

# sticky situations

EXPERT GUIDANCE ON CRITICAL COACHING ISSUES

## Should my client write a book, or pay off debts?

“My client says she can’t decide about whether to keep working (at a low-level office job) in order to pay off her rather considerable debt, or to cut back at work and just focus on writing the book she has felt compelled to write for some time. She apparently built up the debt by some rather unwise choices (she mentioned gambling and shopping), so feels equally compelled to get that behind her. On the other hand, she is fairly sure that the nature of the book could really further her career once it is published, and lead to more income. I’m not sure what would be my best approach with her.”



By Craig Carr, CPCC, PCC

This issue of *choice* looks at NLP in coaching, so let’s explore how the very language used to describe this sticky situation is a clue for where to begin.

It’s very important to listen carefully to linguistic patterns to assess whether or not they move your client toward a successful result. Did you notice that the situation was framed as an either/or proposition? When you allow that to be the frame around a topic you limit creative thinking to just two possible outcomes. Either/or language also increases stress and anxiety because, to your client, it feels like living between a rock and a hard place. She has an either/or decision, not an empowered choice, and this is probably a pattern of stress she falls into on a regular basis.

It’s essential to fully understand this decision/choice distinction. I can’t tell you how often I’ve heard clients fall into the either/or trap (and taken a coach in with them!). Think of it like this: The word ‘decide’ has the root ‘cide’ in it (like homicide, suicide or herbicide), and it means that something gets cut off or dies. There is finality to it; there is a message that you can never go back to what was left behind. The word ‘choice,’ however, is broader and more inclusive (its roots are related to the meaning of ‘tasting!’). The feeling state around ‘choice’ tends to be free, empowering and patient.

Choice does not exist without three or more options! If you and your client get hung up on weighing the pros and cons of two options, you are doing nothing more than trying

**“The word ‘choice’ is broader and more inclusive. The feeling state around ‘choice’ tends to be free, empowering and patient.”**

to fix a problem with rationale and logic. Your conversation is likely to go circular rather than deeper and lead to action that is full of doubt and scarcity rather than certainty.

Slow down. Go bigger and wider into values and possibilities. Put more perspectives and more options on the table. Listen less to content and more to the language patterns and mindset that are creating your client’s map of the world. Do this to discern what is going on with the gambling and shopping problem, too. Your client may be approaching the book option from a gambler’s mindset; that is, it’s a roll of the dice that is going to work out for her, or not. After that, it’s on to the next thing that looks like a winner. Again, the truth is in the language she uses and the depth she goes into connecting with her core values.

Hopefully, she is sincere and not plagued with addiction. Remember, powerful coaching begins when your client learns new ways to think about their circumstances and situations. Have your client on board with new ways to look at life that are values driven, and the way forward will clarify itself in ways that will surprise and delight you both.

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.

By Carol Adrienne, PhD

**N**ot surprisingly, being stuck between the known and the unknown is common in coaching. In your client's case, several possible factors seem to be working to keep her from moving ahead. I suggest exploring the following issues (not necessarily in this order):

1. Being torn between two scenarios (black and white thinking). The ego generally has an agenda to maintain status quo. Creating a dilemma is the perfect way to keep us in our comfort zone. Being stuck between only two options justifies our procrastination, because we can't argue for doing either one of them completely. Thus, uncertainty works to save face and stave off fear of failure. Eventually, your client will come up with a third (or more) options she could live with. But first, you may want to address other issues.

2. The pattern of under-earning (working below her skill and experience level). Under-earning is an insidious energy sapper. We know we're not working with passion, but justify it with statements like, "I'm not the competitive type." One of the problems with under-earning is that we may tend to compensate to make ourselves feel better, but which only digs our hole deeper (her mention of shopping and gambling). Help your client to see any underlying reasons of how or why she fell into the low-level position. It may have served her

well at one point, and clarity can help bring empowerment.

3. Unrealistic expectations. We all have hopes and dreams. However, when we are barely getting by, steadily accumulating debt, and feeling powerless, our tendency is to look for that pot of gold which will transform our life. Help your client break down the dream of the novel into realistic objectives, without killing the dream! Why does she want to write this novel? Is it still a current dream? Is she still passionate about the subject—despite uncertainty about the outcome? How can she set aside short, but consistent amounts of time to write, without giving up her job which pays the bills?

4. Fear. I remember one client who wanted to write a book but had not started even page one. Her fear was, "I'm afraid I'll write too much. I won't know when to stop." Often our fears are part of a pattern of crippling perfectionism—another ploy of the ego. I suggested that she give herself permission to write "way too much, gobs and gobs of writing. Get it all out." New writers often forget you can't edit while writing first drafts.

Eventually, if your client really wants to write her book, tell her to get a kitchen timer and set it for 10 minutes. Write madly until it rings. Repeat until the book is done. The joy of accomplishing the pages will likely transform her relationship to her employment as a collateral benefit.

By Victoria Trabosh, CDC®

**T**he first thing I notice about this sticky situation is that the two options she is sharing with you may not be the answers to reach her stated goals. In one case she wants to pay off her debt, in another, to write a book that she is "fairly sure" could lead to more income.

Have you discussed with her the truth about becoming an author and the road of faux gold of this magic bullet upon which many people lay their hopes and dreams? According to UNESCO (United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization), 1.7 million books were published in 2010. How a book is picked up by the masses is indeterminable and completely without logic. As an example, *50 Shades of Grey* sold over 30 million copies within one year. No one knows exactly why it has become such a blockbuster bestseller. That's the issue: we can speculate why a book becomes successful but can never know that it will. Please work with her to understand why she believes writing a book is the answer to her problems and the challenges she faces of standing out in a crowd of many more than 1.7 million authors (when you take into account the millions of books that DON'T get published).

Her other option is working to pay off her debt. Good plan! Again, is she paying off her debt with an understand-

ing of how to stay out of debt going forward? Does she have a plan to live below her income and begin a savings strategy? According to Barbara Stanny, author of *Prince Charming Isn't Coming*, "If we probe deep enough, we will discover that our reaction to money mirrors our inner life and forecasts our outer life."

Without a plan, high-paying job or not, great book idea well written or just imagined, the issue I believe your client faces is that she must have a dream that allows her, compels her, to make a plan that will encourage her to continue on the path regardless of the good days and bad days ahead.

I challenge you as her coach to help her step back and decide what her life could look like one year from now. Where will she find the greatest peace? What will lead to a highly satisfying outcome? Does she know that money is just energy and that to understand its role in her success is more than giving or receiving it? Help her to truly flesh out who she wants to be and how her life will feel and look. Is she committed enough to that vision that she's willing to do the hard and glorious work it will take to reach that vision?

As her coach, can you assist her in this journey so she feels the satisfaction of a dream realized rather than a task achieved? Empower her through your coaching with unconditional support, excellent questions, accountability and faith in her dreams. ●