

# 30 Coaching Tips for Work and Life

The tips in this book come from my experience as a coach. I draw on my coaching, my experience being coached, and the incredible training of The Coaches Training Institute, where I first encountered many of these ideas.

I hope you find this booklet useful in your coaching  
and/or your relationships.

Sincerely,  
Laura

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## Coaching Tip of the Week #1

**Keep it simple, keep it simple, keep it simple. It's so easy to try to ask a brilliant question, but the real value comes when I am simple, and ask questions that almost seem dumb.**

E.g. Client: "I want to be more assertive."

"Brilliant question" (Don't try to be brilliant!):

"If assertive were a metaphor..."

"Dumb question" (Ask this one instead!):

"What does 'assertive' mean to you?"

E.g. client: "I'm really overwhelmed about x, y, z..."

"Brilliant question" (Don't try to be brilliant!):

"What do x, y, z have in common?"

"Dumb question" (Ask this one instead!):

"What is it like to be overwhelmed?"

**Notwithstanding the example above... do not underestimate the value of metaphor! Metaphors are amazing. When a client gives you one, you HAVE to run with it because it will be rich.**

E.g. client: "It's like I'm walking through mud."

Non-metaphor-alert coach:

"Sounds like a tough time.

What's hard about it?"

Metaphor-alert-coach:

"Walking through mud. Hm, what's the mud?"

"What's the sound your feet are making?"

## **Coaching Tip of the Week #2**

### **Don't settle for anything less than commitment.**

E.g. Client: "Okay, for my homework this week I will try to think about some of the ways I could change my approach to this project." (notice the red flags: "try to", "think about", "could change")

*Wishy-washy coach:*

"Sounds good!"

*Coach who truly is committed to the client's agenda and the client's forward motion:*

"What WILL you DO to change your approach this week?"

or:

"Will you, by Thursday, email me three ways that you are changing your approach?"

### Coaching Tip of the Week #3

#### **Acknowledge, acknowledge, acknowledge.**

Acknowledgment is **recognizing the quality in someone** that they have demonstrated. It's different from feedback. It calls attention to the quality in the person, because sometimes when the coach sees the quality, recognizes it, and names it, then the client discovers that quality in him/herself. And once the client knows it is inside him/herself, the client is able to draw on that quality again.

Here's an easy formula (courtesy of one of my CTI instructors) for novice acknowledgers:

1. Make it three words.
2. The first two words are "You are".
3. The third word is the word that tumbles from your heart out of your mouth when you see the quality in your client.

You can acknowledge anyone in your life. Not just people you coach.

Practice. I dare you. Look up from your computer and find something to acknowledge in the first person you see. Or in the person to whom you send your next email.

E.g. Client describes how nervous she was at a big presentation she had to give, and how she got up there and psyched herself up and did it.

*Non-acknowledging coach:*

"Good job." (Question: How does that help your client? Answer: it doesn't).

*Acknowledging coach:*

"You are courageous." or "You are brave". or "You try new things." or "You push yourself to grow."

## Coaching Tip of the Week #4

### MOVE.

Moving can literally and figuratively change your client's perspective (and yours too!).

In coaching vocab, we call this "geography" - because being in a different space or in a different posture can be just as significant as moving from one landscape to another. Change the physical geography, and the mental and emotional geography changes too.

Suggestions for using geography:

1. Ask permission / invite the client to move.
2. Let the client know that you are going to move with them. (if you're coaching over the phone, let them know that you're going to move too)
3. Listen for cues that a change in geography is in order.

E.g. Client is talking about a promotion she wants, but the promotion seems far away and unreachable and she doesn't know how she'll get there. Use geography to: 1 - have her get the sense of what it would be like to have that promotion; 2 - use geography to understand how to get there.

*Here's how:*

"I invite you to stand up. I'll stand up too. So, here we are, where you are now. That promotion seems so far away. *[pause to let the client get the sense of how it feels]*. Now, look ahead to the other side of the room. That's you, once you've got the promotion. Can you see it? Now, we're going to take a giant step over there. Are you ready? 1-2-3... here we go! *[literally step to the other side of the room, to "promotion land"]*. What do you see here? What do you feel? *[use whichever questions you can for the client to get the sense of what it's like here in promotion land]*.

"Who did you have to be to get here? What qualities did you have to call on in yourself?"

*[now you can use the perspective from this geography to ask the client how to get to this place]*

"Look back to where you started. Back there on the other side of the room, back to your present-day self. What's the first step she needs to take to get you to here?"

## **Coaching Tip of the Week #5**

### **Renew Yourself.**

I love coaching. I love coaching everyday. I want to coach all the time. And because I love it so much, I sometimes forget that I need time off.

I'm going to go out on a limb here and say that coaches have a responsibility to their clients to model self-renewal and to schedule time to renew ourselves.

Coaches are putting energy out all the time. They are being present and attentive. They're listening at 100%.

In order to keep doing that, we need to take breaks. We need to take breaks BEFORE we're run down and burned out. We need to model sustainable work and self-care. We need to model our own commitment to our own health and our own growth.

