

sticky situations

EXPERT GUIDANCE ON CRITICAL COACHING ISSUES

“My client has low self esteem”

“My client is an extremely bright, resourceful, high-level professional – yet she is ungratified in her work, which she attributes to ‘low self-esteem’ and her inability to be assertive, stand up for herself, or handle confrontation. She has apparently built up her belief system (‘I am not ... I cannot’) through family relationships and discussions. She has indicated repeatedly that the book, *The Disease to Please* describes her to a tee. She is very tightly wedded to the perception she has created of herself despite understanding that the beliefs don’t serve her. I’d like approaches or options for working with her to pull her out of her thinking.”



By Craig Carr, CPCC, PCC

I can certainly see that you might be stumbling around for the starting point to generate positive results with this client. She’s built up a lot of evidence to justify the way things are, and until you break her habit of resorting to that evidence to explain everything, you’re both going to be frustrated.

I’m also quite sure you sense that this coaching is classic transformative coaching, which comes down to belief change, value alignment, identity shifting and action. You’re looking for the key that begins to unwind the tightly wrapped world she has designed for herself. The good news is that she apparently understands that her perceptions create her results.

Begin with that. Also, establish your solid commitment to your role and clearly let her know that you will hold her to language, inquiry, plans, accountability and action that is designed to construct only “gratifying” results. In other words, no excuses and no tangents into self-pity or intellectual pop psychology trips are to be tolerated!

Recognize and point out to her that stories of family relationships gone bad and details about who says what to whom is quicksand for the coaching. Don’t get caught in those traps and self-manage any of your own tendencies either to please her or to allow her to get off the hook by pleasing you.

You’ll have to be diligent about this as it is an important

life-training piece. No one else in her world is capable of pointing out what pleasing, accommodation and co-dependence looks like in moment-to-moment conversation. Unless you keep growing her awareness of these patterns, she won’t get it—and she’ll repeat the patterns that result in her personal assessment of low self-esteem.

Another thing to diligently reveal to her is how the blame game works in her life. Human nature being what it is, when a person blames herself for “not being enough”, she will look around for who or what to blame for that. The unintended result will be relationships that are anything but gratifying.

Your coaching relationship is the one place for a conversation that won’t allow her to slide into self-pity and stories about how bad things are, and why. With you, she can have a real conversation about what “gratifying” values are all about. Use that as an opportunity to design small acts and attitudes that can craft new evidence for the life of her dreams.

Finally, I suggest you favor frequent, shorter calls with lots of accountability and feedback. You may be tempted to ‘please’ her because of a story about her busy schedule, fee concerns, or anything else. Being firm about your boundaries at the start of the coaching relationship will pay big dividends as the coaching unfolds. Strive to be a model for what gratifying life and work looks, sounds and feels like.

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 and put “sticky situations” in the subject line.

By Victoria Trabosh, CDC®

What I love about this sticky situation is that the client has provided the roadmap. The real question from my perspective is: Will she take the journey?

The book itself offers the solution. The actual title is: *The Disease to Please, Curing the People Pleasing Syndrome*. The author, Harriet B. Braiker, has a quiz in the beginning of the book and then suggests the strategy for overcoming this crippling and real issue. After taking the quiz, she states as you find out what type of people pleaser you are (as outlined in her different chapters), focus on those chapters and for 21 days follow her well-laid-out action plan. While this may be overwhelming for your client to tackle on her own, what if, using her own stated issue, you use a tool that guides her to become her best?

I applaud your client for knowing the true problem. As you partner with her, she can learn from her past failures and decide what the future can look like. My only concern is that while I have a passing knowledge of this book, she's read it and yet all I hear you saying is that she's identified

the stumbling block in her life. But does she really want to change?

The unknown can be frightening to people – no matter their level of success. If she was my client, I'd read the book carefully, ask her how she wants to use this excellent resource and if she's willing to change.

If there is agreement, with her consent devise a plan of action. Accountability to you as her coach could be just the missing piece of the puzzle. I know you'd like to pull her out of her thinking, but better yet, show her the solution and see if she's motivated to pull herself clear from this issue.

In my coach training I learned that if a client can't shift out of a certain way of thinking through tools I provide, it may be a therapy issue. If so, I assume you know a therapist to whom you can direct her. Coaching can then be done in tandem with therapy or after therapy is concluded.

This is a journey. She has shown you the roadmap of this book she knows and respects. Your willingness to look at her answer and bring your own wisdom could be just the solution she has been seeking.

By Carol Adrienne, PhD

Your client's problem is not about finding a gratifying professional career that is aligned with her values. Ironically, she already has that!

Her current values are: "It's not okay to be assertive. It's not okay to stand up for myself. It's not okay to confront someone – ever." Her current 'values' or choices have brought her to this situation, which is where she has a chance to grow. By building this wall of self-esteem issues, and declaring that something should be different, she is safely shielded from getting outside her comfort zone. Being a victim perpetuates the fallacy that something is wrong. Someone in victim mode doesn't want a solution. A solution would cut off all the attention that flows towards her from others (such as a best friend or a coach) who bend over backwards looking to help.

My recommendation is to help her recognize that this current employment is her perfect laboratory. For example, perhaps you could ask her to imagine how her present situation exactly matches her relationship to her family. Awareness of what she has re-created is liberating and curiously empowering. Help her understand that psychologically she avoids manifesting a new position because she might lose something else. Subconsciously, if she becomes

happier, she might fear that her family will think she is not one of them anymore, and she will have to give up being the underdog.

Instead of strategizing about how she might find a new position, ask: "What if this current job is the best job you could ever find? What if you have to work here the rest of your life? How could you make that work?"

Also ask if there is anybody with whom she has unresolved issues. Even though it may not seem related to work, until that issue is confronted, resolved, and released, it's unlikely anything professionally is going to be much different.

I had a client once who really hated her job and was trying unsuccessfully to start her own business. One day she decided to "turn toward" the hated job. Instead of resisting it, she threw herself into the work. Within three months, everything changed. She got promoted with a big raise and a company car. The best part was a great relationship with her co-workers. A few years later she did leave and start a completely different and successful line of self-employment.

Your client needs to stay exactly where she is and commit to giving up blame. By staying in the job just the way it is, and paying attention to what comes up each day, sooner or later her understanding will grow. My guess is that a new position or opportunity will then almost certainly manifest. ●