

Harken Brand Symbol

Creative Brief

Consolidated direction and exploration history
September 13 2026

The assignment

Develop a distinctive, memorable symbol for Harken that carries a credible idea about the coaching practice and works with the existing HARKEN wordmark. An H is optional. A circle, frame, or other container is optional. This is a focused symbol assignment; the public brand name, service descriptor, and broader website identity remain in place.

The central unresolved issue is distinctiveness. Multiple rounds produced competent, increasingly polished marks, but none has provided enough conviction to replace the current identity. The next round needs a stronger underlying idea and a more recognizable visual identity. Further polishing of a familiar H is unlikely to resolve that concern on its own.

What the mark should ideally achieve

- Establish a compact, recognizable silhouette that can become associated with Harken over time and feels sufficiently distinctive to adopt for the long term.
- Offer an accessible connection to deliberate response, choice, or agency. The visible construction should support the story before a designer supplies a lengthy explanation.
- Feel mature, confident, precise, and approachable beside the existing wordmark, with enough character to reward a second look.
- Represent executive and career coaching today while allowing room for group coaching. A literal two-person interaction would narrow that scope.
- Remain useful in one color and at small sizes across the website, client portal, social profiles, documents, and presentation materials.

The practice and its audience

Harken provides Executive & Career Coaching for go-to-market (GTM) professionals across marketing, sales, revenue operations, customer success, and emerging GTM roles. Clients span career and leadership stages. Scott Ablin, Principal & Executive Coach, brings operating experience to coaching grounded in the realities of GTM work and careers.

The current framed split H remains the approved identity until a replacement is expressly selected. All subsequent studies are exploratory, including the latest offset symbol. The strongest option in a comparison is not automatically an approved direction.

Creative direction and design requirements

The shift from listening to response

Early work centered on attentive space, listening, and conversation. Those ideas fit the name and the invitation to “Schedule a Good Talk,” but the explored forms repeatedly became generic communication icons or required too much explanation. Listening and quotation imagery are closed directions for this next assignment.

The leading direction now comes from Scott’s description of the practice:

“My coaching helps clients examine how they respond to everything that is out of their control yet remains theirs to shape.”

The opportunity is to express a deliberate response within circumstances a person did not fully choose. Adjustment, a considered change in direction, or a meaningful relationship between forms may provide a starting point. The emphasis is the client’s agency in responding; the mark should avoid implying control over every circumstance or outcome.

Response is a creative premise, not a prescription for a bent line, arrow, or particular construction. The Harken Coaching Cycle, Gain Clarity, Take Ownership, Make Progress, supplies context. Its GTM acronym and three stages do not need to be encoded in the symbol.

How much meaning is enough

A viewer should perceive a coherent, intentional form with a plausible brand connection. A short rationale can deepen that connection. The symbol does not need to communicate the entire coaching philosophy unaided, but its meaning should survive without a persuasive story invented after the drawing. Distinctiveness and understandable intent must be evaluated together.

Visual character

Favor economical geometry, purposeful negative space, compact proportions, and balanced visual weight. Corner softening should be restrained. Angular details can work with the sharp elements in Alata; prior diagonal cuts failed principally because their significance was unclear. Coordinate corner treatments optically rather than requiring identical numerical radii.

Allan Peters and Peters Design Company are references for disciplined, idea-led simplicity and memorable form. This is an influence on the standard of thinking and craft, with original work expected.

What remains open

A standalone non-H symbol is a strong avenue to investigate. An H-based solution remains eligible if it brings a genuinely different, legible idea. A container may be integral to the design, but should have a clear purpose. Test black and white first, then specifically show a white mark reversed out of the established sky blue. Shadows, gradients, and dimensional effects should wait until the core form succeeds.

Evolution of the mark

The original circle H

The circle was inherited from the original logo rather than chosen to express the current positioning. Refinements to color, weight, and an echo treatment improved execution. Eventually the concern shifted to whether the symbol contributed enough to Harken's narrative. Retaining the circle is not a requirement.

The framed split H

A rounded rectangular frame and split H became the current production identity. Tests reduced excessive width and softened corners more selectively. Optical weight and spacing were refined beside the wordmark. Scott later described the result as acceptable but unremarkable. It remains a functional baseline, with distinctiveness still unresolved.

The angular H

The B2 study and subsequent vector 01 used opposing diagonal cuts around the crossbar. Scott preferred its compactness and asked for a horizontal stroke matching the vertical strokes. The equal-weight version was liked and underwent small-size and lockup checks. The remaining reservation was that a well-executed angular H still felt familiar, and the cuts did little to communicate the brand idea.

Attempts to make those cuts more explanatory through speech-like details added complexity. Further geometric refinement did not solve the central concern. Treat this study as evidence of preferred discipline and proportion, rather than a design to reproduce.

The Claude exploration

The revised brief moved the premise from listening to response. A single bent stroke called "The turn" reportedly survived several practical tests, including small-scale use and pairing with the wordmark, before its resemblance to California became decisive. Its reversal introduced a backward-motion association. Versions placed inside an H or square created new structural or pictorial problems.

That specific form is closed. The underlying idea of deliberate response remains useful. The detailed failures on the following page should prevent repetition without becoming universal prohibitions on every use of symmetry, angles, or negative space.

