makers in the organization that takes place in the middle of the engagement as well as at the end. It is a time to check in with your clients and learn from them what is working and what can be improved as well as a time to share with them what they can do better or differently to help you to do your job better. Typically, these sessions are a mutual admiration and acknowledgement fest, which is a fabulous time to a.) ask for testimonials, b.) ask for referrals, and c.) ask what other challenges, issues, projects, or needs are coming up for your client so you can shift the lessons learned conversation into a sales conversation. When interacting with your clients at any point in time when they express gratitude or appreciation for your skill and contribution, you can ask for referrals. There are three keys to getting referrals: 1. Provide exceptional service. 2. Express the importance of referrals to your business. 3. Ask for referrals. Of course, once the referral becomes business, you close the loop with a handwritten note or small gift to the referral source.

## 3. No One is On the Bench

How do you actively stay competitive in this rapidly expanding market? Networking and business development are not spectator sports. Not only do you have to be in the game, on the court, out in the field, but you must think of everyone else in the world as also being in the game with you. There are no benchwarmers, which means that none of your interactions with any other human being is ever wasted. Every moment is an opportunity for building relationships, for speaking your vision to everyone all the time. Another critical piece of this mindset is to operate from the assumption that everyone wants to help you. This assumption will allow you to make big, bold, outrageous requests that will encourage and invite people to contribute to your growing business and blossoming self. If you are not networking all the time, what is in the way of that? Even if you spend most of your time with fellow coaching colleagues, they can be great networking and business development resources for you. Staying competitive in the market may not actually be about competition.

Let’s explore competition for a minute. In a personal services business like coaching in organizations, even though you and all your would-be-competitors offer similar or even the same services (360’s, MBTI, individual coaching, team coaching, situational leadership, presentation

skills, etc.), so much of what you do is unique to you as an individual, therefore do you truly have competitors in your market? Here's a mindset that better serves coaches to expand our offering into organizations and be able to provide larger scale interventions than individual coaches: I've heard it referred to as *coopetition*, an amalgam of cooperation and competition. The idea is one of collaboration with competitors, or turning competitors into partners by building alliances and joint ventures as a business development strategy. If you struggle with staying competitive in the market, identify those you perceive to be your biggest competitors and approach them to create coopetition arrangements that serve everyone and the greater good of the client organization. It is the old win-win concept that we facilitate our clients to attain...just applied to your own business growth strategy.

#### 4. It's a Numbers Game

There is a process to sales. In order to leverage that process, it is important to understand the numbers involved. Typically, research shows that it takes ten phone calls to reach six people to set up one meeting. It takes ten meetings to get one client. That means that for some folks, they would have to call 100 people to get each client. If ten clients is considered a full schedule, that means 1000 phone calls. The sales process can take anywhere from 5 minutes to 7 years, depending on your circumstances. Your personal hit rates may be quite different from the general numbers mentioned here, but until you know and understand the numbers, it is very easy to get attached to specific outcomes, and to take it personally when you do not get clients. Persistence and resilience are part of this game. I've heard that 80% of people stop trying to connect with a prospective client after their 3<sup>rd</sup> attempt, however 80% of all sales are made after the 5<sup>th</sup> attempt to connect! Recognizing that it is a numbers game will allow you to keep your pipelines fully loaded, and to create the bench strength you need to continually generate sales. The gift in this numbers game is that it removes any of those pesky attachment issues many of our colleagues face. It is nearly impossible to be attached to the outcome of sales if you have more leads than you can track! Sales is only frustrating and emotional if we do not have enough possibilities in the pipeline, therefore we get attached to needing each lead to become business. If you are actively pursuing five strong leads, you have time to think about each one and to pine for it to work out in your favor. If you are pursuing 150 leads, it becomes very difficult to have high hopes pinned on any one of them, therefore freeing you up to focus on the sales process rather than specific potential opportunities.

#### 5. Scarcity to Abundance: Shifting Your Money Conversation

We could devote an entire issue of the journal to this topic. Are you undervaluing your experience and under-pricing your coaching services? Our executive clients take us more seriously if we are priced in league with them...how credible are you if your hourly rate is more along the lines of what their administrative staff earns? There is a scarcity mentality prevalent in our professional community. This scarcity thinking leads to coaches undervaluing themselves, their experience, and their education which leads to under-pricing coaching services.

There are scarcity mindsets and coaching belief systems embedded in our professional community and propagated in our coach training schools that set up coaches to not make money. One such approach is the concept of giving away free coaching sessions to lure in clients. In reality, this method primarily allows the coach to undervalue his services and to attract clients who are more committed to getting something for free than who truly value the coach and the service. Once someone gets your services for free, it is very difficult to transition to paying high dollars for it. Do not diminish yourself or our profession by attaching a valuation of zero to our work. You can make a huge contribution to the world by providing pro bono services to those who cannot afford it, but giving it away for free as a sales ploy is inauthentic and gimmicky. Offer a reduced introductory rate, if you must, but stop giving away free samples.

I am continually amazed at the statistics I read about the coaching profession that estimate that fewer than 7% of coaches are making a living at it. Yet there are a small percentage of sufficiently

abundance and prosperity minded coaches who are generating sustainable six figure revenues through coaching, and even fewer who have successful business models such that they are doing multimillion dollar coaching businesses. Financial literacy<sup>1</sup> coupled with abundance thinking can help coaches to shift the money conversation in our profession.

