

How do you help a client who seems ‘stuck’?

STICKY SITUATIONS GIVES US A WINDOW INTO CRITICAL COACHING MOMENTS. THIS SITUATION QUESTIONS THE COACHING ROLE.

the situation

A client I have been working with for two years has been building her business and working on improving her people management skills. Over the past two months things have stalled. She was ready to make some major changes and then backed off, two or three times. I have tried future self, perspectives, and some hard truth about what I was observing. Last week I explained that I was feeling out of integrity in our coaching relationship because I saw no progress toward her goals and I had run out of strategies. How can I help her move forward?

Do you have a sticky situation that you want help with or a different perspective on? You don't have to go it alone. Let our senior coaches give you a hand. Please send your situations to: letters@choice-online.com



Victoria “Yoda” Trabosh, CDC®, says: “Review what works, review what doesn’t, and get back to the basics.”

In the 1980 movie “The Empire Strikes Back,” Yoda said to Luke, “*Mind what you have learned. Save you it can. Decide you must what to serve them best. If you leave now, help them you could but you would destroy all for which they have fought and suffered.*”

Luke, I think as a coach you are making a couple of decisions which do not serve you or the client: one, defining the issue as your integrity and two, losing faith in your own ability to work through these difficult issues.

Two years is a lot of success! Review what works, review what doesn't, and get back to the basics. Work with the client's problems by coming at any issue from her strengths. Identify the issue with the client. Are there any extenuating circumstances like health issues, family problems, financial barriers, etc? Also,

are the major changes of which you speak changes she has identified she wants to make, or are they those you have identified she needs to make?

Of the two observations I make, I think integrity is a more delicate issue. How are you out of integrity? Her lack of progress? Your lack of success in helping her reach her stated goals? If you believe you do not have the necessary skills to coach her through this (assuming you still believe it is coaching that she needs), then help her find a better coach to meet her current challenges. You can coach successfully what you live successfully. And integrity should be a cornerstone of all coaching relationships.

And now let me talk about my second observation. As a coach, know that you know what you know. If you lack strategies, seek advice from other great coaches. I have not found a more generous group of people. These additional strategies coming from your ongoing conversation with your client and input from other great coaches will lead to a mutually agreed upon plan with the client, and get you *both* back on track.

Otherwise you're reduced to cutting and slashing with your lightsaber. And that's a bad day anywhere in the universe.

“You can coach successfully what you live successfully.”



Carol Adrienne, PhD, states: “The proposed changes may have re-stimulated old emotional baggage she’s not ready to deal with unconsciously despite your strategies.”

I would like to consider four points. First, although I don’t know the specifics about the changes she backed off from, I’m wondering if you might be getting too involved with whether or not she is making progress *on your terms*.

Secondly, she may be in an inexplicable plateau period. Two months isn’t such a long time to experience integration and consolidation before moving on. Third, the proposed changes may have re-stimulated old emotional baggage she’s not ready to deal with unconsciously despite your strategies.

Fourth, your statement, “I have run out of strategies” sounds a little bit like you are trying to change her behavior, instead of getting to the bottom of the resistance. If so, you need to let her explore whether she really wants to continue with you. Instead of more strategies, perhaps it’s more to the point to *pace her* (as in NLP)

where she is. The stalling is there for a reason — allowing her not to confront something even more threatening.

However, if you are looking for a new tool to probe the resistance, I suggest using the intuitive approach. I frequently use a set of symbolic cards, called the OH cards. They are extremely useful for stimulating new awareness in clients. One set has words, and the other images (e.g., people, scenes, ambiguous settings).

I ask the person to form an open-ended, yet specific question such as, “What do I need to know about why I am stalled in the changes I want to make?” The client uses the cards to find a word and image to work with. This way intuitive insights emerge — *from her*.

I have seen some amazing combinations come out of the deck, which speak *directly* to their questions. You can get the cards at bookstores or online.



Craig Carr, PCC, urges: “The stretch you need to make to grow your coaching is to get vulnerable with your client at a new level entirely.”

You have been working for two years with this client so it may be time to step back and assess if the coaching relationship is deepening and broadening, or if it got stalled some time ago. I hear you grasping for a technique or some new strategy that is brilliantly going to dissolve her fear and get you both back on the happy road called ‘progress.’

Congratulations. You have found an opportunity to stretch your coaching skills and this client is giving you a huge gift. As long as her backing off is no more than the normal neurotic fear we all face when contemplating major change, there is lots of potential here. Speaking up about your feelings is a good and necessary thing to do, but you risk *her* feeling wrong because you make the integrity issue about *her* progress. Good start, but

slightly off-target. I’ll explain...

The answer is not going to be in you doing something smart and effective, but it is to get back into integrity in the coaching relationship. It is not out of integrity because she is not making progress toward her goals. It is out of integrity because you don’t trust that not looking good will empower your client.

Entertain the notion that there is an impact you are not taking full responsibility for. The stretch you need to make is to get vulnerable with your client at a new level. Go ahead and courageously and authentically celebrate the failure the two of you have made of things, at the moment. If you do so with Heart and Meaning I can guarantee you will soon be watching her gently and boldly step back into the flow of her life. ●