

Bringing yourself into the room: how to use your presence

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Purpose

The purpose of this exercise is to reveal a potential blind spot, to enhance clients' awareness of their impact on others.

Description

At its simplest, presence means that you as the coach are fully present and totally focused on the client you are working with. You try as far as possible to be in the here and now, bringing all of yourself, and in doing so you allow yourself to be moved by the impact of the client. You then share this with the client as feedback. For many individuals, particularly senior leaders, with whom people have learned not to be direct, this provides a unique combination. The leader is provided with feedback:

- with no hidden agenda, with totally positive intent;
- by someone who experiences their behaviour directly.

The power of this is that it cannot be contradicted, as you are using your own experience.

Process

The process is as follows:

- Notice what you are noticing.
- Play the impact on you back to the coachee.
- Offer it up as feedback.

For example: One client was talking about a meeting he had been invited to by some senior engineers. I noticed that as he was talking, I was becoming anxious, so I played this back to him: 'I notice as you are talking about the meeting, that I am becoming more anxious'. At which point he said 'Yes! You're right, I *am* anxious. I think they've only invited me because they want to show me up, to embarrass me by how little I know about their work'. This led to a fruitful discussion about his assumptions and how true they may be. If he hadn't immediately responded I could have added to the end of my sentence: '. . . and I wonder if that is how you are feeling?'.

Another client cancelled two sessions at short notice, despite our agreement on cancellations, and wasn't available to re-schedule for some considerable time. When I played this back to him I said: 'I notice that you cancelled two sessions and that I found it difficult to get hold of you to re-arrange'. After listening to his answer I enquired: 'I wonder if this is how other people may experience you?'. This prompted a useful discussion around his impact on his team and led to greater insight into his leadership style.

Pitfalls

There is a possibility that you may be rebuffed. Where the truth is hard to hear it may temporarily damage rapport. Be clear and precise with your feedback and restore rapport as soon as you can.