The latest standalone symbols

A subsequent board of five black-and-white symbols produced one relative preference: 01, two offset angular forms sharing a directional character. Scott found it the most interesting and least derivative. In three vector refinements, the tighter-gap B version was preferred.

The proposed rationale concerned a considered adjustment within continuity. Scott remained unsure after hearing it. This is an unresolved experiment, not an adopted concept or an instruction to keep refining it. It demonstrates interest in a distinctive standalone silhouette, while also showing that an appealing form and a plausible explanation have not yet created a convincing Harken mark.

Dead ends and lessons to retain

Listening and conversation proxies

Open brackets and “attentive space” forms were too obscure. Paired speech bubbles felt familiar and generic. Concave or ear-like H treatments had a weak listening connection and risked hearing-care associations. Quotation details inside an H became busy at small sizes; standalone quotation pairs also failed to establish potential. These territories should not be recycled in the next round.

Additional constructions explored in Claude

- Meeting point and threshold studies: a node between strokes lacked distinction; unequal uprights did not establish a compelling direction.
- Interlock and common ground: rotated H halves suggested an unwanted superior–subordinate relationship in that design; overlapping solids with a shared cutout were too obtuse.
- Back and forth and parity: a serpentine construction read as the numeral 2; a doubled H crossbar read as a ladder and introduced an unwanted climbing metaphor.
- The turn and its variants: the bent stroke suggested California; the mirrored version suggested backward movement. Inserting the gesture into an H produced cramped channels, stubs, or disconnected structure.
- Square variants: a faced corner felt familiar within tech identity; an enclosed counter looked arbitrary; a gesture entering an edge suggested a keyhole or slot.

Reactions to the latest five symbol board

Beyond the relative preference for 01, Scott associated 02 with a shark tail, found 03’s meaning unclear, saw a strong resemblance between 04 and Safeway’s logo, and found 05 abstract and random. These are recorded visual reactions, not findings of legal similarity or infringement.

Apply the lessons without overconstraining the designer

Check common associations early: letters, numerals, interface icons, familiar logos, objects, and geographic outlines. Avoid spending multiple rounds tuning a silhouette before asking what it immediately resembles. Also test whether paired forms suggest hierarchy or limit the practice to one-to-one coaching.

The failed constructions do not establish that rotational symmetry always implies rank, every single-bend shape is unavailable, or an H can never contain meaningful negative space. These are cautions grounded in specific attempts. A new proposal should demonstrate how it resolves the relevant issue.

Additional exclusions

Avoid generic growth arrows, ladders, climbing imagery, literal two-person scenes, anatomical ears, heavily rounded pill forms, and familiar angular H marks differentiated mainly by a slash. Nautical, rope, rigging, and marine cues would also be unhelpful for differentiation. Multiple encoded metaphors and effects used to rescue a weak silhouette have consistently moved the work away from the desired simplicity.

Evaluation and handoff

A focused next round

Present roughly three genuinely different concepts in black and white, with the actual HARKEN wordmark and a short rationale. Compare the forms before discussing the rationale. Include a white-on-blue test and an initial resemblance check. Select a direction on the strength of the idea before extensive optical refinement or production rollout.

The decision questions are: Is it memorable without explanation? Does its construction support a credible Harken story? Does it feel distinctive rather than familiar with a minor alteration? Does it belong beside the wordmark? Can it represent the practice broadly? Would Scott want to keep using it after the novelty of the presentation has passed?

Practical tests for a finalist

- A clear silhouette at 16 px and recognizable important detail at 24–32 px, with sufficient negative space after reduction.
- Horizontal with service line, compact without service line, stacked, and standalone applications. Test square and circular avatar crops.
- Black, white, and agreed palette versions on light and dark backgrounds. Check visual balance and spacing at realistic website and document sizes.

Use the approved artwork as the authority

Preserve the outlined Alata HARKEN wordmark and approved title-case service line, “Executive & Career Coaching.” Work from the current production masters rather than reconstructing lettering from an assumed font weight. Established palette references are sky blue #38BDF8, indigo #6366F1, midnight #0B0F23, and cool off-white #F6F7FB.

The Claude findings include useful reported measurements: a 28-unit cap height, 4.32-unit stem, 4.16-unit H crossbar, and diagonals ranging from 23.45 to 44.87 degrees from vertical. Recheck these against the supplied master before using them. They provide comparison points, not mandatory symbol geometry. Choose stroke weight, angles, and lockup proportions optically; a single governing angle or fixed symbol-to-letter ratio is not required.

Scope and final deliverables

Agree the concept fee, revision rounds, schedule, and any production extension separately. After selection, deliver an editable vector master, outlined SVGs, black and white and approved color versions, all agreed lockups, PNGs, favicons, and concise guidance on clear space, minimum sizes, backgrounds, and file organization. Guidelines updates and website implementation follow explicit approval.

Supply the current production suite and brand guidelines alongside this brief. Prior comparison boards and the Claude findings are supporting history, not production masters. A preliminary resemblance review supports creative judgment; it does not establish trademark clearance. No legal review is commissioned by this brief.

Success is a mark whose form and meaning feel sufficiently distinctive, natural, and durable that Scott wants to adopt it. The process should remain open to a fresh solution rather than settling for the least objectionable prior candidate.