

EXPERT GUIDANCE ON CRITICAL COACHING ISSUES. THIS SITUATION DEALS WITH A CLIENT'S SEEMINGLY UNREALISTIC EXPECTATIONS.

## “Are my doubts holding back my client?”

### the situation

“I have a new client who has been a stay-at-home mother until age 52. Now she wants to start a career, but isn't sure what she should do. She tells me that she knows she is 'meant do something big' and is somewhat interested in literature, art and acting (but claims to have severe performance anxiety). She says she doesn't want to waste any more time, so she can't afford to make a 'mistake' and choose the 'wrong' direction. She lives in a mid-western state which wouldn't seem (at least to me) to offer a whole lot of exciting opportunities for this 'something big' to emerge. What do you tell a client with seemingly unrealistic expectations? Am I allowing my own doubts to interfere?”

#### Are you grappling with a sticky situation?

You don't have to go it alone. Let our senior coaches give you some different perspectives to consider. Email your situation to: [editor@choice-online.com](mailto:editor@choice-online.com) and put “sticky situations” in the subject line.



**Craig Carr**, PCC is a senior trainer for the Coaches Training Institute (CTI) and a coach committed to the conscious development of personal potential. Craig's specialty is working with entrepreneurs and investors who are designing new relationships with their businesses or jobs.

I'll answer your last question first: Yes. Actually more emphatically: YES! I want to be clear that there is no sarcasm here as it is very serious business when you – or any coach – allows their own doubt, fear, limitations or beliefs to run what you think is possible for a client. I don't know how I can actually say it more strongly or with more conviction: if you are acting in the role of what you want to call coaching, then it is imperative that you make a stand for unlimited possibility as a perspective.

The point is that if you get caught up in the circumstances as much as the client already has, then you will stay as stuck as she is and the coaching will fail. In the scenario you have drawn my guess is that you have fallen into a classic trap, so don't beat yourself up too much. By that I mean that her conditions – age, fear of making a mistake, performance anxiety and home location (that one is yours!) – are frames certain to keep things as they are. They appear bigger to her than the 'something big' she is craving, and the more you allow focus on the current big obstacles, the more unlikely she is to move toward what she wants. She cannot afford to keep talking to you about how to fix all those heavy, insurmountable barriers.

A powerful place to explore first is into the values that underlie the ideas she has for achieving her 'something big.' And I don't mean just putting them on a piece of paper like a to-do list, either. One of the most fun, yet challenging, jobs for a coach is to bring values alive in an in-the-moment experience, and then to sustain a freshness with them. It is in this way that desire and inspiration begin to move with more power than the gravity of dream-crushing life circumstances. Risking cliché: the hows really will start to take care of themselves.

As a last encouragement, my experience tells me that to start moving you have to overcome inertia, and first steps don't have to be grand things. Action has to be taken and results celebrated whether they appear “good” or “not so good.” For this client, then, wallowing in the fear of making a mistake is not an option, and you can tell her that in coaching she only gets to do that for a limited amount of time. Be firm that that's the deal, the game, and what she signed up for. I bet she'll respond well to certainty from you.

It's frustrating, of course, if a client won't start, and there's no doubt that on occasion that will occur. Be prepared for those times but know that if you hold the doors of possibility open with all your heart and trust the coaching paradigm, your commitment will not fall short. Results can often be about timing in a client's life. If not-starting occurs, and you've held true to the essence of coaching, rest assured that the next time they approach their threshold of change you will be remembered and appreciated for your efforts.



**Carol Adrienne, PhD**, is an internationally-known author, intuitive counselor and life coach whose books have been translated into over 15 languages. As a master numerologist, workshop leader and life coach, she has helped thousands of people eliminate negative patterns, providing them with life-long tools for creating the life they want to live.

**T**here are many facets to this sticky answer. Here are some suggestions on how to proceed:

- 1. Create a specific, achievable goal** – I found a free download model for the process online at <http://d.scribd.com/docs/1rix6rdr3ywm6io7ain.pdf>. The process starts with the question, “What do you want?” (She answers, “To do something big.”) She wants emotional fulfillment and recognition in the future – and what small step would begin to give her that confidence, knowledge, or connection?
- 2. Validate her feelings without judgment** – There’s no denying that she is feeling frustrated, overlooked, and – most of all – scared about “starting over” at 52 and amounting to nothing (unconscious mortality issues!).
- 3. Hone in on what she unconsciously requires by reading between the lines and direct questioning** – Does ‘big’ represent getting recognition for a talent? If so, she might start by taking classes, thus reaping some immediate emotional rewards. Could she be happy getting recognition as part of a group or organization? If so, what skills would she need?
- 4. Set daily or weekly goals based on small steps in an unfolding, positive direction** – She has energy to burn now. The self-sabo-

immediate (very big) goal is to begin noticing and eliminating negative thoughts. Studies show that positive thoughts literally expand our memory and creativity abilities.

**6. Make her vision real** – How would she look, feel and talk once she has achieved her goal? What qualities would she need in order to be in that picture? Define how she would know something was ‘big.’ What does ‘big’ look, feel, and sound like? My guess is that your own doubt will subside as you flesh out preliminary steps with an initial goal to explore some new interest categories (classes, training, temporary work, non-profit, even volunteer work.)

**7. Gently ask if she sees herself being responsible for her outcome** – Remind her that your job as a coach is to be a sounding board and reality check, not the one who figures out how to make it all happen.

**8. Remind her that there is no rush!** – I would even give her an assignment to go to the library and check out some biographies of people she admires – and scan them for turning points. Ask her to give you any insights she picked up from these lives.

**9. Create a written list of her ideal life** – Make two columns with non-ideal on the left and ideal on the right. First, ask her, point by

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tagging part is thinking that there is a “wrong” direction and that time is running out. Her true goal is to find something worthy of her efforts, and to see where it leads, instead of looking for an end result. A ‘big’ life could be lopsided or have an unhealthy balance.

**5. Drop the negative self-talk** – Mention that our “ego voice” talks to us in these urgent, black-and-white tones to scare us off from unknown territory (so we can stay in our comfort zone playing with options.) An

numbered point, what would NOT be ideal for her. Next, go to the other side of the page and write the ideal version of each point. Scratch out the left-hand negative ones.

**10. Finally, read back all the points of her ideal life** – Ask her which one is most exciting to her, and have her write a statement such as, “I love it when I am immersed in ...” Suggest she begin saying this in casual ways every chance she gets. She now has a well-formed outcome.