My new commitment: whenever there are 5 weeks in a month (happens ~ 4 times a year), I won't coach during the fifth week. I'll work: I'll catch up on administration, I'll do some writing, I'll do work on my business plan - but I will take a break from coaching. I owe it to myself and I owe it to my clients to build in these breaks in advance, before I'm desperate for them.

What's your commitment to self-care?

## Coaching Tip of the Week #6

### Articulate What's Going On.

A Co-Active Coaching Skill that seems so basic that I often forget about it... and then when I use it, I remember how valuable it is!

As a coach, you're listening and probably drawing conclusions and receiving impressions and noticing all sorts of things. Instead of just letting those things keep running around in your head, notice them out loud: observe them, and articulate them to your client.

#### Example:

**Client:** I could try x, but I don't really think it will work. Or y, but I don't really want to... I'm so confused.

**Non-articulating coach:** What haven't you tried yet?

*(note - that's a perfectly fine question to ask... but it isn't articulating what's going on. And it kind of keeps things staying in the stuck, how-do-I-find-a-solution place)*

**Client:** I could try x, but I don't really think it will work. Or y, but I don't really want to... I'm so confused.

**Articulating coach:** It feels like you're in a dead end, and you don't see a way out.

By articulating what's going on, the coach is giving the client to notice what's going on too - an invitation to step back, see what's happening, and choose a different perspective.

## Coaching Tip of the Week #7

### Your Most Powerful Question: "What Do You Want?"

Many of us have been trained, educated, and rewarded for learning how to solve problems. We've become very good at it! And sometimes we let that problem-solving spill over into coaching.

Here's the thing: coaching - at least, co-active coaching - is not about problem-solving. Coaching: working with someone in the service of their full potential, in the service of their goals, in the service of their aspirations and fulfillment - this is not problem-solving! This is much bigger. Problem-solving is small in comparison.

Because we - both coaches and clients - are all so societally good at problem-solving, here's something I've noticed: we're great at understanding the problem. We're great at knowing what's not working. Wow, we know so much about how things are wrong and the story of how they got wrong and the status quo of their wrongness and our dissatisfaction. But what we don't know as much about is how we want things to be. I've been stunned at otherwise brilliant people who have never given any thoughts to what they want, rather than what they don't want.

#### Example:

**Client:** I wish I wasn't so stressed out. I have so much to do. It's piling up and I can't figure out how to fit it all in. And when I get overwhelmed I get more stressed, and when I get more stressed it's even harder to get things done.

**Problem-solving coach:** So, what are all the things that you have on your plate?  
*(You can see where this coach is going... he/she is thinking ahead to how to solve the problem. I bet you that the client has already thought through this line of thinking!)*

**Client:** I wish I wasn't so stressed out. I have so much to do. It's piling up and I can't figure out how to fit it all in. And when I get overwhelmed I get more stressed, and when I get more stressed it's even harder to get things done.

**Fulfillment-focused coach:** How do you want to be when you have lots to do? How do you want to feel?

## Coaching Tip of the Week #8

### Switch Perspective

If you as a coach are getting the sense that your client is "stuck" (sometimes your client comes out and says it: "I'm stuck!" "I can't figure this out!") then it is prime-o time-o to switch perspective. (For all you CTI folks, I am referring to what we call Balance coaching, or using geography.)

The trick is not in telling your client to "think about it in a different way", but instead opening up the space for them to step into and *\*feel\** some new perspectives. The right brain will help you out here: think music, landscape, imagery, and metaphor.

#### Example:

**Client:** I've plateaued. I was making so much progress on [goal x], and now I can't get anywhere with it.

**Perspective-aware-but-not-particularly-skilled-coach:** What's a different way of looking at it?

**Client:** I've plateaued. I was making so much progress on [goal x], and now I can't get anywhere with it.

#### **Perspective-alert coach:**

*(coach notices the client's current perspective: "Plateaued", and notices the client's emotion as he/she describes it: frustration, discouragement)*

Sounds like you feel stuck. You believe you aren't making progress anymore. From where you're standing now - if it was a landscape, what would it look like? If it was a concert, what type of music would be playing?

*(waits for answer, works with answer a bit, then aims to switch perspective...)*

Let's try a different perspective. Step over here and imagine the landscape is a body of water, and you're standing here looking out at it. What are you feeling now? What music do you imagine playing? *(waits for answer...)* Now that you're standing in this perspective, what do you notice about your [goal x]?

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(My wise new friend and colleague Chris Corrigan has a lovely piece on Coast Salish perspective here: <http://chriscorrigan.com/parkinglot/?p=2732>)

## Coaching Tip of the Week #9

### When You Get Stuck: Stop Thinking About Yourself, and Get Curious About Your Client

A tendency many coaches, new or not, can fall into: getting stuck and thinking that we have to find the answer within ourselves. The coach's wheels start spinning as he/she searches for the perfect question to ask, the perfect thing to say next. The coach gets trapped in his/her own head as he/she tries to figure out what to say and starts worrying that he/she won't have the right thing to say, maybe even starts thinking that he/she must not be a good coach, that this conversation is a failure, etc. etc.

