

Language that strengthens client agency

The coach brings presence and challenge; the client retains meaning, choice, and ownership.

LISTEN → EMPOWER → ACT

Presence before perspective;
insight before action.



SKILL	DEFINITION	PURPOSE	EXAMPLE LANGUAGE	BEST USED WHEN...	WATCH FOR...
Praise	Evaluates performance, outcomes, or behavior.	Reinforces behavior; shifts motivation outward.	“That was great work.”	Rarely, when deliberately reinforcing an action.	Approval-seeking; loss of internal motivation.
Mirroring	Reflects words, emotion, or energy neutrally.	Builds awareness; lets clients hear themselves.	“I hear frustration as you say that.”	Early, to surface what is present.	Adding interpretation or judgment.
Empathic Listening	Attunes beyond words to emotion, tone, and meaning.	Creates safety, trust, and connection.	“This feels heavier than you expected.”	Throughout, especially when emotion is present.	Solving instead of understanding.
Curiosity	Asks open, non-leading questions.	Deepens insight; expands possibility.	“What feels most important here?”	Exploring meaning, values, or assumptions.	Advice disguised as a question.
Acknowledgment	Names qualities, values, strengths, or resources.	Builds identity, confidence, and self-trust.	“You demonstrated real courage.”	A strength, value, or way of being emerges.	Praising the action instead of naming being.
Championing	Expresses steadfast belief in the client’s potential.	Expands possibility; strengthens self-belief.	“I see your capacity, even if you don’t yet.”	Self-doubt or fear constrains movement.	Pressure, rescuing, or coach-centered optimism.
Reframing	Offers a truthful, more empowering perspective.	Loosens limiting stories; opens new paths.	“What if this reveals your capability?”	The client is stuck in a narrow interpretation.	Moving too early or forcing positivity.
Designing Actions	Co-creates meaningful, aligned next steps.	Turns insight into movement and agency.	“What step will honor that value?”	After insight or clarity emerges.	Choosing or over-structuring for the client.
Accountability	Reconnects clients to their commitments.	Builds ownership, integrity, and momentum.	“How will you keep this important?”	Commitments or actions are designed.	Policing, guilt, or pressure.

CLIENT-CENTERED PRINCIPLE • The coach supplies presence and challenge; the client retains meaning, choice, and ownership.

BOUNDARY | LISTEN | EMPOWER | ACT