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the magazine of professional coaching

Impact!

How coaching
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Impacts from
Coaching
TED Fellows

sticky situations

EXPERT GUIDANCE ON CRITICAL COACHING ISSUES

“My client doesn’t see his progress.”

I have been working with my client for many months. He recently commented that he did not feel he was making significant progress as a result of his coaching despite what I have noticed and made notes about. How do I coach my client to seeing his impact?

By Victoria Trabosh, CDC®

Let’s go back to what it takes to ‘make a sale.’ Three things: 1) What’s in it for the client? 2) Does he know, like and trust you? 3) Is he ready to buy? You might think you’ve answered these questions because he’s your client. But our ability to sell ourselves is an ongoing, dynamic process. There are many factors out of your control: Is he still committed to the coaching process? What else is going on in his life that may be distracting him? Is he always focused on what’s not working, not what is working? What is his expectation about how long it’s going to take to make progress? As we seek to understand rather than be understood, I believe it’s important to go back to the ‘sales’ questions.

1) What’s in it for him? Look back at your intake form and see what he identified as his goals through the coaching process. Are you working on those issues or have you veered off course? I’d have a conversation with him and see if that’s the source of his dissatisfaction. While you may be working on important issues and making progress, it’s only progress if HE sees it that way, not you.

2) Does he know, like and trust you? This is not primarily a friendship but a business relationship that requires an ongoing and strong rapport. If you’re challenging him in ways he’s not willing to be challenged, or if he’s not meeting the challenge and internally beating himself up, you may become the whipping post. I’m not suggesting you ASK him if he still knows, likes and trusts you. I’m suggesting you check in with yourself and see if the relationship feels as easy or fluid



as it once was. If not, can you correct that? Has anything changed in you that has put you in a place of less confidence and thereby made him less confident of you? I always ask clients at the end of a session, “What are you taking away from today?” (They’ll begin to hate that question – seriously they do – but they’ll answer it.) It’s another way to have them reflect the value of the coaching. If they don’t know, that’s important information! Back up and make sure you’re solving *their* problems and issues, not the ones you think are good for them to address.

3) Is he ready to buy? If value isn’t perceived, no value is present. Look at selling as an ongoing opportunity to demonstrate your value by communicating effectively and listening to him closely.

Regroup, find out from him what he needs that he’s not getting, and begin again. Finally, be thankful you’re getting real-time feedback and he’s not ‘talking with his feet.’ What’s worse than this kind of message is a client who just fades away, begins to miss his appointments and doesn’t give you feedback.

Feedback is information. Information applied is knowledge. Knowledge acted upon is wisdom. Be the coach that isn’t discouraged but can overcome obstacles, including his dissatisfaction, and then you’ll begin again. May your wisdom in a situation such as this serve you first, and best.

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: submissions@choice-online.com and put “sticky situations” in the subject line.

By Suzi Pomerantz, MT, MCC

Context is key! Is your client the type of person who needs external evidence in order to know he's making progress? How important is it to him that he is feeling this way? In other words, is it a big deal for him, or is it more important to you that he feels he's making progress in his work with you?

Some context questions that will help in resolving this: What do you consider to be "many months"? How many months have you been working together thus far? How long will this engagement be altogether? In your contracting phase, did the client generate metrics or indicators of what he wanted to accomplish and how he would know if he was making progress? How does he define "significant"? Does he see that he's made any progress at all? Have you shared your observations? Is this a pattern of behavior for him: not seeing his impact?

The way out of most sticky situations is a conversation or series of conversations. Would it help to have a conversation with him about expectations regarding the length of the coaching engagement and milestones along the way to denote progress points?

Is there a conversation to have about quantifying or qualifying what success looks like or what progress looks

like or how and when he'd know if he made signification progress? If he had an expectation that a profound or radical shift would have taken place by now, did he express that expectation to you and was it something you agreed was realistic?

It might be that a portion of the contracting conversation at the start of your engagement was skipped over or unclear. It may be that you and he have different expectations about what progress will look like at various stages of the engagement. It may be that he has a particular definition of what would constitute "significant progress," which may be different than is realistic or possible at this stage of your overall coaching engagement.

Sometimes our role is to hold up a mirror for our clients and show them who they are being. I wonder if sharing your observations with him about his impact would help him to see it? If you've already shared with him your observations about his progress and he isn't able to see it, then perhaps what's next is a coaching conversation to explore whether this is a pattern of behavior or an unconscious limiting belief he holds that shows up in other aspects of his work and life outside of coaching -- and what that might mean for him in the context of his goals.

It could very well be that this is not a sticky situation at all; rather the cusp of a breakthrough for your client!

Craig Carr, PCC, CPCC

Clearly your client is not seeing eye-to-eye with you, so somewhere along the line the relationship lost an important connection that was not repaired. This is not to say you did anything wrong. It's just that you now have an opportunity to learn about *the impact* when a coach and client get on different wavelengths.

It is essential to remember that one great benefit clients receive is a clear reflection of their personal impact. Designing the "right" to do this with someone grants a relationship power and, if you don't use that leverage to move your client forward, you are going to watch the coaching flame out and risk feeling like you've failed.

As mentioned, in getting here we can assume you missed some key opportunities to clarify what was going on in the coaching. Did you highlight impacts that were happening as you went along? Or is it only now you are having this conversation? Did you mindfully and vigorously celebrate, champion and acknowledge your client's actions that were different, innovative, risky, bold, vulnerable, truthful or exemplary?

Looking back over your coaching time together, did you make sure he knew that the successes and triumphs were his own, and that it was a privilege and an honor for you to witness the impact he was having? I'm laying it on bit thick because if you had those moments you are in good shape

and what is happening now is a dip that can be transformed into something amazing. You just need to get in there and champion the heck out of him and he'll get it.

If you didn't have those moments, however, and he hasn't had a journey in which he can feel connected to the wins and challenges you worked through, it is going to be tough to convince him in a meaningful way that any of that ever happened. I'm not saying it isn't possible, but it's an uphill fight to salvage something that is already sinking.

That said, there is a "Hail Mary" play you can make. For it to work you have to be clear that this is NOT a time to be "nice" or indirect. Your job is to take a "stand" for the coaching and everything you did together. Insist that he respect the value of the work that was done, the impact it had on him and, most important, the impact he had on his world because of it.

Finally, what's true is that you gave it your all (most coaches do) and he didn't meet you there (many clients don't), and for whatever reason you never challenged him on that point in a serious way. One impact is that he never learned to respect the coaching. Maybe the beginning was a "hard start." If it was a corporate gig paid by the company, there may have been simmering background noise that never got addressed. That can be a big problem and could weigh on the coaching, so be sure to bring that up early in your sessions. ●