



Top 10 Tips for Effective Group Coaching

Being a founder can be very lonely – and few people understand the unique challenges of an early stage venture like other founders. Group coaching programs provide a powerful mechanism to harness the passion of founders as they challenge and support one another to discover the business value of their ideas.

Here's our Top 10 list of proven techniques for running effective group coaching programs.

1. PRE-SCREEN PARTICIPANTS: Meet with each founder to determine their readiness for group coaching. Who you bring into the program is critical to setting up the right conditions for self-discovery and peer coaching. Are they coachable? Do they have the ability to listen and learn from feedback? Are they open to the group process or do they think they already have all the answers? Through the pre-screening meeting, you can assess the founder's fit for the group coaching model and as a peer for your other participants.

2. MATCH LIKE-MINDED FOUNDERS: Group coaching works best when founders are among peers they can respect and trust. Match researchers with researchers, entrepreneurs with entrepreneurs, and ideas at the early stage of development – whether it's technology commercialization, startup, mid-course correction or new product innovation. Keep the group small – 6 to 10 founders – and make sure that *only* founders are in the room. Be careful about bringing in consultants or experts who can dominate and derail the process.





3. DEFINE YOUR DESTINATION: Effective coaching clinics are programs with a defined purpose, set number of weeks, regular day and time, and outcome. Founders need to be accountable to the group to attend sessions and come prepared to contribute every week. Consider ending the program with a “Shark Tank” style investor pitch and clearly define the conditions for moving to a next step, whether that’s entry into 1:1 coaching, incubation, mentor program or other tangible destination.

4. MAKE IT DIFFERENT: Designate a room for your group coaching clinic with its own character and brand. Name the room and fill it with white boards, flip charts and markers, remove chairs, make it a “no cell” zone. Set the tone with founders from the beginning that this is not training, it’s doing - and the clinic is a dedicated time and space to roll up your sleeves and work on your idea.



5. USE A FRAMEWORK: Founders are action-oriented people who need to understand how the coaching program is going to help them. Use a systematic framework or structured approach with clear expectations. Cover 1-2 topics at each meeting and expect participants to come ready to share their working drafts. Even if every person isn’t presenting at each meeting, they are still actively engaged, providing input to other founders, asking probing questions and learning from the conversation. End each session with takeaways and assign preparation work for the next meeting.



6. BE STRUCTURED BUT UNSTRUCTURED: It's a journey of self-discovery, so be open to exploring a few unexpected paths along the way. At first you will be doing the heavy lifting on moving the process forward, but at one magical point in every clinic (usually in the second or third session), peer coaching starts to emerge. Allow the group to steer the conversation, but control the pace and minimize scientific debates and other potential “rat holes.”

7. CREATE A COMMON LANGUAGE: Visual tools help technical people with no business experience model their ideas and develop a common language for conversations about the business value. Adopt tools and worksheets that help founders let their guard down to model and map their ideas as they explore the potential value and market applications.

8. COACH, DON'T CONSULT: Remember it's not about you, so let go of the marker! Your job is to guide and facilitate the conversation. Let the founders own the problem and drive the discussion – they have the answers and just need help framing them in the right context. It's difficult to hold back and let that discovery happen but the results are worth it.

9. WATCH FOR COACHABLE MOMENTS: When “aha” moments happen, stop the discussion and make sure the group is aware of the recognition or breakthrough. Take time to celebrate the moment and ensure that others learn from it.

10. TRY CO-COACHING: Coaching founders can also be very lonely – you're guiding the ship, adapting to group dynamics, troubleshooting hot spots and managing the pace. Co-coaching allows you to facilitate different aspects of the group dynamic, while offering a second perspective on strategies for helping founders get the most from the experience.

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