

When a client is stuck

Heather Cooper

Purpose

Coachees often spend time during sessions grappling with a particular problem that crops up for them regularly. Perhaps there is a particular relationship that they find difficult to deal with or they don't understand why someone else behaves towards them in a particular way. Often the coachee is caught up emotionally in the turmoil and finds it difficult to stand back and look objectively or indeed to look at the situation from different perspectives.

Description

This strategy allows the coachee to stand back from the situation. By acknowledging different views on a problem or situation, the coachee can be more dispassionate and empowered to make shifts in their own behaviour. By acknowledging and owning their own patterns of behaviour and emotional responses paradoxically this can allow change to occur.

Working with coachees in this way is informed partly by Neuro Linguistic Programming (NLP), by Gestalt therapy (the paradoxical nature of change) and by 'chair work'. In particular, the strategy encourages the coachee to notice their behavioural and emotional patterns in these situations, and sometimes to recognise where the root of these patterns come from. By making connections and understanding themselves, coachees can free themselves from limiting

thoughts/emotional patterns, to increasing options, creating flexibility and creativity and allowing greater freedom of action.

Process

- **Step 1**

Ask the coachee to talk through the problem or issue from their perspective. Ask them to notice how they feel emotionally, how they feel physically, and what sense they make of the situations by drawing on different parts of their body.

- What is the brain saying (accessing their intellectual response)?
- What is the gut saying (accessing gut feel)?
- What is the heart saying (accessing their emotional intelligence)?

- **Step 2**

Ask the coachee to draw a picture of the problem. This encourages the coachee to express themselves using a different medium whilst at the same time distancing themselves from the issue.

- **Step 3**

The next step is to explore the situation/problem from different positions or perspectives by role playing other people who are engaged in this situation, and to talk from their perspective. The coachee actually changes chair and imagines they are a different party who is involved in the issue and shares their understanding of the problem.

Coachees can find this hard, but by gentle encouragement and questioning they pick up great insights from actually 'being' the other party. It is important that the coachee speaks as the third party, rather than imagining what they would say. Enrich their understanding further by asking the coachee to switch chairs, each time talking from the other individuals' perspective (i.e. fourth party, fifth party, etc.).

- **Step 4**

Imagine that the room is a time machine where you can

move forward in time and look back on today. Ask the coachee to move to a different place in the room that represents a date sometime in the future and ask them to look back in time to the situation today and describe what they see. This also encourages a dispassionate look at the situation.

- **Step 6**

Ask the coachee to return to their original chair, as themselves, today, to summarize their learning, and consider how they can apply it.

Pitfalls

Take time to explain the exercise and what they are doing at each stage or the coachee could be confused by moving from chair to chair.

Bibliography

- Houston, G. (1995) *Red Book of Gestalt*, London: Rochester Foundation.
- Knight, S. (2006) *NLP at Work: Neuro Linguistic Programming: The Difference that Makes a Difference in Business*, London: Nicholas Brealey Publishing.