

ANNIVERSARY ISSUE
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YEARS
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the magazine of professional coaching

Celebrate

The past, present &
future of coaching



**John Whitmore & the
History of Coaching**

**Where We Are,
Where We're Going**

**Millennials: The
Next Generation**

How can I help my client overcome his boss's criticism?

the situation

"My client has made great strides since we started coaching almost a year ago. However, he keeps getting knocked back by his boss, who is always looking for the things that are wrong vs. acknowledging and celebrating the things that are right. It's a constant roller-coaster ride of emotions that is taking its toll on my client (and me, too, sometimes). What can I do or offer in my coaching that can help him continue to enjoy his work?"

the experts weigh in

By Craig Carr, BCC, PCC, CPCC

To unravel this riddle, let's look at the noteworthy elements and their order of importance. You, coach, come first. Second is the client, and third – and least important – is the boss. Does that surprise you? Following are some thoughts aimed at each of these.

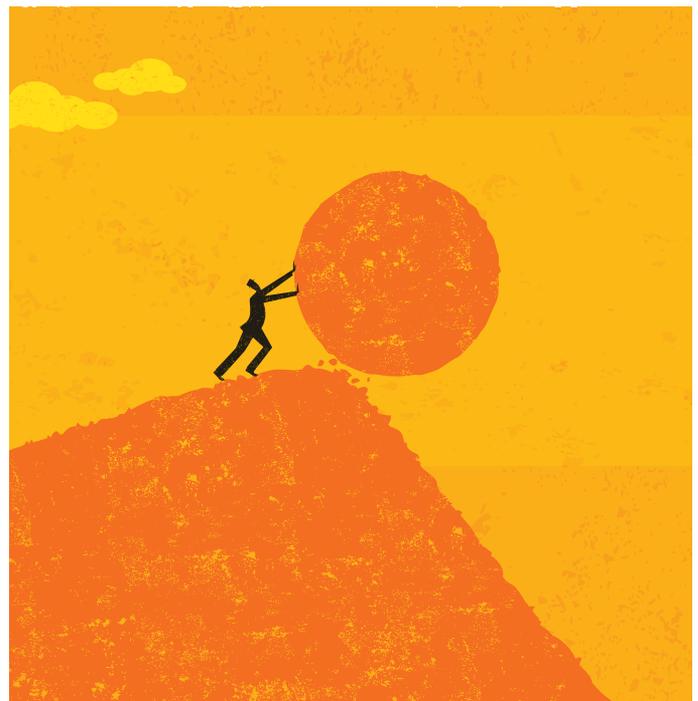
Coach: You come first because you have to be certain you aren't getting hooked by your client's complaints. Are you wasting valuable time hearing about the latest violations in basic management EQ? This client has made great strides, you say. What do those strides inform him he should do in this situation? Look for what's missing in this realm, and you'll find clues for where to explore next.

Client, respectfully: What are you not looking at by blaming your boss for making life a roller-coaster ride? What tolerations are necessary to keep your job and what can you work around, ignore, or even extinguish? You already have one foot out the door, I would think, so what strategies do you need to put in place to advance your plan to evolve out?

Boss: We have to assume you are not going to change for the sake of this employee. That may be a hard truth for this client, but we recognize you need not explain yourself, make amends, or change anything. You don't even have to respond to requests. What you will soon realize, however, is that this employee is first and foremost looking out for himself and his career, not you.

In current conversations about today's work world, you may hear people talking about a "Business of You" perspective. It's not just for entrepreneurs. Among other things, it means that the individual or organization who writes your paycheck is not who you work for! Rather, they are your *customer*. This viewpoint shifts most people to think about performance, worth, choice and more. Explore this and watch your client move out of victimization and into proactivity.

Systemically speaking, this boss is using your client to work out personal issues that ought to be handled elsewhere.



That doesn't bode well for anyone, but it is what it is. At some point your client, if they are growing, will face how they are complicit in such a dynamic and, then, how they are going to deal with it. Meanwhile, have your client look up the chain of authority and determine if bosses above his boss behave in the same way. If they do, it is even less likely that things will change, as the culture is not in his favor.

Lastly, look with your client at the pros and cons of keeping the job and what he accepts or rejects on a Values level. Seriously consider the cost of the emotional turmoil he has to endure. Match this with an assessment of what he wants in his life. Align this with standing in the place of *I am a business that matters*, and the road ahead will clear.

