

Helping your client to learn for themselves, not doing the work yourself

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Purpose

A client can sometimes fail to see what seems clear to others, including you. The temptation is to save everyone's time by telling the client what you see. However, this more directive approach is not as effective as the strategy of enabling your client to do their own work to learn.

Description

In this strategy you will be helping your client to learn about their situation and find a solution for themselves.

Process

Adopt a strictly non-directive approach in your coaching. Ask open questions; explore the issues without offering your own judgement, solutions or theories. Focus on your client's feelings as well as thoughts. Concentrate on the sense your client is making of things. Be aware of your own emotions in the moment and make them present if there is a resonance with your client, for example 'I'm feeling a sense of frustration as you tell me that your colleagues are refusing to accept your recommendations'. Remember that you do not have to understand the issue, your client does: so, resonant questioning is what is needed, not your analytical ability or insight to solve the client's 'problem'. When you challenge,

do so to keep the client fully aware of the contradictions and ambiguities inherent in where they are, for example. 'You tell me you want to do x and that your colleagues are wrong in wanting to do y '. Do not challenge to 'push' your client in any direction, for example, 'So you/they must be right?' or 'Here is another way forward that I can see', but work with your client's energy, for example, 'How do you move forward/feel in this impasse?'

Where there is a 'blind spot' for the client, the organization may have gathered diagnostic data and you may be expected to deliver the message. Resist the pressure to be an advocate. Use this data to enable your client to self reflect, for example 'The data seems to be saying this. What do you make of it?' Help your client explore for themselves what others see without pushing for acceptance on their behalf. You are there to enable your client authentically to engage with the data. The client needs the space to reject all or part of it, if it seems right to them.

New data may be available from recent work experiences to challenge the client's sense of themselves. Retain the focus on how the client can make sense of and resolve the tensions and contradictions. You are there to 'hold your client's feet to the fire', not to fan the flames, nor to put the fire out, nor to press the client to accept the organization's view, nor to allow your client to run away into self deception. The real hard work is for your client who feels the fire burning and has no effective way forward without new learning.

Pitfalls

- Acceptance and change does not happen fast enough for the organization.
- Failing to see the learning taking place because it is not your own 'right answer'.
- Giving in to the client's own desire to 'just tell me'.
- Using this approach when being more direct would be better.