

Coaching “Magic” — The Power of Choice and Decision Making

A client who has been training with you three days per week just found out she's pregnant. She's experiencing a lot of morning sickness and fatigue and is having a hard time eating.

Because she hasn't been feeling well, she tells you that she's worried she won't be able to train as consistently as she had been training before, even though she feels better and has more of an appetite when she does work out regularly.

As her coach, telling her that she has to continue training three days per week likely isn't the best approach right now. She may not believe that's realistic for her, and she's looking to you for guidance.

In this scenario, it's important that you do the following:

Step 1: Praise her for being honest with you about what she's going through. Always try to make her feel comfortable when she shares information with you. This might sound obvious, but many clients are afraid to tell their coach how they are feeling for fear of being judged, shamed, or embarrassed by their coach's response.

Step 2: Validate and affirm how she's feeling and lend an empathetic ear. If she's been experiencing morning sickness, fatigue, and a loss of appetite, the last thing she needs is to feel dismissed or have her experience minimized. Acknowledge how she's feeling and make sure she knows you're listening by reflecting what she has said and asking relevant and thoughtful follow-up questions.

Step 3: Let her know that her experience is normal, that you're there for her, and that you would love to help her figure out how to adjust her program in light of her current situation. This helps her feel heard and safe, and conveys that you have her best interest at heart -- and that nothing is “wrong” with her or her experience.

Step 4: Offer two or three choices that may be a better approach for now. This allows her to understand that exercising in her first trimester doesn't have to be all-or-nothing. It's also a great opportunity to show her how her current program may be modified for her changing needs.

The conversation may look something like this:

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Coach: Thank you so much for sharing this news with me. It's important for me to know how you're feeling so I can help you modify your program as necessary throughout your pregnancy based on what's best for you. (Step 1) I'm sorry to hear that you're experiencing so much nausea and fatigue and are struggling to eat. I know that's difficult and can certainly affect other areas of your life. Is it morning sickness you're experiencing, or is it happening all day? Are there any times throughout the day when you feel a bit better or have more energy? (Step 2)

Client: Most of the time I feel nausea and fatigue in the mornings and early parts of the day.

Coach: Got it! So you're saying you experience most of the nausea and fatigue in the morning?

Client: Yes, most of the time. Occasionally, I experience that during other parts of the day, but those instances have been more sporadic.

Coach: I will tell you that what you're experiencing is normal. Many of my pregnant clients have similar experiences, and I know when I was pregnant with my second child, my morning sickness was off the charts! The good news is that there are some adjustments we can make to your program to accommodate how you're feeling, and I'm happy to discuss them with you. (Step 3)

Since you're feeling particularly poor in the morning, which of these options to do you think might work best for you right now?

Option 1: Instead of working with me at 6 a.m., would you prefer to come in for your workout at 4:30 p.m., when you have more energy and less nausea?

Option 2: Instead of working with me three times per week, how about coming in once per week, and I can write you a workout that you can perform at home once or twice a week?

Option 3: Instead of continuing with your semi-private sessions, why don't we switch you to group training which has more time slots available so that you can come or not come based on how you're feeling, without being charged for missing sessions if you need to change your plans at the last minute? (Step 4)

Following these steps not only allows you to develop greater rapport with your client, but they empower her to make the choice that's best for her while taking ownership of her choices and the future outcome.