

Session 9: Effective Feedback (2). Coaching Skills 6 & 7/10; Being Honest & Being Constructive

6. Being Honest

This coaching concept relates to the skill of saying what is, telling the whole truth. Mark Twain wrote that congressmen are people who never lie “unless it is absolutely convenient”. We have all found times in our lives when the truth wasn’t particularly convenient, when a lie either by commission or more often by omission made the path seem smoother. Seem smoother. But there is a significant cost.

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Think of how a lie detector test works. You are hooked up to sensors that assess the amount of tension in your muscles and skin. Lying has a measurable physical effect. This same tension is present if you are lying to yourself, or lying by omission, not speaking what you know to be true. Over time, this stress takes a toll.

Your clients are as sensitive as a lie detector. If you are avoiding issues with them they will sense that and their trust in you will diminish.

How do you develop the ability and the confidence to be honest? Telling the truth is a skill, not a character trait. It requires sensitive listening both at the levels of words and at a deeper level.

What do you hear in the client’s language? What is the client demonstrating in their behaviour? Where do you sense incongruence? Being Honest is not only about addressing negative or challenging things. Pointing out a positive can be very powerful.

If a client is consistent about making their coaching calls but also accuses him/herself of being undisciplined, the truth you are seeing (what is going on in the coaching relationship) is in contrast to the generalisation the client is drawing. Their discipline is being demonstrated each week when they make their call.

It can be challenging and at the same time very rewarding to say it like it is by calling attention to behaviour that is getting in the way of the coaching. It is challenging in that you are more likely to get hooked when you are part of the system you are talking about. You cannot be the impartial observer. At the same time, if a behaviour is coming up in the coaching relationship, you can safely assume that it is coming up elsewhere in the client’s life. Your honesty in this relationship can have a ripple effect that has consequences in many of the client’s other relationships.

You may resist telling a hard truth because you have concerns about losing the client, and this may happen. Ask yourself, are you skirting an issue to serve your own income goals? If so, you are operating from your own agenda. But you may also have the experience, as we have, of losing a client by calling attention to “what’s going on” only to have that client return after a period of time with a higher level of trust and commitment.

When you avoid speaking a truth and try to protect a Client from it, the meta-message is that you do not believe they could handle it. So much for holding them as resourceful and whole!

7. Being Constructive

Being constructive is not the same as being positive. As a coach you want to be positive, but not at the risk of sugar-coating a challenging truth. By being constructive, you are assuming that the client can benefit from feedback in fact they have hired you to provide that feedback so that they can move forward to actualise more of their potential.

When you are being constructive, you are offering the client an alternative. You are not pointing out faults rather you are shining a light into a corner and inviting the client to clean it up. You are communicating to the client that you are right there with them holding the broom and dustpan. You assume they are capable and will choose to resolve this issue so they can move onto the important work of living their life without this encumbrance.

Many of us were raised with the directive “If you can’t say something nice, don’t say anything at all”. Constructive comments are not always nice. It is nice to tell your dinner companion they have spinach between their front teeth? And yet, have you ever had the experience of noticing something like that about yourself hours later and wishing someone had told you about it? If you had known, you could have done something.

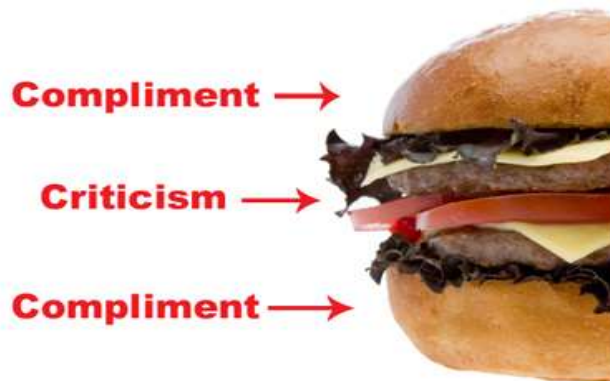
Being constructive is not the same as simply being positive. By being constructive, you are assuming that a Client can benefit from feedback. When you offer that feedback, you offer a piece of information that they can use to change their behaviour. They may want to make changes, and they may not want to. It is their choice. But they don’t have a choice if you withhold the information

When you are constructive, you put the client in control. Constructive feedback propels the client forward to better choices and more possibilities. Whereas being positive can be a way of propping the client up. Again the meta-message is that they need propping, that they would fall down if you were not there. If you truly believe that last statement (and in some cases you will) it is a message to you that this is not a good coach/client match. You deserve to work with clients you feel great about. And the client deserves a coach that is convinced of their resourcefulness and can be unconditionally committed to their wholeness.

It is profoundly respectful to be truthful about your observations so that your clients can enhance the quality of their lives.

You can also be constructive by calling attention to something the client is good at. This may open them to the possibility of transferring that skill to another area of their life. Think of a client who gets angry and irritated with someone in their workplace. You may point out that they have so much patience and tolerance when they are with their children, this work situation might be another place to apply that skill.

How to deliver Effective – honest and constructive - Feedback by serving the Feedback Sandwich



POSITIVE statement + FEEDBACK + POSITIVE statement = Client able to hear you and not get defensive.

1. Tell your Client the positive.

Example: "I really appreciate that you are [positive stuff here]"

2. State the concerns (**link #1 and #2 with the word "and" not "but"**)

Example: "And I have some concerns/ideas for improvement, [state the concerns, the things that could be improved etc]"

3. Finish with an overall positive statement like

Example: "all in all I really appreciate your efforts and your commitment to the project."

Summary

"I really appreciate that you are [positive stuff here]"

"And I have some concerns/ideas for improvement, [state the concerns, the things that could be improved etc]"

"All in all I really appreciate your efforts and your commitment to the project."

Any positive communication is quickly negated if it is followed by a 'but'.

Session 9: Effective Feedback (2). Coaching Skills 6 & 7/10; Being Honest & Being Constructive / Assignment

Please ensure that you have read Pages 57 - 60 and have listened to the MP3 recording before completing the following exercise:

Applying Being Honest

Describe how you have used / will use Being Honest in your current working role or other professional context. What was the outcome for the other person? Reflect upon what you feel you did well and if appropriate reflect upon what you could do differently next time to enhance the outcome. (250 - 500 words)

Applying Being Constructive

Describe how you have used / will use Being Constructive in your current working role or other professional context. What was the outcome for the other person? Reflect upon what you feel you did well and if appropriate reflect upon what you could do differently next time to enhance the outcome. (250 - 500 words)

Serving the Feedback Sandwich

Describe how you have used / will use the Feedback Sandwich in your current working role or other professional context. What was the outcome for the other person? Reflect upon what you feel you did well and if appropriate reflect upon what you could do differently next time to enhance the outcome. (250 - 500 words)

Please note:

The word counts are intended as a guideline to give you an indication of how much to write.

Where you have relied on additional references please list these at the end of your work. For example:

Coaching with NLP, Joseph O'Connor and Andreas Lages (2004), Chapter 1: What is Coaching? Pages 1 – 13