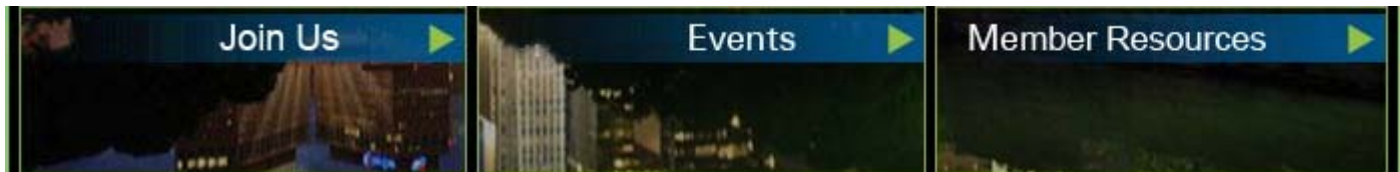



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Learning Professionals as Coach

As learning professionals we often find ourselves spontaneously in one-on-one coaching sessions, whether it be after we conduct a course, or simply an employee or client calling for assistance on the phone.

Whether these moments are internal or external, what they often have in common is that the person wants to create an end state that they envision and they are asking for your help. They've tried their own means but were not successful. They are choosing you as their coach to make it there. The good news is your client has a sense they can get there, otherwise they'd pack up shop and call it quits. They are not seeking a cure or a "healing." Much like sports coaching, they want to work with someone who spots non-supportive behaviors and supports actions that get to that desired end state. In today's world of readily available information, people are not seeking informational experts – they are seeking support of a different nature – to be held accountable for what they know is possible, yet are stuck in making it happen.

As a coach, you may need to help your client define that "end state." Too often clients are unclear about what they want. You will hear, "I want a better position" or "I want a richer life." Your coaching will assist them in getting specific. One of the best ways to do this is through applying a form of measurement. Ask your client how they will know they've reached that end state in a measurable form. Examples include, "I will make \$25,000 more dollars by the end of this year" and "I will spend 5 hours/week mentoring my direct reports."

You may have a tendency to judge or assess your client's goal. It's not up to you to judge or assess; it is your duty to see that it is measurable and achievable, and to ask the coaching questions that ensure the client sees it this way. If you have an ethical concern or have a dual relationship with the client (such as coaching a friend or relative) or simply are too close to the subject matter (such as you want the same job as your client is going after), then ask yourself if it truly serves your coaching relationship for you to remain the coach.

Just as a sports coach must observe an athlete to coach, you must listen to your client to coach. Your client's sense of

trust is heightened when you listen well. Sometimes clients don't realize what they say or how they say it is actually blocking themselves either intra-personally or interpersonally. For example, a client saying, "I've never been able to do that" often creates a mind-made obstacle. Perhaps it's true they haven't done it to date, but do they give it as a reason not to in the future? Your listening of the client can reveal unconscious patterns that hold them back. Putting the client "at choice" for how they communicate with themselves and others can be a turning point.

Most coaching interactions are held as ongoing sessions. There may be times when you assist a colleague with a few coaching questions or even in a group meeting as a one-time event. The question, "What is our desired end state?" can help to corral a group's focus. But inherent in coaching are follow-up sessions to manage the progress and accountability of the insight gained from a previous session. Your role as coach is to hold the client accountable for their actions both in a coaching session and between appointments. Although at times the client may argue or defend their rights not to be accountable, your mirroring of their choices continues to leave the client "at choice" for the living of their lives.

Much like learning theory, re-presencing oneself to newly learned content cements new ways of being and behaving. Popular opinion states it takes 21 days of repetition for a new habit to form. Having multiple coaching sessions supports the accountability of creating new habits. Clients may try to postpone sessions or even be a no-show because their current habits are too strong in the moment. This may be a good place to add a reward or a consequence if the client shows resistance. Your job as coach is to reflect these dynamics and remind them of their desired "end state."

Another reason people want to work with coaches is to learn about what gets in their way. There will be times when it most serves the client for you to be simple and direct. An example of this might be when a client is reciting why something is difficult for them to achieve. A simple, direct reflection is to say, "I'd like to presence you to the excuses you are giving in this moment." For you to develop a menu of coaching styles is in your favor. What may be uncomfortable for one coach, could be easy for another. As we support clients in building new muscles, we too, as coaches, need to develop our weak muscles. It may be that silence is uncomfortable for you, yet silence may be exactly what the client yearns for. Develop your capacity for silence. Explore.

One aspect to coaching that is similar to counseling is the dynamic of mirroring. As humans are social animals, there exists a yearning to be seen or witnessed as part of one's existence. You are that mirror. An aspect of coaching is to validate the client's expression of feelings and concerns. You are at the receiving end of their communication. They are paying you (either with time or money or both) to be their receiver. There may be times when your client wants a session to be a "download" of the week, and most of your time is spent there. After 20 minutes of download (for example), the client may be clear to then explore what's next in achieving their goal. But without that download you may have been coaching on top of stresses or concerns that would have derailed the coaching at one point or another.

Similar to listening, another core skill to coaching is asking questions. Your questions may reveal information needed for the maximum benefit to the client. Often what we care deepest about doesn't get questioned. You as coach have an opportunity to assist the client in diving into what they most care about by the power of your questions. Your questions are to assist the client in discovering their path and making their own best decisions. As both of you have the "end state" in mind, it takes an unbiased listener to ask the questions that uncover what's next for the client.

For some clients, you may be the sole source for supporting their goals – do you have the stamina and fortitude to hold their "end state," even when the client may not? You will be "tested." Your client will come with excuses, statistics of why they can't, down feelings, and up feelings. No matter how the client shows up, their desired end state is your compass. You also may be the only regular appointment for your client, especially if it is a weekly appointment. This consistent review of the client's goals is in itself reinforcement to their commitment. Will you provide not only the structure but the continuous stand for their desires?

Finally, during your coaching a client may have an insight, but without an action to build upon that insight, it may just remain an idea, and they will go back to old habits. Your role as a coach is to stimulate actions toward achieving that "end state." Being in the moment with your client where you can capture insight, point to it, and not let it slide, will serve the client. It becomes the moment of possibility for change. Once the client commits to an action, a follow-up meeting is often scheduled. This completes the loop, and before you know it, your coaching has moved them through their desire, to insight, to actions, to achievement.

Written by Tina Mertel, adapted from her book, Meaningful Coaching™. See www.meaningfulcoaching.com.

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