Turn off all that mental chatter! Stop it in its tracks! As soon as you, as a coach, realize that you're caught up in your own head trying to figure out what to say next, congratulate yourself for your self-awareness! Then step out of your own head and get curious about your client. Your client is naturally creative, resourceful, and whole. Your client knows exactly what to say next. Your client knows the perfect question. Your client knows his/her own perfect answer.

#### Example:

Here are some things you, the coach, can say when you feel yourself getting stuck in your own head. Note that these examples are all **short, simple**, and they all **will take your awareness out of your head and back to your client**, who, after all, is the main attraction here :-)

Option 1) "I'm struggling to find the right thing to say. What's going on with you right now?"

Option 2) "What would be the perfect question to ask you right now?"

Option 3) "What question are you hoping I won't ask right now?"

Option 4) Notice something about your client and articulate it. e.g. "I notice your fists are clenched." e.g. "I hear sadness in your voice."

Option 5) Express your own feeling/thoughts, maybe using a metaphor. "I'm feeling a little lost in the fog right now. Where are you at?"

Option 6) "What about that is important to you?" (always a winner!)

Option 7) "What do you truly want?" (again, always a winner!)

## Coaching Tip of the Week #10

### If You Have a Hypothesis, State It

First off: try not to have hypotheses. Your imagined story about what is going on with your client is just that: an imagined story. As a coaching instructor said once in one of my courses, "**Coaching is not about getting someone else to have a realization that you've had.**"

Second: if you do have a hypothesis, and you can't let go of it, and you're burning with the desire to "illuminate" the other person with it, then don't try to sneak it in. Don't try to lead them down a path until they think what you think. Just come out and say it - and make sure you own that it is YOUR imagining, and YOUR hypothesis. It is up to them to accept it or reject it.

### Examples:

Handy ways to state hypotheses / imaginings:

- 1) "When you say that, here's where my mind goes [...] Does that resonate for you?" (Note: if it DOESN'T resonate for the client, then let your story go!)
- 2) "When I hear you say that you yelled at your boss, I imagine that you're worried about that upcoming performance review." (Maybe the client is worried about that. Maybe he/she's not. Maybe it had never crossed their mind and now they're going to think about it. But it's your imagining.)
- 3) "I imagine that when you found that out, you felt upset." (That's what you imagine - but check it out. Maybe the client actually felt: discouraged/relieved/angry/sad/disappointed/happy/etc).
- 4) "My hypothesis is that you need to talk about [x] before you can find an answer to [y]. Does that ring true for you?" (Note: if it DOESN'T ring true for your client, then let the story go!) (But don't just start making them talk about [x] without checking with them about your hypothesis!)
- 5) "When you tell me this about [x], it reminds me of what you said before about [y]. How are they connected for you?" (Note: coach has hypothesis that the two things are connected, so the coach is checking in with the client to see if they are).

I imagine you have read this, and I imagine that now you are thinking about how transparent you are in communicating your assumptions/hypotheses. If my imaginings are correct, then yay! Mission accomplished.

## Coaching Tip of the Week #11

### Head, Heart, and Body

I've been studying the Enneagram (<http://www.enneagraminstitute.com/>) in my therapist training course. It's a really involved and in-depth tool for growth, and I think it requires probably years of study before you can use it properly. But here's one piece that's usable for coaches right now:

According to the Enneagram, every person is one of 9 different types. Within the 9 different types, there are three sets of three. Each set has its own "intelligence centre".

- There are three types whose intelligence centre is the head, or thinking centre.
- There are three types whose intelligence centre is the heart, or feeling centre.
- There are three types whose intelligence centre is the body (aka "being", "intuition", "gut").

One of the gifts of understanding the Enneagram is in learning how to integrate all three of your centres, and be able to access all three intelligence centres.

As a coach, you can use this trio of head, heart, and body to explore different sides of a topic and to expand your client's awareness.

### Examples:

#### Head/Thinking questions:

- 1) What possibilities do you see?
- 2) What might get in the way?
- 3) What will help you reach your goal?
- 4) What obstacles will you overcome?
- 5) What will you do, and by when will you do it?

#### Heart/Feeling questions:

- 1) What will it feel like to reach your goal?
- 2) Imagine you have succeeded. What are you feeling? What's the emotion?
- 3) When you describe that event, what emotions come up for you?
- 4) If you were ridiculously happy, what would you notice?
- 5) What would be thrilling?
- 6) What about this is exciting? What about this is scary?

#### Body/Being questions:

- 1) What are you aware of in your body right now?
- 2) When you describe your anger, what are the physical sensations?
- 3) What are the physical cues that let you know you are at peace?
- 4) Who do you have to **be** to reach your goal?
- 5) When you are confident, how do you stand? What's your posture? Where do you feel the confidence in your body?

