



BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT RESOURCES FOR COACHES

A Brief Introduction

To some extent, there is a standard approach to business development for life, business, and career coaches just starting out. The basics of this include:

- **Articulating a niche.** There are two main reasons for this: identifying a personal passion so that you have authentic, mission-driven work is the first. The second is the idea that you can capture a larger percent of the potential client attention the narrower your niche is. Someone who offers general coaching, for example, is competing against all other coaches; but someone who offers expatriate coaching for people locating to South America can be far more targeted and get more targeted referrals. That said, you do not have to feel that you completely box yourself in and can have some more general and flexible practice.
- **Developing a web page.** Your website is your best calling card. It should reflect you, personally, and be an opportunity for prospective clients to see who you are and have a means of contacting you. Your web site should stand out from others as really being about you as a unique coach. Imagine, for instance, one site that says “I coach the whole person toward goals they value” (a generic approach) and another site that says, “My goal is to work with you the shortest amount of time humanly possible! I want to protect your time and budget by making certain we get the most mileage out of each session.” That feels a little more counter-intuitive and engaging. Note: most clients are not going to be random people trolling the Web for a coach using general Google searches; they will be referred to you by other clients you have served well.
- **Using free sessions.** It is standard practice to offer a no-risk initial consultation. You should think seriously about how long this session is and what you include in it. My opinion is that people who come to coaching want some coaching, and so the intake session ought to be long enough to include some coaching—20 or 30



minutes perhaps. I favor a slightly longer intake to allow for get-to-know-you conversation, some discussion of whether and how to work together, some coaching, and some debriefing. I don't think that prospective clients should be forced to make a decision on the spot. These sessions are a good opportunity for both of you to make a solid, thoughtful decision about how well you fit.

- **Establishing an online presence.** A few years ago, this meant having a blog and newsletter. This is still popular but it is notoriously slow and difficult to build a wide readership for such tools. What's more, the Internet is cluttered with duplicated posts on highly overlapping topics. You should pursue this route if A) you love writing, and B) you have a unique approach to addressing topics.
- **Creating a client funnel with workshops or other products/services.** I generally dislike phrases like "client funnel" and similar marketing speak. Not that marketing is wrong but that it can, at times, clash with our human-centered mission as coaches. We want to avoid thinking of clients as "sales" and commodifying them. What we do want is to offer really high-quality services that will represent tangible benefit to people who deserve it. Many coaches pursue this ethic by offering workshops, courses, and related services because A) these expanded services also fit their mission of helping others develop, and B) people who like these services sometimes also benefit from coaching.

Other Resources for Business Development

Branding and Marketing

Every other year, the ICF gathers thought-leaders to engage in a series on [business development](#). These include coverage of topics such as branding, marketing, sales, creating a business plan, and the use of social media platforms. The most recent series was hosted in 2022 and includes a wide range of on-demand offerings. The 2020 and 2018 versions are also available for purchase with the older offered at a lower price point. As an alternative to the ICF offering, there is a [business development course](#) offered by the Whole Being Institute. It is asynchronous (pre-recorded lessons) and comes with 30 ICF resource development credits. The faculty member is Lynda Wallace, who is a former executive, experienced coach, and graduate of the Positive Acorn program.



Book Recommendations for Business Development

[Different, by Yongme Moon](#)

This book offers a refreshing take on marketing. Rather than adopting best practices, Moon suggests that companies do well when they try to distinguish themselves. As an example, most discount furniture stores offer home delivery and assembly in an effort to attract customers. Imagine, by contrast, an inexpensive home furnishing company that says “we will not deliver and we will not assemble your furniture but we will feed you sushi in our store and carry kitchen and other household good.” Welcome to Ikea and its breakout success. Moon’s book is full of stories that should inspire you to distinguish yourself from the competitive herd.

[The E-Myth, By Michael Gerber](#)

This is a small-business classic. The e-myth (or entrepreneur myth) is the idea that opening a business will allow you to do what you love for a living. His classic example is someone who loves making pies, opens a bakery, and never makes a pie again. They are too busy with inventory, payroll, and other aspects of running a business. It is a solid book on business development processes and philosophies that is not specific to coaching but can be applied to coaching.

[Make Money as a Life Coach, by Sally Miller & Melissa Ricker](#)

This book covers the usual suspects of niche, pricing, first sessions, getting clients, developing expertise, and the other standard topics of business development for beginning coaches. It is the type of information that is available in courses, blogs, and other online sources but it is collated in one place here in this book. If you are familiar with these topics, you can give this book a pass but if these are new topics for you, it is an easy way to familiarize yourself with them.

[The Business Book of Coaching, by Neeta Bhushan & Ajit Nwalkha](#)

It can sometimes be hard to find a book on developing a coaching business that doesn’t overpromise business success, treat clients like commodities, or come across as a get-rich-quick scheme. There is much in this book that is worthwhile food for thought. There are good parts on cultivating a passion-based business and communicating effectively with current and prospective clients.