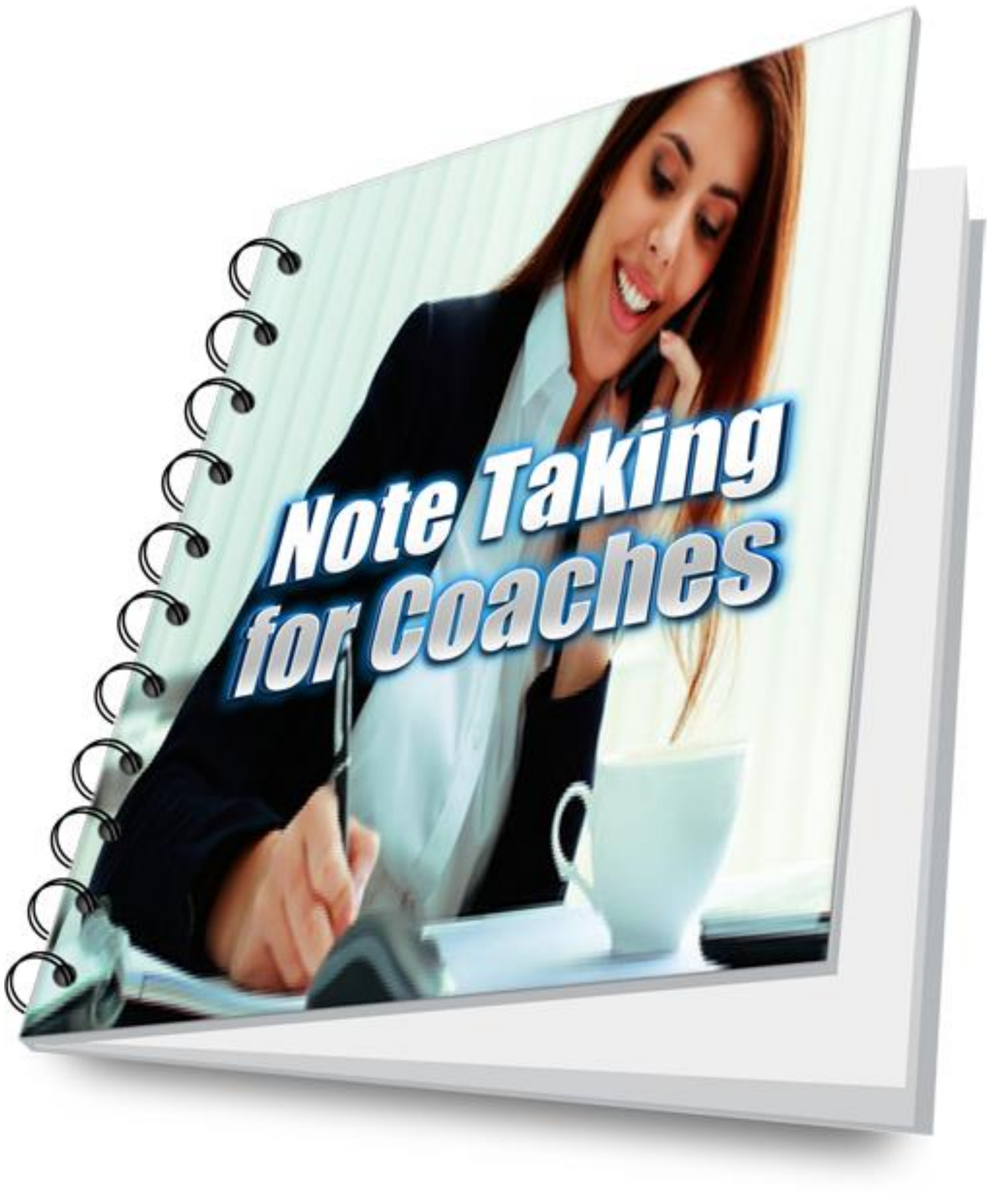

www.CoachCertificationAlliance.com/RegisterL1.php

Glenn Livingston, Ph.D.

Note Taking for Coaches

Sharon Livingston, Ph.D.

