

# Hold up a mirror and the client will do the rest

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## **Purpose**

Clients can sometimes struggle with issues of confidence, especially in the face of tough new challenges. Addressing the underlying issue is one approach, but sometimes clients need only to see themselves clearly in a 'mirror' to find that they know what to do to succeed. New confidence then flows from that realization. The strategy is to hold up the mirror to your client, where the issue is their confidence, not their capability.

## **Description**

In this strategy your role as coach is to enable the client to see a situation more clearly. You will also help the client find the confidence to take the right actions. The key is your belief that the client can do it themselves – with a bit of help from you.

## **Process**

Set some clear objectives: under-confident clients need safety and clear objectives help. Build real trust together to make it okay for them to feel inadequate. Explore the reality around the client and help them fully express their thoughts, feelings and uncertainties. Work from a place of respect but use your own business acumen and organization knowledge to evaluate their take on things. If you see that the issue is

indeed confidence, and not capability, focus on holding up the mirror. This is a choice for you to make without sharing that judgement explicitly with the client. It is the mirror's job to do it!

Ask what it would be like if they felt confident to act. What would they do? How would it feel? You might use humour to help them feel more in control by making it all seem very human, not dauntingly 'other'. Do not offer your own ideas or refinements: the process involves working exclusively with your client's resourcefulness. Most importantly, use summarizing statements to bring into sharp relief the choices to act the client would like to make *in their own words*. Offer affirmation and encouragement of the decision to act.

For example, one client was struggling with a predecessor who cast a long shadow. She felt intimidated. I asked what he was doing, what the impact was on her team, how she felt and how she was responding as the team leader. As she talked, I noticed that her desire to take a strong stance in defence of her new role was growing. I asked what she would do and her detailed answer made complete sense. I summarized what she had said and asked her how her words sounded to her. I discovered that it made complete sense to her too! I supported her in her resolve.

The challenge is to help your client identify a 'winning strategy' for themselves. For you, it is also to avoid any distortions in the mirror (for example, a less than winning strategy, unexplored feelings of uncertainty, or your own opinions) and to keep an empathic sense of whether or not the client is indeed finding strength in the process of enquiry.

## Pitfalls

These are:

- offering answers and solutions unnecessarily to 'rescue' the client;
- getting impatient with the client's sense of being overwhelmed;

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- not keeping a critical eye on the client's sense of things and failing to challenge;
- assuming that your client needs only a mirror when they need more.