

How can I coach younger clients?

the situation

"I'm an established coach with 20-plus years of experience, now coaching clients who are much younger. What should I be doing or learning in order to coach effectively across a broader range of generations? How can I avoid the age difference becoming a barrier?"

the experts weigh in

By Victoria Trabosh, CDC®

I love that you've been doing this work for 20-plus years. And here's the good news: you don't have one year's experience 20 times. You have 20 years experience! THAT makes you valuable, wise, and effective.

Your ability to relate starts with your attitude about your clients, regardless of their age. As an example, I'm a bit disturbed about all the talk about "millennials." They're a few generations removed from many coaches, but they have needs, wants and desires, just as people of all ages have. Lack of communication is the great barrier of connection. Whether we're talking age difference, cultural difference or gender difference, it's our differences that bring the challenges, and it's communication that brings connection.

An important part of communication is not just getting your message across but also actively listening so that you truly hear what is being said, and the person feels heard. The adage 'be more interested than interesting' applies here! Feeling heard happens when a coach asks better questions, doesn't judge a group or generation for its values, and is seeking to understand rather than be understood.

Barriers can arise when we're not willing to move towards the other person's frame of reference. That can be in language, technology, style of communication and/or awareness of what's generally important to the age group you're working with.

The millennial generation (born between 1980 – 2000) has a great affinity to technology. So be tech savvy to relate. If you won't text, you won't connect. It is absolutely true that people don't care how much you know until they know how much you care. Are you keeping up to date through blogs, the Internet, digital news sources, etc.? You don't have to know all your younger clients know, but you can't be a deer in the headlights if they mention their points of reference. (And ASK if you don't know what they're talking about.)

To relate to anyone who is different from you, think about what's important to him or her, not what's important to you. Many of my clients are 30-plus years younger than me. They



appreciate my experience and I make sure I listen intently to what matters to them and withhold judgment. I always tell my clients, "Do you understand I stand for YOU and NOT your goals?" When they understand this, they clearly begin to see me as their partner.