



Torch P.O.V.

# What Drives and Sustains Strong Coaching Program Engagement



# Our Quick Take

Strong engagement in a coaching program starts with an equitable, formal, and transparent [selection process](#). This means a selection process designed to select the right people at the right time. When you get the selection right, participants are more likely to stay engaged. Engaged participants (i.e., participants who are using the platform to meet with their coach at least 1x month) have higher retention, employee engagement, and promotion rates – all metrics that demonstrate [better ROI for your organization](#).

Once you've identified the right people, it's critical that participants start meeting with their coach as soon as possible. **How a participant starts a coaching engagement sets the tone for the rest of the program.**

## What is disengagement?

When a participant has gone 14 days without meeting with their coach and has no future meetings scheduled, the Torch platform will alert the program manager. A participant is disengaged if they've gone 30 days without any meetings and none upcoming.



Strong engagement in a coaching program starts with an equitable, formal, and transparent selection process.

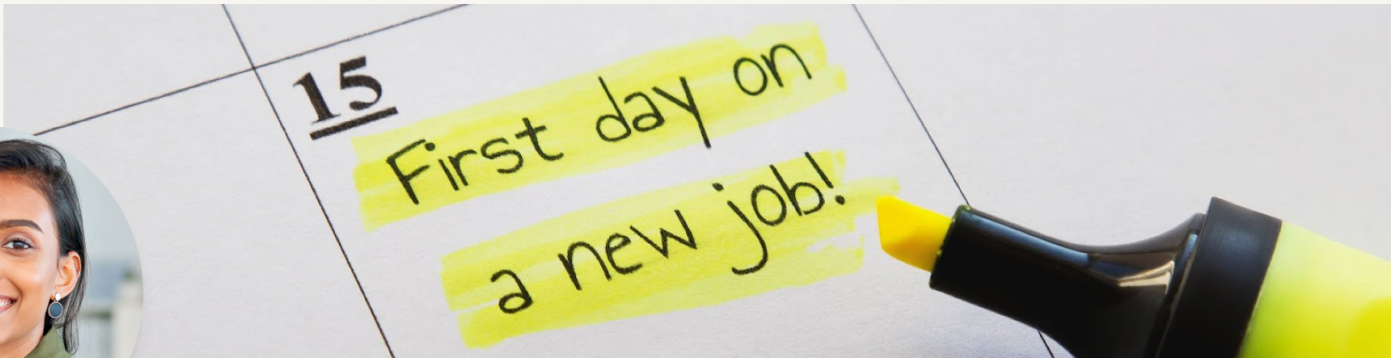
# What the Science Says

There are all kinds of criteria you can use to select participants for your coaching program. But the best indicator of whether or not someone will be engaged in coaching is their readiness for coaching—in other words: *do they want to participate?* Are they enthusiastic about the process? Other characteristics of someone who will be engaged in coaching include being:

- Motivated to learn and grow
- Proactive about their development
- Committed to the program
- Open to new experiences

Participants also tend to be more engaged if they are undergoing a personal or professional transition that could impact their work. We call these Moments that Matter, and they are times of transition for an individual or organization that demand new skills and capabilities.

People are more motivated to pursue their goals when they feel like they've started a new life chapter. This is called the "fresh start effect," and it explains why it can be easier to change our behavior at the start of something— like a new calendar year, after a promotion into a new role, or starting at a new company.



## The Fresh Start Effect

People are more motivated to pursue their goals in moments when they've started a new life chapter.

# How to Create a Strong Selection Process

Five steps to identify engaged candidates, meet your program goals, and see high-impact results.

