

# Coaching glass ceiling clients

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## **Purpose**

A number of my senior coaching clients have wanted help to progress their career to the next elite level. Their leadership style and developed capabilities have served them well until now, but something is missing and hindering their progress.

## **Description**

The aim of this coaching strategy is for the client to look through the metaphoric glass ceiling and identify how to break through it. There are three components, as explained below.

## **Process**

### *Looking through the glass ceiling*

Your client's thoughts on their next steps need to be explored, stretched and crystallized. Clarity on the purpose of their ambition is also important to identify. With eyes open or closed, ask them to consider the furthest position on a relevant time line (for example, three years) and invite them to tell you about their lifestyle, family and health, with a particular focus on the components of their job. It is important that they use present-tense language so that they are talking as if they were living that life right now. Invite them to

express how they are feeling, comment on their presence, verbal and non-verbal communication and challenge them on the extent to which their purpose is being fulfilled. Equally, encourage and reinforce their conviction to succeed as they move into a place of experiential realization.

Repeat the technique as you progress back along the time line towards the present day, integrating a Gestalt approach by inviting the client to change seats for the different years explored, powerfully experiencing what success would feel like. Capture the plan on paper using a straight line to represent the period of time explored. Recording actions and achievements on opposite sides of the line, this Meaningful Action Plan with Purpose (MAPP) will enable positive movement through the glass ceiling.

### ***Tools and capabilities***

Using a positive psychology approach, identify what has served the executive in achieving their success to date. Then ask, 'What else do you need?'. Feedback from their manager and peers would be useful here. You may identify some missing elements yourself as the coaching relationship develops, for example, an opportunity to enhance their communication style, their drive to win, an action orientation. The overall outcome of this conversation should awaken their spirit, reignite their ambition and sharpen their tools to break through the glass ceiling.

### ***Current and future systems***

Invite your client to review the components of their corporate environment, for example, company culture, their manager, decision makers, opportunities, along with the environment they wish to progress into. Clients often comment on the value of this exploration to achieve an enhanced understanding of how they need to shift in order to progress. Their immediate line manager is also an important factor as they could be your client's best sponsor or indeed blocker. Ask if their manager knows about their desire to progress; are they supportive, threatened, fearful of losing them? Does the

client aspire to their manager's role? Their responses will aid the client to identify meaningful choices in positively influencing the system of which they are a key part.

### **Pitfalls**

Look out for superficial plans, thoughts and a non-committal wish list. Tone of language, energy and body language will provide any signals to pick up on and challenge. Enquire into their willingness to change and also their purpose in wanting to progress. These deep-rooted questions and the holistic approach detailed above will assist your client to break through their glass ceiling and realize their ambitions.