## **Coaching Tip of the Week #12**

### **Intrude and Bottomline**

A coach intrudes or bottom lines when the client is stuck in a story, rehashing the old, not going anywhere new, and not exploring. A big part of a coach's job is to help their client see new perspectives and new ways of looking at things, and to open up possibilities. If the client is stuck in rehashing an old story, then it's the coach's job to interrupt.

#### **Signs that a client might be stuck in an old story or in an old way of looking at things:**

- They're talking about what happened in the past
- They're full-on telling you a story (which might be nice if you were having a friendly conversation, but isn't conducive to coaching)
- You, the coach, notice you're feeling bored or that your attention is wandering (this could mean you need to work on your SELF-MANAGEMENT, or it could be an indicator that your client is hanging out in old, already explored stuff, and you need to push them to move toward a vibrant, resonating life)
- They're rambling
- They're spending a whole bunch of time on details that aren't propelling the coaching forward (e.g. describing every aspect of the menu they prepared for their parents)

#### **Sample things to say when you intrude and bottomline:**

- In my first session with clients, I let them know that I may interrupt them in the future to help bring the conversation into focus. I ask if I have their permission to do that, and ask if they will let me know if it bothers them.
- "I'm going to cut you short here to ask, 'What's important here?'"
- "Do I have your permission to interrupt? I want to ask, 'What's at the heart of this?'"
- "What's the main message here?"
- "I can tell this is really on your mind. I just want to check with you: is this the topic you want coaching on today?"
- "So that's what happened. Tell me what is important about that now."

### **Coaching Tip of the Week #13**

#### **Not every coaching conversation needs to be mind-blowing.**

You know the coaching conversations I mean? The one where it feels like the coaching client sees the world in an entirely new way, his/her perspective shifts, possibilities come flooding in, and everything changes? Yeah, those are amazing conversations.

The tricky part: it's easy to get hooked and to become a mind-blowing junkie. As a coach, I might get hooked into thinking that I haven't done my job unless my client's life/work takes a complete turn every time we talk. And all those other coaching conversations, where change happens more slowly and with more subtlety, might seem unsuccessful to me.

Let's get a dose of perspective, shall we? Who could handle having a complete paradigm shift every week? Not me. Who could handle having a mind-blowing conversation that causes me to run out and make a bunch of changes every week? Not me. So why would I think that's what I have to provide every week for my clients?

What I can handle - in fact, what I LOVE - about coaching is that all those more subtle conversations add up. Slowly and surely, clients start becoming more in tune with their values. They start sensing their Future Self. They start shifting perspectives on their own, and become less attached to one way of seeing things. They start looking for metaphors to describe their situation, and they start becoming more aware of and more able to articulate their emotions.

These are incredible and precious changes that deserve to be honoured and valued exactly as they are.

## Coaching Tip of the Week #14

### The Quality of Listening

*"Listening makes a space. It is holding an open, unbiased and caring space for another person to speak into. Feminine principle is a sense of warmth and open heartedness – unconditional friendliness that comes into the pauses in conversations and into our moments of silence. It is unconditional because it is not based on anything in particular. It is not caused by circumstances – because they were nice to me or because I want something from them, I will be friendly to them. For no particular reason, just because we are human and appreciate our life, we can provide a friendly listening space for other people."*

~ Arawana Hayashi in The Feminine Principle and Theory U,  
<http://www.presencing.com/docs/publications/articles/FemininePrincipleTU.pdf>

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Of course, coaches do much more than listen. But one of the first rules of coaching is to listen. To listen to the words, to listen to the emotion, to listen to what is said and to what is not said, to listen to how it is said, to listen to the mood in which it is said, to listen for when the voice speeds up and gets louder, for when the voice drops and gets slower.

I invite you to practice holding an "open, unbiased and caring space for another person to speak into" this week. You could try it while coaching, or you could try it with a friend, with an acquaintance, with a co-worker, with a manager, with a family members, etc. What changes for you when you listen from an open, unbiased, and caring space? What changes for you when you listen because we are human and we appreciate our life?

## **Coaching Tip of the Week #15**

### **Your Client is Amazing**

Before your scheduled coaching call or coaching meeting, take fifteen minutes and remind yourself:

What do you love about this coaching client?

What do you admire in him/her?

What inspires you about him/her?

What are this client's goals, dreams, and values?

Who is this client's Future Self?

What are this client's magnificent qualities?

What do you wish to acknowledge in this client?

You might not mention all of these or any of these in each conversation, but if you as a coach go into the conversation with this rich perspective on your client, you will be so much better positioned to serve your client.

And if you want some practice, maybe try asking yourself all of those questions about your spouse, roommate, parent, child, coworker, etc!

## **Coaching Tip of the Week #16**

Props to the **Process** course at the Coaches Training Institute for inspiring this tip...

### **Experiment With Your Own Geography**

In Coaching Tip of the Week # 4 I talked about using "geography" - inviting your client to move to explore different perspectives, and to connect with how the coaching topic felt in their body.

This week: it's not just your client's geography that you get to play with!