By Suzi Pomerantz, MT, MCC

In this situation, it sounds like your client's roller coaster of emotions has been taking you along for the ride! First, protect and manage your own energy so that you can then help your client to find the best strategies for protecting himself from the emotional tolls from his unappreciative boss. This is one of those times to put your own oxygen mask on first!

Your client needs skills and strategies to advocate for himself, speak up, speak truth to power, manage upwards, and communicate to influence leadership. If those are not the goals he's set for his coaching program with you, perhaps you can guide him to clarity about managing his own emotions at work as well as effectively transforming how his boss leads him.

First, manage and protect your own emotions. As an empathetic coach, you will need skills, tools and strategies for protecting your own inner landscape from the roller coaster your client is on. Before each call with him, mediate or practice your favorite centering/grounding techniques so that you can hold the space for him on the call without being sucked into it by his roller coaster ride. It's his journey, his agenda and his situation. Be clear about boundaries so that you don't take it on in a way that doesn't serve him.

Next, help your client generate strategies for protecting and managing his emotions at work. He will need to unhook his enjoyment of the work that he does from the external validation (or lack thereof) from his boss. Your coaching might include helping him to increase his self-awareness and emotional intelligence such that he can cultivate tools and practices for preventing himself from being buffeted about by commentary from a boss who primarily looks for what's wrong. Help him design practices for getting centered, grounded, protecting his

energy and managing his emotions so he can have freedom and choice about who he wants to be regardless of the circumstances in which he finds himself.

And finally, explore your client's agenda regarding skills of:

- **Self advocacy** – Your client can request the acknowledgment he deserves and effectively communicate his successes.
- **Speaking up** – Your client can learn to say his truth and tell his manager what he wants and needs as well as the impact of the current messages that the boss is communicating.
- **Speaking truth to power** – Your client may need some strategies for how and when to set context, align with leadership, and strategically communicate the reality of the current situation or provide feedback to the boss about the current dynamic that isn't working. He has the right to express what's not working for him about the current management style of his boss, as long as he also provides suggestions and solutions.
- **Managing up** – Have you been coaching your client in the many nuances and distinctions of how to manage his boss? This is a core leadership skill that he will need for this and all future positions.
- **Communicating for influence** – Your client can take on strategically designing his relationship with this boss and reclaim some personal power by learning how to influence the boss. To do so, he will need to uncover what matters most to the boss, what the boss is trying to accomplish, and what support is needed. Then he will need coaching about how to link and connect what he wants from the boss (recognition, celebration) into effective requests that meet the needs of both parties.

With your emotions and his no longer running the show, you can focus on helping him develop the strategies and skills he'll need to transform his relationship with his negative boss so he can get back to enjoying his work!

By Victoria Trabosh, CDC®, CEC

We can become the image of another's perception, or we can check that perception through our own wisdom and knowledge of who we are. Your client's efforts to remain unaffected by his boss's reflection are difficult to watch, and difficult for him to shoulder.

Your client's boss sounds like a High D on the DiSC® scale. Direct, demanding, always looking for the next problem, and not much awareness that an 'atta boy' would carry him far with this employee.

Your client's need for the positive feedback doesn't mean he doesn't himself have 'D' characteristics, but he also most likely has high 'I' or 'S' qualities in his personality. Those characteristics include optimism, looking for what's working, responding well to positive feedback and being respected in general.

I'm a big fan of the DiSC® tool when I work with clients. It helps clients understand themselves and how they're perceived by others. It teaches them to take responsibility for their actions and more objectively look at the actions of others through a dispassionate and highly effective tool. Awareness of actions that are not personal to us – just a personal way of being for the other person – changes the emotionality of our response.

While the employer's actions are not condoned, this is the profile of many leaders. They're off to the next problem as soon as the last one is solved. They see no need to offer platitudes or congratulations for what they feel may simply be seen as "doing your job" behavior.

Two ideas I'd offer. First, tell your client that he needs to be less affected by his boss's style. If he knows his worth he needs to get a higher level of feedback from more sophisticated leaders. If his boss's constant critical feedback is putting him in a negative light he needs to decide if the message, though inelegantly delivered, has merit and he can improve his performance. Second, your client needs to have a conversation to let his boss know he'd get better performance from your client if he praised the client's successes and helped him improve. Your client should be less affected by his boss when he understands his needs are not his boss's or vice versa.

As the coach, don't be frustrated or let a client's issues take a toll on you. Stand for the client and NOT their goals and you'll be able to be a resource. ●

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.