	STEP	KEY QUESTION TO ANSWER	EXAMPLE
1	<b>Clarify organizational goals</b>	What are the most important objectives for your organization?	<i>Improve retention of emerging leaders.</i>
2	<b>Identify Moments that Matter</b>	How do those organizational objectives tie to key transitional moments?	<i>Improving retention of emerging leaders could connect to a new manager or succession planning focused programs</i>
3	<b>Define observable, objective criteria</b>	Beyond soliciting the opinion of managers (which can be biased), which criteria will you use to determine your participants?	<i>New managers who indicate readiness for coaching, and with consistently strong performance reviews]</i>
4	<b>Communicate with the rest of the org</b>	How can you communicate the criteria and program so that important stakeholders can take action?	<i>Consider: <b>Timing</b> –communicate the opportunity before or after a promotion or review cycle, when development is top-of-mind; <b>Content</b> –frame the message so that the criteria and intended actions and opportunities are clear; <b>Channels</b> – make sure these communications are shared in all appropriate places.</i>
5	<b>Formalize to hold leaders accountable</b>	What types of approaches can you take to reduce bias in the process?	<i>Ask managers to rate all of their direct reports, allow individuals to self-nominate, ask for multiple pieces of evidence in support of a claim or nomination</i>

# Troubleshooting Engagement Challenges

Even after designing a thoughtful selection process, it's possible that you still experience engagement issues with participants. It happens! We're here to help you figure out what to do. Start by looking at data (like survey results) to understand why participants are disengaged. Then move on to take action.

**Here are some of the most common engagement barriers and how to solve them.**

## Engagement Barrier #1: Bandwidth

The challenge we hear most often is that participants don't have the time to engage. The person who has no bandwidth for coaching may be the person who needs it the most; this could be a signal of challenges in delegation, managing workload, and prioritization. But instead of focusing on what they can gain from coaching – for example, support and strategies to become more productive and feel less overwhelmed – they're focused on what they're losing – time.

**Solutions:** *Clarify goals and change the frame.*

**Clarify Goals:** Sometimes, participants may cite bandwidth as an issue when the real issue is they don't have a clear plan of action for their growth, nor do they understand how to use coaching or the value of it.

In our experience, we see that participants who set initial goals early on with their coach – rather than waiting until the end of the 360 process (which can help to refine and shape those initial goals)– are more likely to make time for coaching. That's because they know what they're working towards and have more clarity on the value it's providing them. It's important to note that goals can change throughout the engagement. It's okay to adapt them, as long as the participant starts somewhere, and starts fast.

**Change the Frame:** [Research suggests](#) that changing the way we frame choices – emphasizing what we gain rather than what we lose, for instance – impacts our behaviors. In this case, remind participants and help them reframe their

participation in coaching as a choice and a tool that will help them become more productive and feel less strapped for bandwidth. Coaching is the opportunity to learn and practice managing time, expectations, and boundaries at work and home.



**TIP:** For program managers, another way to think about changing the framing of coaching is to **introduce more flexibility into expectations**. For example: instead of a rule that participants must meet with a coach at least twice a month, instead you could encourage participants to meet twice a month on average. Providing more room for the ebb and flow of bandwidth, and normalizing this as a path to growth, can help participants stay engaged even if they get busy for a few weeks.

## Engagement Barrier #2: Forgetting

Sometimes, the reason why a participant isn't engaged is simple – the participant forgot to set up a new meeting.

### **Solution:** Reminder emails.

We've found that sending a simple reminder email significantly boosts engagement. Depending on the population, **we've seen between 19% to 50% of disengaged participants who get an email reminder take the action to set up a coach meeting**. At that point, we can also remind them to set the next five, six, or seven meetings in advance (which is a best practice).

Incomplete since	Suggested action
Dec 7 2022	Email <input type="button" value="v"/>
Dec 14 2022	Email <input type="button" value="v"/>
Dec 14 2022	Email <input type="button" value="v"/>
Dec 21 2022	Email <input type="button" value="v"/>

Did you know that there's a feature in the Torch platform that allows program managers to see which participants haven't scheduled meetings, and to send them emails? Learn more about [this admin feature](#), and about what reminder emails participants already receive as part of their engagement.

## Engagement Barrier #3: Coach Fit

Occasionally, someone stops engaging because they don't have the right chemistry with their coach or their schedules don't align. Torch Impact Surveys, delivered to participants at the beginning of their engagement, are designed to measure this and surface any disconnects to program managers.