As you experiment with the following, notice:

- the different energy you bring as a coach in the different geographies
- how that affects your client's energy
- the different questions and intuitions that arise for you when you try on different geographies.

Experiments to try midway through the coaching call/conversation:

- if you're sitting down, stand up. If you're standing up, sit down.
- change your focus. Look up and away for a minute, focus on something else, then come back to the conversation. (In Gestalt training, we call this playing with your figure/ground).
- put your hands on your hips
- stand/sit straighter
- slump over
- put your feet up on your desk
- smile
- frown
- clench your fists
- tap your foot on the floor
- coach in a business suit or a fancy dress
- coach in that pair of jeans that you don't really like

What happens? And what can you learn from the experiment?

As always, you don't have to wait for a coaching conversation to try these... try them in any conversation and see what happens!

## Coaching Tip of the Week #17

### An Open Inquiry on Feedback

A few things people have asked me lately: "How does a coach give a client bad news (e.g. that they don't stand a chance at getting that promotion)?", "What if you know something that your client needs to know?", "What if you can see what they're doing wrong?"

Mostly, these questions highlight to me that mixing managing and coaching rarely works. How can a client trust that they can share their fears, weaknesses, and dreams with the "coach" who believes they won't get a promotion, the "coach" who believes they know more than the client, the "coach" who has a preconceived story of what's right and what's wrong?

I put "coach" in quotation marks, because I think that if you are carrying the certainty that the client won't get a promotion, you aren't coaching - you are playing God, and not believing in your client to boot. If you believe you know something your client needs to know, you need to do your own work about your need to be such an expert. If you can see what they're doing wrong, then maybe the real calling is for you to turn the lens on yourself and ask what you're doing wrong (for example, being really judgmental!).

Am I being harsh? I feel strongly about this one.

At the same time, there is a place for a true coach to give feedback. And by feedback, I do NOT mean evaluation or judgment. A coach who is doing their job is not evaluating or judging. By feedback, I mean that there is a place for a coach to play back for the client what the coach is experiencing in the client.

#### Examples:

- "I know you value honesty. And in the situation you're describing, I don't hear you being honest with yourself. What's true for you?"

- "For a few weeks you have been telling me that you want to improve your organization and time management, and we have talked about strategies, and you haven't taken action. What's up?"

#### Strategies:

- you can use roleplay to rehearse or rehash a situation. For example, your client is preparing for a conversation with their coworker. The coach can roleplay the coworker and then feedback to the client what they experienced in the roleplay. e.g. "When you said, 'I sort of wish you would take more time making sure our office kitchen is in good shape,' I didn't hear a clear request. What is it that you want to request of your coworker?"

- similarly, you can use this strategy to review a conversation that didn't work out the way the client wanted. The coach can ask the client to recount what was said, and then feedback his/her own experience listening to the client. e.g. "You are telling me that you told your coworker you want the kitchen to be in good shape. How can you and your coworker identify and reach agreement on what a 'kitchen in good shape' is?"

- note that in neither of my above strategy examples does the coach step into judgment and say, "You need to work on your communication skills." All the coach does is state his/her own experience, and then get curious about what it is the client is wanting. I'm willing to bet the experience + curiosity works a whole lot better than judgment does for prompting growth and change in a client.

I've titled this tip "An Open Inquiry..." because there are still areas within this topic that I am exploring and trying to figure out. I don't have all the answers! And I would be eager for your responses, input, and follow up questions.

## **Coaching Tip of the Week #18**

### **Experiment with Lightness**

Try keeping it light. We don't have to be serious all the time. Yes, personal growth can be serious stuff. Professional growth can be serious stuff. Our lives can be serious. Our growth and discovery and our fulfilling lives - these are all significant and weighty. And at the same time, it is also true that all of these things can be playful, light, creative, and funny.

Try experimenting with lightness in your coaching conversations, and see what new areas it takes you to.

### **Example questions:**

- What's humorous about this?
- How would a 7-year-old describe it?
- What would it be to hold this lightly?
- What's the playful way to look at it?
- What's the ridiculous angle here?
- What would a clown/joker/jester do in this situation?
- What if it were impossible for you to be serious about this? How would you look at it then?

## Coaching Tip of the Week #19

### Coach the Client, Not the Topic

In Co-Active coaching, we coach the client, not the topic. That means the coach doesn't step in and get her/his hands dirty trying to problem-solve. The coach doesn't get involved in the decision / the struggle / the disagreement / the challenge - whatever it is that's going on for the client.

What the Co-Active coach DOES do is coach the client into **being who that client needs to be** in order to address the topic.

#### Example:

Imagine the client is single and looking for a partner.

#### The coach's job does NOT include:

- setting the client up with the coach's friend
- giving the client wardrobe advice / online dating advice / how-to-meet-people advice
- sending the client flowers on Valentine's Day
- ... you get my drift.