The New York Times

Entrepreneur

CRAIN'S NEW YORK BUSINESS

ADWEEK

Originally trained as a psychologist, Dr. Glenn Livingston has helped literally thousands of clients. Along with his wife Sharon, he's sold consulting, teambuilding, and workshops to big names like AT&T, Nextel, Panasonic, Whirlpool, Novartis, Lipton, Colgate-Palmolive, Kraft, and Panasonic. Their work, research, and theories have been seen in major media publications like The New York Times, Entrepreneur Magazine, Crain's NY Business, AdWeek, America West, and more!

"According to Our Students We Run One of the Most Powerful Certification Programs for Coaches Who Want to Grow a Thriving Practice...*And Now You Can TEST-DRIVE It for a $25 One Time Payment!"*

Contents

Introduction

Because coaching is an unregulated industry, there are no clear “rules” or government expectations for keeping a chart or taking notes on your coaching clients.

Notwithstanding this, in our considered experience keeping a chart and taking notes on clients taking is extremely valuable and important for every kind of coach. It helps you remember key points about your sessions, track your client’s progress, and protect yourself in the event of a conflict. *(It’s relatively rare for coaches to get sued unless they make outlandish promises or egregious mistakes… but if it does happen your notes are likely to be the only record of what went on, and are therefore crucial for your defense)*

More importantly taking notes helps “clear your palate” between clients so you can be more fully present for the next person. When things are written down your brain can stop worrying about important details from the last session and focus on the person in front of you.

There are a number of questions to consider as you're setting up your coaching practice when it comes to taking notes.

- When should I take notes?
- How should I take notes?
- What sort of information should I keep?
- Should I discuss taking notes with my clients?
- How long should I keep notes?

Although many coaches skip note taking altogether, I’ve actually found more successful coaches almost always keep charts. Perhaps not meticulous charts like you might see in the medical profession. But charts with key information they could rely upon.

Which is why I've always taught my coaches the importance of having a chart with key elements for each and every client. I tell them to include, at minimum: (1) A description of the client including their approximate age and gender (2) client contact information such as name, address, and phone number; (3) the client's goals *(including a time frame in which they can hope to achieve a measurable outcome)*; (4) expectations for the coaching relationship, including clear documentation that the difference between coaching vs. psychotherapy, counseling, and other licensed professions was explained to the client*… and that the client understood and agreed with these distinctions, ideally accompanied by a signed agreement;* (5) referral source.

What's more, I ask my coaches to update goals in their client's charts at least once every six months. Why? Because people often achieve and/or change their goals without telling you. And it's hard to help your client get what they want out of the relationship if you don't know what that is! So you need to periodically re-visit and re-document client goals.

Beyond putting these assessment measures in writing, at minimum you'll want to make a "progress note" of at least three sentences after each session. Progress notes should include (a) what the client presented; (b) any movement—*or lack thereof*—towards their most current set of goals; (c) how you, the coach, interacted and/or intervened to help them achieve their goals, including assignments you've given; (d) whether the client came on time and completed the whole session; (e) whether the client completed any assignments given; (f) if there was any conflict about the coaching relationship itself, what that conflict was and how the coach responded.

I also recommend my coaches have a section in their chart to track payments, and just make a note whenever a client misses one and/or pays the wrong amount. *(It's usually an underpayment, but overpayments can be a problem too)*

And the charts should either be kept in a locked file cabinet or encrypted and secured with a password to protect the client's confidentiality. Almost every word processing program has such a feature these days.

After the first few sessions with any given client most coaches develop a kind of rhythm for all of this… it doesn't take more than a minute or two, so don't let it throw you, OK?

Pros of taking notes

- Notes remind you what you discussed in the session, progress the client has made, and any assignments you've given the client
- Quickly reviewing your notes for each client you're about to see on a given day can remind you of anything you need to do to be prepare. It can also help you spot patterns and particular resistances the clients may be experiencing. For example, you can quickly see if a given client is starting to come late, miss sessions, or avoid payment. I've always found these problems are better dealt with early before they become a major issue… and they're almost always representative of something significant going on in the client's life.
- You can track the number of sessions you've had with the client, different coaching strategies you've tried, the goals you've agreed upon with the client, and strategies you've agreed upon the client undertaking to meet their goals.
- You can also use the progress notes to help you remember key questions you want to ask the client, or remind you of an important issue you want to monitor.
- Finally, glancing over your charts can help bring key issues to the forefront for discussion with your own supervisor or one-on-one coach

