

When the coach or client gets stuck

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Purpose

The purpose of this exercise is to help the coaching client and the coach explore the reasons why they are finding themselves stuck in a coaching session and unable to move forward.

Description

The irony of getting stuck in a coaching session is that it can be useful. Many coaches have shared with me their fear of not knowing what to do or ask next. It can also indicate a lack of engagement, boredom or confusion. For the client who becomes stuck, it can be a frustrating and difficult place and may be represented by feeling blocked, lost or overwhelmed for example. Whatever the reason or feeling associated with not knowing what to do next, the first step is to recognize it.

Process

When the client becomes stuck, be patient, give them space and remain comfortable with where you have arrived. Stay silent but present as they assimilate where they are and process their thoughts. Should you feel that a coaching intervention is required, ask them: 'What's happening for you right now?'. Re-enforce their feelings and thoughts by mirroring their language and summarizing what they are describing. Be curious with any metaphoric references,

for example: I am cornered; I have hit a brick wall; I am swimming in toffee. Also observe any relevant body language – are they sitting in a twisted position, sighing or shaking their head. By making this known to the client and asking if it has any significance to the situation, it will encourage any important subconscious realities to be revealed.

Allow the agenda to be controlled by your client so that it remains their agenda, encouraging them to find their own solutions. As thoughts are verbalized, you may choose to ask, ‘What do you want to do with this?’ or ‘What would be useful now?’. When they are ready to progress, this is where the shift can take place and having experienced the pain of being stuck, the derived pleasure and sustainability of their choices as they move forward are often more profound.

If you as the coach reach a point of uncertainty or one of feeling stuck, access the signals that are telling you this, choosing your timing to express what is happening for you. The strategy ‘Managing yourself during the coaching session’ on p. 55 explains how to do this. Such awareness is a powerful compliment to that which the client is experiencing themselves.

Pitfalls

Human beings tend to avoid feelings of discomfort where possible and so in staying with them, albeit with the support of a coach, the client can find it intense and draining. They may therefore choose not to explore this occurrence for too long, if at all. Remain mindful of this and do not force the situation. When you do work through a place of challenge with your client, be aware that it can also be a stressful process for an intuitive coach. Position your feedback and self analysis in a tailored way according to the client you are coaching and the nature of the session. It takes courage to use this strategy but, when applied effectively, it brings real value to the client in identifying progressive strategies to overcome the sticking point.