#### The coach's job MAY, however, include:

- helping the client get clear on the vision: What type of relationship does the client want? What type of partner? What does the client dream of? What relationship/partner would thrill this client?
- helping the client identify and work with self-limiting beliefs: e.g. if the client has the perspective, "I could never get the type of partner I want", the coach might point out that this is one perspective, and help the client experiment with trying out different perspectives, and with choosing a perspective that better serves the client and his/her goal
- holding the client Naturally Creative, Resourceful, and Whole, whether or not the client has a partner. The coach can still see, acknowledge, and reflect back to the client how the client is naturally creative, resourceful, and whole - perfect just as he/she is - regardless of whether the client has or does not have a partner.

## Coaching Tip of the Week #20

**Two Sides of the Same Coin: Clarifying and Metaview** I'm an "NT" (with some NF tendencies) on the Myers Briggs Type Indicator, which is one of the reasons I'm naturally drawn to metaview questions. I love 'em. **Metaview questions** take your coaching client up and out of the messy details and point to a higher up perspective, or to an overarching theme.

### ***Example metaview questions:***

"If your life is a book, what's the name of this chapter?"

"Five years from now, what does this situation look like?"

"Imagine yourself floating up into outer space, and then looking down on this. What do you see from that perspective?"

"What about this is familiar? What about this reminds you of a pattern you've seen before?"

The flip side of metaview questions are **clarifying questions**, and I especially find clarifying questions important with NT clients, who can tend towards the abstract. The metaview, themes, and patterns are so enticing to these clients that the specifics and details get lost.

### ***Example clarifying questions:***

"What's an example?"

"What action or behaviour will it involve?"

"Here's what I'm hearing... [summarize main points] – is that right?"

"What does this look like in action?"

"How would you know?"

### **Food for thought:**

Do you tend to gravitate toward one end of the spectrum? Are you more on the metaview side, or the clarifying side? Why not experiment with the whole spectrum and see what you discover?

## **Coaching Tip of the Week #21**

Sometimes people ask me if I have favourite coaching questions...

### **Favourite Questions**

I generally always find these questions can be useful (by useful, I mean: they take the client to a new place, they open up new knowledge or awareness, they deepen the conversation). Use them liberally, and with sincere curiosity, and you will go far...

What is important to you?

What do you truly want?

What value(s) are you honouring? What value(s) are you ignoring?

What's that like?

What are you learning?

What do you notice?

What will you do?

What's next?

## **Coaching Tip of the Week #22**

### **Speed Up By Slowing Down**

Here's what sometimes happens: a client brings a topic to a coaching conversation, and maybe my self-management skills aren't at the top of their game, and I have a little reaction of "Oh my goodness, this topic is huge, how are we ever going to get through this in a half hour call", and then I start jumping ahead. Instead of staying with my client, listening to exactly where they are right now, my mind goes ahead and starts looking for potential paths for the conversation and potential places to end up.

This is a poor path to go down, because: 1) I stop paying attention to what is going on with my client; 2) I lose awareness of the emotion and feeling in the client's voice, because I'm doing mental gymnastics with the topic; 3) I start rushing the client through places that might be rich with learning and discovery.

*When my client and I are lucky, I notice what I'm doing and tell myself, "Stop, slow down, listen!"*

In my experience, without exception, slowing down always works better. The client learns more. The client becomes aware of things that perhaps he/she had been rushing over himself/herself. The client gets a chance to experience what it's like to be in the middle of this topic, not knowing the way out, and starts seeing the situation and his/her own experience more clearly.

By slowing down and creating this space for the coaching client, the coach gives the client time and space for new learning.

#### **Ways to slow down:**

Pause. Breathe. Count to ten in silence.

Echo back the client's words, without adding anything new or adding a question.

Ask the client, "What happens / what do you notice when you hear yourself say that?"

## **Coaching Tip of the Week #23**

### **Don't Work So Hard**

If you notice yourself struggling when coaching a client, you've stumbled on a good clue that you're working too hard. It's your client's life. It's your client's dreams. It's your client's actions and your client's goals and your client's values. You as coach aren't the one who has to carry all the responsibility here!

In fact, if as a coach I take on responsibility for my client's life, I'm implicitly giving the message that I don't believe my client is capable and resourceful. I'm implicitly sending a message of "You need me to live your life," and creating dependency.

But coaching is about enabling your client to tap into his or her full resourcefulness. So if you notice yourself struggling to get the coaching conversation "right", step back and turn the ownership back over to your client. Remind yourself as coach not to work too hard. And invite your client to work harder :-)

### **Ways to let go of working so hard:**

Ask "What question should I ask you right now?" or "What question are you hoping I won't ask right now?"

Ask "What's happening now?" or "Where did you just go there?"

Say "I'm feeling like I'm struggling. What are you noticing?"

Slump back in your chair, put your feet up on your desk, hold an imaginary cigarette, and ask the laziest question you can think of.

## **Coaching Tip of the Week #24**

### **The Client is the Expert**

This week I found a reminder in my calendar to go read a "September-October" doc I keep in the folder called "Wellbeing" on my harddrive. I opened up the document, which I wrote a few years ago, and was surprised and thankful for the wisdom of the Laura-of-a-few-years-ago who wrote that document and put a reminder in her calendar to go read it.