Cons of taking notes

- If you see clients face-to-face, note-taking may be distracting and may cause the client to edit when he's saying to you. *(I personally don't take notes DURING face to face sessions… but I do leave a few minutes afterwards to jot down key points. On Skype or the telephone I have a pad and paper by my side and scribble a few points to help me remember what I want to come back to… but I don't write the actual formal progress note in the chart until the session is over.)*

- Taking notes during a session *could* distract you from hearing what the client has to say, which could hurt your coaching practice. However, I definitely do know coaches who take extensive notes during sessions, including my darling wife. , As far as I can tell neither way is better than the other, so you should experiment and see what's most comfortable and effective for you personally.

When to take notes

As mentioned above, Sharon and I both take notes, but we differ about *when* we do it. Sharon likes to take notes during her coaching sessions. I schedule some free time afterwards to write down key points and my thoughts about the session.

You can also do a combination of in-session notes and writing after a session. You can jot down a word or two to remind you what to write after the session. Jotting down a word or two is an effective way to keep from getting too distracted during a session. It only takes a second to write a word or phrase, which will help you stay focused.

It's also important to distinguish between writing in your client's chart vs. your own personal journaling which happens to include thoughts and free associations about the client.

Remember, the client chart is the only record of what's gone on in the coaching relationship. I theoretically could be subpoenaed by a court of law. So I "chart defensively", relying on it primarily to document that I've done a good job and attended to my responsibilities as a coach, but nevertheless containing enough of the information above to help me in the ways already discussed.

> *(IMPORTANT: Most states tend to view the chart as the client's property. So unless the client requests the chart themselves I try to claim its privileged information. And unless ordered otherwise by the courts—remember coaches aren't protected by the same doctor-client confidentiality as doctors are, even if they happen to be a doctor like me—I NEVER release a chart without the client's written permission!)*

But every coach inevitably gets "stuck" with certain clients. At these times it's really helpful to both talk to your own coach or supervisor—*and*—to journal about what the particular client is touching off in you personally. I tend NOT to save these journal entries. Instead, I use them as a way to *<u>temporarily</u>* "think on paper." Then I transfer the key insights and possible action plans into the chart itself.

This way my own thoughts remain my own business, and I'm free to think anything I like without worrying I might someday have to share them with my clients or a court.

Other Information You May Include in Your Notes

Note-taking allows you to keep a record of a wide variety of information that will be helpful to your client and to your coaching practice. Here's a list of items you may want to include:

- A short, factual narrative of what you talked about in the session.
- If you assigned homework, if the client did it and any comments.
- Any comment the client made regarding their own punctuality
- How many sessions the client has had… what number session is this?
- Client comments or concerns about payment.
- Any questions you plan to ask the client during the next session.
- A detailed description of the Homework you assigned *(and why you assigned it, related to their goal)*…
- Specific and detailed descriptions of any progress made toward the client's goals…
- Anything you have promised to do for the client before the next session.
- The agreed upon date and time of the next session.

If you are seeing lots of clients, this information will be very helpful to review before you see the client again. You can organize your notes in folders that include signed copies of your contract and your initial assessment. Pull the clients you are seeing the next day at the end of the day before to review.

In-Session Note-taking methods

If you're going to take notes in the sessions themselves as a "coaches thinking and organizational aid", these will probably not wind up wholly in your client's chart. Considering this, below you'll find some ideas on how to be more effective with your in-session note-taking:

Most of us think about taking notes from lectures in high school or college. We would listen to a professor lecture and write down the main points of what we heard. Some of us took pages and pages of notes in each class. Others simply created an outline.

But you're probably never going to be "tested on the material" the way you were in school… so give yourself the freedom to create a style which is genuinely most effective and comfortable for you. There's no right or wrong way. Here are some suggestions:

- Write a few sentences about what happened in the session. At the end, write any questions you have, feelings you have about the session, and anything you need to bring up with your own coach.
- Draw a line down the center of a page. On one side, write the facts about what the client's presenting, and how they reacted to your coaching interventions. On the other side of the page, write your questions, thoughts and concerns.
- Outline the meeting with bullet points and write questions, concerns, etc., in the margin.

.