We take coach fit very seriously. We know, and the [research supports](#), that the coaching relationship is one of the most important parts of a successful engagement. The coaching alliance is the most impactful element that helps to drive behavior change and other positive outcomes in participants.

### **Solution:** *Rematch the participant.*

This is an easy fix: after surveys surface a partnership disconnect, we can work with the participant to understand what didn't feel right about their last partnership and get them re-matched with a new coach who is a better fit.



# How Program Managers Can Encourage More Engagement

Program Managers play a key role in driving engagement by creatively encouraging commitment, modeling what 'great' looks like, and communicating transparently.

*Here are some ways to get started:*

## Encourage commitment creatively.

- Asking participants to sign a commitment form (based on research and experience) can help them stay engaged in the process.
- Bring participants together for a 30-minute lunch & learn session to talk about their coaching experiences at the start, middle or end of an engagement.
- Use your program communications to reframe the experience. Set the expectation from the start that coaching can help save time, enhance productivity, and support wellbeing.

## Model great engagement.

When possible, share stories publicly about engaged participants and their positive experiences. This could mean highlighting it in newsletters, in your program recruitment materials, as you wrap cohorts and report on progress.

## Communicate transparently.

Inform managers that their team members are in coaching, and encourage managers to ask participants how they can support them through the engagement. Coaching is confidential, but it doesn't have to be a secret. Managers can act as an accountability partner and create safety for participants to take the time to participate.



**TIP:** You may not be able to fix every disengagement issue. Sometimes, a participant just isn't ready or willing to be coached, and that's okay! In those situations, we can help you select a different participant who will get more value from the experience.

---

# How Coaches Encourage More Engagement

Great coaching begets great engagement. Our coaches are already trained to proactively raise engagement flags, and to lend support during challenging times by reminding participants of their past success, getting curious about the context, and affirming their partnership.

## Remind participants of past successes

Torch Executive Coach Monica Anderson says she re-engages participants by “inviting them back, and communicating something of value they expressed at the last coaching session.” Like Anderson, Executive Coach Karuna Thomas often starts re-engaging by reminding a participant about the progress they’ve made, and the success and wins they’ve had so far. She also brings up inspiring moments they’ve had during sessions.

## Meet their quiet with curiosity

Torch Executive Coach Rafal Szaniawski’s instinct in the face of disengagement is curiosity, which he uses as a tool for reconnection. He asks “if there’s anything I can help with to make the small step in resuming our partnership.” Anderson does this too, asking them if all is well or how they’re doing.

## Affirm their partnership and support

Thomas makes sure to reiterate her role “as their accountability partner, and ask for their input on additional ways I can support them achieving their goals,” she says. Similarly, Szaniawski tells them that “I’m there for them” even acknowledging the reality that this can be a tricky time of year. He also shares “that sometimes the most challenging yet rewarding thing to do in the middle of work overload is to pause for 45 minutes and rediscover themselves and what can help them go forward.”

# How Managers Can Encourage More Engagement

Driving strong coaching engagement is a community effort. Managers in particular are positioned to empathetically hold participants accountable by setting an expectation that they attend sessions, asking great questions and participating in manager alignment sessions.

## Set the expectation

Managers can hold participants accountable for going to their coaching sessions by making their expectations clear at the outset of the partnership.

## Ask questions

During a 1:1, they can add 'coaching check-in' to the agenda, simply asking their direct report how it's going, whether there's anything they can do to support them. This reinforces the expectation that the employee will engage.

## Participate in a Manager Alignment Session

Sometimes coaching can feel removed from what a person is focused on day-to-day, and therefore less engaging. Managers can help link these spheres so that the participant feels like their work in coaching is connected to their team and organizational goals.

Do you have more questions about how to increase engagement in your coaching program?

**We're here to help you think through your program strategy from goals to execution.**

[Let's talk!](#)





# Torch

Torch is the People Development Platform that unlocks the potential of people, teams, and organizations.

By combining coaching and mentoring, Torch helps you design, manage, and measure programs that drive the success of your people—and your organization.

[Request a demo](#)