Laura-of-a-few-years-ago had my best interests at heart. She noticed that every October, my tendency toward clinical depression takes an awful hit and everything falls apart. Laura-of-a-few-years-ago had the wherewithal to leave me instructions about what to watch out for, who to reach out to, ideas of what helps, recommendations to help me get through October every year. With her help, I just might be able to break the annual pattern.

I offer this story because it's such a true example of how the client is the expert. In this case, I was the expert on myself. I am so much more willing to take my own advice, because I actually know what works, what hasn't worked, and what my tendencies are. If someone else - even someone loving and caring - showed up in September and told me I need to buy a lightbox, go for walks, and go to acupuncture in order to stave off an October crash, I would just ignore them. What do they know about my life? What gives them the authority to offer me advice?

Do you notice yourself trying to offer advice to your clients? Do you start thinking that you're the expert on them? If you notice this tendency, experiment with stepping back and letting them be the experts.

### **Ways to tap into your client's expertise:**

Questions to try out:

"What have you tried before that worked/didn't work?"

"What have you never tried that might work/not work?"

"What advice would you give to someone else in your situation?"

"What other viewpoint might you consider?"

"What wisdom do you have to offer yourself?"

"What does this remind you of?"

"How would you like it to be different this time?"

"What pattern are you falling into?"

"What pattern are you trying to break?"

## **Coaching Tip of the Week #25**

### **Coach Your Client**

Your client has a story about how Someone Else is totally the problem. Everything is going wrong because of Someone Else. Someone Else needs coaching, they say. If only Someone Else would change / lighten up / get over him/herself.

Here's the deal: you as coach are there to coach your client. Not to vicariously coach someone else through your client. Not to agree about how Someone Else is clearly the problem. Someone Else did not hire you, and you certainly can't coach Someone Else when Someone Else isn't even part of the conversation.

#### **Clues you're moving into Someone Else territory:**

- The conversation is all about Someone Else and what Someone Else did/said/felt.
- The client is removing him/herself from the conversation, and saying "The problem is that Someone Else is..."

#### **Ways to move back to coaching your client:**

- "I hear your frustration. Where are you in all of this? What's happening with you?"
- "I'm hearing a lot about Someone Else. Someone Else isn't here, though. What part of this can we coach YOU on?"
- "Someone Else is taking up all the space here! When you focus on Someone Else's role in this, what are you avoiding/missing/not seeing?"
- "How are you contributing to this situation?"
- "What are you believing about Someone Else/the situation?" (moves you back into coaching your client's beliefs)

#### **Experiment:**

Fun way to try this out outside of coaching. Notice in yourself when you are telling a story all about how Someone Else is the problem, and ask yourself what your contribution is.

## **Coaching Tip of the Week #26**

### **Remind Yourself What Great Coaching Is**

Any time I feel like I'm moving away from being able to do really good coaching, or if I'm coming back from a vacation and trying to get back in the groove, or if I get all caught up in worrying about how one single coaching conversation went instead of seeing the many, many that have gone well... then I take some time to remind myself of what great coaching is.

### **Ways that I remind myself (What might work as a reminder for you?):**

- I have a session with my coach, and marvel at her skill
- I have a peer coaching session with some of the folks I met in my coach training, and learn from their examples and comments and observations
- I listen to the CD recordings of sample coaching that come with the book Co-Active Coaching, by Whitworth et al
- I read over training notes and coaching books
- I reread the Coaches Training Institute's fantastic article series on co-active coaching's cornerstones (<http://www.thecoaches.com/resources/multimedia/The-Co-Active-Cornerstones-Series-1-of-4.html>).

**What might work as a reminder for you? What gets you back in the groove?**

## **Coaching Tip of the Week #27**

### **Being Alert to the Implicit Rules**

In a number of coaching conversations recently, I've noticed the presence of implicit rules or unconscious beliefs that are getting in the way of a client being able to reach his/her goals. I'll use some examples of my own implicit or unconscious rules, ones that I have become conscious of in my own life:

- I have to exercise first thing in the morning, otherwise I won't do it all
- If I haven't put in three solid hours of work before noon, the day is a waste
- The harder I work the more successful I'll be

A good coach would notice some of those unspoken beliefs and would gently uncover them and ask me about them. Imagine if I did question the belief that exercise has to happen first thing in the morning - all of a sudden I find a yoga class I love that's offered in the evening. Imagine if I realize that I'm habitually calling the day a failure at noon - I could start noticing how much of the day was left when noon comes around, and get curious about my notion of "waste". Imagine if I realize my "work hard = successful" lens - then I could experiment with another lens, like what if I will be successful through playing hard? What if I will be successful through living a joy-filled life?

If you notice a coaching client using the word "should" (e.g. "I should exercise first thing in the morning", "I should work hard"), get curious about what implicit rules he or she is following. What unwritten rules does your client have about how he/she "should" exercise, work, be in a relationship, spend money, take time off, be socially etc. etc. ?