However you choose to take notes, it's a good idea to keep it consistent so it becomes a tool you can rely on. A good way to keep achieve this is to create a template.

Your clients and note-taking

It's relatively rare for clients to ask about their charts and your note taking methods. But when they do, their biggest concern is whether they will be kept confidential. You need to assure clients both verbally and within your contract that your notes will be confidential.

But you also need to clarify the limits of confidentiality in coaching. The promise of confidentiality in the coaching industry is an oath of honor, NOT a legal protection.

This is very different from psychology, psychiatry, or medicine. Let's walk through an example. *(Because we are not attorneys—and—because the law varies somewhat by country and state this is NOT legal advice. Consult an attorney if you require legal advice applying to your situation.)*

Let's say your client comes in and confesses to a murder during their first session.   Generally speaking:

- **IF YOU ARE A PSYCHOLOGIST**: You can encourage your client to confess to the police. But you're not permitted to share the information with anyone, or to tell the police about them. You could be censured and/or have trouble with your licensing board if you do.
- **IF YOU ARE A COACH**: You might brought up on charges as an accomplice if you do NOT tell the police.

On the other hand, every professional regardless of license has a "duty to warn" in most states if they learn of a crime being planned, if warning may prevent serious harm to the client or others, and/or if they discover any kind of child abuse. *(This is not a comprehensive list but covers most cases)*

Now, you probably don't want to go through the above example unless your client specifically asks you about how confidentiality applies to criminal events because you'll just frighten them away. But for your own protection you'll want to have something like the following in your coaching contracts:

> LIMITS OF CONFIDENTIALITY: In the absence of a court order, written permission from me to do otherwise, or impending potential harm to myself or others, I understand my coach's lips will remain sealed about anything and everything we discuss.   However, I also understand a coaching relationship is not afforded the same status as a doctor-patient relationship by the courts, and a court may, in some circumstances, be able to force my coach to testify.

If your client asks about how you handle confidentiality when discussing client issues during supervision—and they almost never do!—be clear that you won't use names or identifying details. *(Whether or not ANY listener could ever identify the specific client you're discussing is a decent litmus test of whether you're adequately maintaining confidentiality by the way)*

From time to time a client may ask for a copy of your notes. The rare times this has happened I've asked the client why they feel it would be in their best interest to have them…

Generally it's because they'd like to be sure they could work with another coach at any time without losing the benefit from our work together. They don't want to "start over"

I tell these people I'll do them one better—if they ever want to work with another coach *(or any other professional)* I'd be happy to talk to that professional personally to explain what we've accomplished… and I can remain a resource whenever they might need to consult me again.

That usually does the trick. I prefer it this way. I don't think it's in a client's best interest to review your notes. Because notes-done-right not only contain valuable information about the coaching plan/client progress… they contain information intended to defend the coach in the event of a legal event. And this makes the relationship seem pretty "cold"

Storing notes

In my psychology training we were taught we had to keep records for seven years, including all correspondence with the client. After seven years, we were supposed to shred the documents to safeguard confidentiality.

I never really understood this. I always felt if you went to the trouble of creating a record, you should keep the record indefinitely. And these days with the digitalization of record keeping and the strength of computer encryption as compared to a locked file cabinet, I don't see any reason to destroy client records…

I've had clients come back to talk to me 15 years later and been very grateful that I could quickly get up to speed by just reviewing their records.

Of course, you'll want to take your own attorney's advice here… and (s)he may very well disagree with me. But I've always felt that since I practice very safely (I don't do anything outlandish with my clients) and chart defensively, it would be more in my best interest to have the record than to say it was deleted.

The Short Story

Note-taking does NOT have to be a huge chore.

- Make sure you write down your client's contact information and goals…
- Have the client acknowledge the difference between coaching and other licensed professions…
- Be sure you document how you disclosed the limits of confidentiality.
- Make a note after each session about the client's progress *(or lack thereof)* and what you did to help…
- Keep track of missed sessions, miss payments, and the client's punctuality patterns…
- Secure your records in a locked file cabinet or on your computer using encryption and a password…
- Don't share the records with anyone unless you've got your client's written permission *(or a court orders you to do so)…*

Now go coach someone!

www.coachcertificationalliance.com/RegisterL1.php