## 6. Helping Professions and the Conflict With Sales

Coaches are not unlike the other helping professions. Self-employed doctors, lawyers, accountants, artists, and mental health professionals often sabotage their own efforts to make a healthy living or amass personal wealth by not engaging in prosperity-generating mindsets. Often, they are not aware of and are not taught or trained in a systemic sales process, so they find themselves truly committed to helping others and hoping that that will be sufficient to attract clients. They have a helping mindset and are hoping for sales. Often they have a negative view of sales and perceive it to be about forcing oneself on others, or pushing people to do something they don't want to do. Shifting to reframing their current sales mindset to one of helping and meaningfulness would allow them to integrate their commitment with sales activity. The other thing I see a lot of is that people may be excellent practitioners, but often they are not business people or sales people. To truly succeed in business, we must be coaches who think like business people and we must consider ourselves to be the sales executive in our own businesses. If we think of sales as helping others to determine if our services and products would be useful to them or not, we can begin to integrate our commitment to helping with our need to sell. Approach every sales conversation seeking ways to help, with no pitches, no agendas, no attachments to closing. You can feel good about selling if it's about making a difference with people, impacting leadership, or improving organizations in a global economy. Identify your current mindsets about sales and see how you can reframe sales to align with your values.

## 7. Asking for What You Want

Closing the deal becomes very simple...almost a non-event if you've been fully present in the conversation. It is a matter of listening for the opportunity to ask for what you want. Yes, you have to actually ask for the "buy". You have to ask your client to contract with you. You have to ask for the money. However, if you have been selling through your natural style, using a coaching approach to sales, having an abundance mentality, and a helping mindset, then closing is as effortless as falling off a log. If you find that you have blocks when it comes to closing deals, then I'd refer you back to number 6 above and suggest that producing for yourself a shift in your money conversation will allow you to generate a breakthrough in asking for and getting what you want. The hardest part is knowing what you want. If you know what you want, then take the risk to ask for it. If you are not crystal clear about what you want, don't ask for anything until you attain that clarity, because you will only confuse yourself and cloud the energy flow.

## 8. Thinking Big, Playing Big

Once you've removed your blocks and left scarcity thinking behind, it is time to invent. Without the shackles of thinking small, what's possible? Can you double your rates? Can you re-think your sales strategy? Can you transition to a new business model? If the restraints are off...what do you really want? Do you have a coaching practice or are you building a coaching business? How big is a big enough business? Do you have the right team around you to build something that will continue to support you, sustain your continual learning and development, allow you to focus on continual improvement in the areas of customer service and product development? Are you working as much or as little as you wish? Do you love all your clients? If you could have anything in your coaching business, what would it be? What will it take to get there from here? What would it look like if your business surpassed even your own wildest dreams?

## 9. Harness the Sales Process

Knowing that sales is a process, respecting the numbers involved, and increasing your awareness

of your own sales cycle will allow you to leverage the information in this article to take your business to the next level. In order to truly harness the sales process there are three things required: 1. Work the system, 2. Be in continual action. 3. It is also critical to understand the distinctions between networking, marketing and sales so that you can track your progress in all three areas. It takes activity in all three domains to produce dollars, clients, and business. Networking involves all the steps you take to meet people and begin to develop relationships. Marketing is all the stuff you do communicate your credibility and service offering to the world. Making calls, scheduling meetings with those in your target list, and asking for the “buy” are sales activities

#### 10. Mailbox Money

Eventually, we get tired of selling our time for money. There is only so big you can grow your business that way, because time is limited to 24 hours in a day and you are limited in how many of those hours of each of your days you can sell. The answer is to find multiple streams of coaching income, and multiple revenue sources outside of coaching as well. Perhaps you create products that leverage core content in a specific niche market, perhaps you catch the wave of the current trend to harness the internet to reach prospective clients and sell products. Perhaps you have secured an in-house position to utilize your coaching mastery, or you’ve branched into real estate or other investment strategies to put your money to work for you. If you are not thinking about or doing anything to generate passive income, that is – money that you earn that is not directly linked to an exchange for your time, then you might consider one or more of these avenues to take your business to the next level. How can you leverage those teleclasses you lead? Can you videotape yourself next time you are in front of the room leading a meeting or training session? Can you find a colleague to interview you on video or by telephone line that is then recorded and put into an MP3 file that folks can download from your website? Have you written a book or been meaning to? Can you take the materials that you have created for various client engagements and link them together somehow into a workbook or monograph that you can sell? Do all your products and services support a common vision, purpose, or set of values that you stand for? Where are you not accountable to yourself for what you and your business stand for and how can diversifying your revenue streams support that?

No matter where you are in your coaching business, there will come a time when you wonder what’s next. Choosing which door to open next requires some reflection and inquiry. Often, the door we choose appears to be locked. We can momentarily see what’s possible, and then upon setting out to achieve it we find obstacles and hurdles to overcome. Perhaps the key to opening the locked door is one of the ten keys described above? I invite you to engage in a dialogue, either in the forum of this journal or elsewhere in the coaching world, to raise the level of financial literacy and business acumen of our profession such that coaching businesses continue to grow and thrive in the global market.

---

<sup>i</sup> Financial Literacy is a booming coaching and training industry. Books by Robert Kiyosaki are a good resource, and you can learn more at [www.Liveoutloud.com](http://www.Liveoutloud.com) to explore how one of our coaching colleagues, Loral Langemeier, has generated millions by coaching people around the concepts of financial literacy.