And while you're at it... what unwritten rules might be operating in your life?

## Coaching Tip of the Week #28

### The Value of Attention

I'm reading [How to be an Adult in Relationships: The 5 Keys to Mindful Loving](#), which is a stunning book full of wisdom. This paragraph on attunement and attention strikes me as wise words for understanding the space from we coach (or, for you non-coaches, the space from which we can relate to each other lovingly).

pg. 29:

"Attunement is mirrored attentiveness from one person to another. Attentiveness means noticing and hearing words, feelings, and experience. In a moment of authentic attention, we feel that we are deeply and truly understood in what we say or do and in who we are, with nothing left out. Likewise, we can attune to others' feelings, needs, bodily reactions, comfort levels with closeness, and degrees of willingness - for example, whether someone is acting out of coercion and compliance rather than true concurrence. We cannot attune if we assume certain feelings are right and others wrong. To attune to someone, we need neutrality toward all feelings, moods, and inner states and the fearless openness of mindfulness. Only with such pure attention can we see beyond his bravado to his terror, beyond his stolidity to his turmoil. This is how attention becomes compassion...

"...Attuned attention creates an ever-widening zone of trust and safety...

"...Attention means bringing something or someone into focus so it is no longer blurred by the projections of your own ego; thus it requires genuine interest and curiosity about the mysterious and surprising truth that is you."

As coaches and as humans, we have to do our own work and our own noticing in order to be there for each other.

\*What words, feelings, and experiences are you noticing and hearing from coaching clients or from others with whom you are in relationship?

\*What needs can you hear them expressing?

\*What feelings might you habitually judge as "right" or "wrong"?

## Coaching Tip of the Week #29

### The Gulp

The Gulp is when a client takes on something that makes her/him GULP. His or her heart starts beating faster. The atmosphere is one of fear and excitement and purpose all at once.

The client is not taking on something that makes her/him gulp just for the sake of the adrenaline.

The key is that the gulp-inspiring action is something that beautifully and masterfully brings her/him closer to her/his purpose, fulfillment, and values.

It takes some real nerve and confidence for a coach to call forth the gulp moments. (It's definitely an area I need to work on as a coach.)

I suspect that in order to call it forth in others, we need to embrace the gulp moments ourselves.

### Example:

*I dream of a fluid, flowing, ease-filled business, yet I often don't act in alignment with this dream. Instead, I tend to constrict my business with schedules, to-do lists, time-tracking, multiple calendars, etc. The GULP action I am trying on this week is to relinquish control and structure at least once a day, and to challenge myself to trust that I will remember to do something instead of adding it to a to-do list. This action wouldn't make everyone gulp, but I find it terrifying. And exhilarating.*

### Practice:

If you're not yet feeling ready to call this forth in your clients, why not practice finding a gulp action for yourself?

What inspiring, challenging, exhilarating, scary commitment would put you more in line with your dreams?

(Remember to aim for something observable and specific - e.g. NOT "I'll be more relaxed and less controlling", but "I will relinquish control and structure at least once a day", or, "I won't consult my to-do list until noon every day this week.")

## **Coaching Tip of the Week #30**

### **Either/Or**

"Either/or"s haunt our thinking / our clients' thinking, presenting false choices.

Some examples:

- "I either have to hurt someone by telling them the truth, or lie to save the relationship."
- "I either have to hold onto all my control, or give up control and fail."
- "I either have to get everything right, or it will all fall apart."

When we see things in terms of either/or, we get locked into choosing one end or the other, and we miss out on other possibilities. We miss out on the "AND"s:

- "I can tell the truth and save the relationship."
- "I can give up some of my control, and still succeed."
- "I can get some things wrong, and it will be okay."

### **Some signs that your client (or you) are in Either/Or territory:**

- A tendency to go back and forth between extremes. E.g. bouncing back and forth between very disciplined + rigid versus carefree + irresponsible.
- Presenting only two options when describing the situation.
- A sense of "trapped" or "stuck" in how the client describes the situation.

### **Ways to work with this:**

- Observe and name the either/or.
- Ask what the client is needing/wanting.
- Ask what a third option might be. Ask what a fourth option might be. Ask what new option the client's grandmother/hero/mentor would come up with.

### **Sample script:**

Coach: "I hear an 'either-or' choice here. You believe your options are to tell the truth and hurt Jane, or lie to save the relationship."

Client: "I don't know what else to do."

Coach: "What is it you want the outcome to be?"

Client: "I don't want to lie... but I don't want to hurt Jane either."

Coach: "That's what you DON'T want - what DO you want?"

Client: "I want to be honest, and I want Jane and I to still be friends."

Coach: "What's a third option that would allow you to honour your value of honesty and your value of friendship?"

### **Self-practice:**

See where you can catch yourself in either-or thinking today!

For more tips like these, sign up for the Coaching Tip of the Week Email.

Visit: <http://readyforchange.ca> for more information.

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