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perspective

One Relationship = All Relationship

Five essential clues to successful relationship coaching

If you want to know how your client handles relationship, notice how they are in relationship with you. From a systems perspective, how you do anything is how you do everything. This means that from the moment of contact, your interface with your client is telling you everything you need to know about how they are in relationship. Here are some specific ways you can determine your client's relationship patterns as a tool for a successful coaching relationship.

1. How did the relationship begin?

As Bruno Bettelheim, a prominent child psychologist said, "The end is in the beginning." So how you began your relationship is a critical clue into how your client initiates relationships. Some questions to consider: Did you seek them out, or did they come to you? How many times did you contact each other before you actually reached each other? How many conversations did it take to receive the signed coaching agreement? How long after your first connection – in person or not – did you begin coaching?

The answers to each of these questions reveal a pattern of how your client begins a relationship. If your client's goals begin with dysfunctional, unclear or negative patterns, the likelihood of success is low. If, however, they enter into relationships, situations and goals with awareness and clarity of intention, imagine how this can impact their success – in everything!

2. What is your client's relationship with boundaries?

Boundaries are the basis for our relationships. What we let in and what we keep out is the stuff of how we are with self, loved ones, friends and business colleagues.

Our boundaries are like a door within us. If we were brought up to practice healthy boundaries, the door



knob is on the inside. In other words, we can take what we want and leave the rest, creating the space for healthy relationship challenges and evolution.

However, if we were raised with little or no information about the concept and practice of healthy boundaries, the doorknob is on the outside. Anyone but us can open up our door and throw in anything they want. Thus begins the dance of blame, shame and defensive behaviors; the nemesis of any relationship.

Boundaries assessment questions: What is your client's relationship with time? Are they early/late? Do they consistently want to go over time? Are you always responsible for time boundaries? How do they sustain or cross/play with the boundaries set in your initial agreement

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– overall and within each session? Do they keep appointments, or always want to reschedule?

If how they do anything is how they do everything, the answers to these questions will reveal their patterns with boundaries. Coaching around these patterns can give important insight to what part your client is playing in their lives, careers and relationships.

3. How does your client deal with accountability?

I tell my daughter that the only thing she really needs to remember is to “Do what you say you are going to do.” We can give the best parenting advice or have the best coaching intentions, but if the child/client doesn’t do what they say they will do, it reflects upon their integrity. Big words and concepts like trust and commitment come into play here. And without these, what can a coaching relationship be?

Here are some ways for you and your client to notice accountability in your relationship: What happens with homework? Who initiates the ‘homework’? What happens with insights that come from the coaching session? Do you have measurable indicators within the coaching contract and session agreements? Are you tired or rejuvenated after each session? Who is working harder in the coaching relationship: you or your client? If this relationship is draining vs. giving you energy, then this is a good clue you have won the accountability prize! And if your client can’t be accountable in coaching, imagine what is happening in the rest of his life?

4. Is there a place for transparency in your coaching relationship?

The ultimate test of any relationship is how honest you can really be with each other. Most often referred to as ‘feedback,’ honesty can come in the form of confrontation. It is related to accountability. However, being accountable or not is one thing; how you handle being confronted with the lack of accountability is yet another layer of the relationship.

The insight you find in your client’s willingness to engage in confrontation is critical to their growth because the congruence between what one says one will do and what actually happens creates the difference between excellence, mediocrity and failure. The inability to be transparent and honest about any gaps determines what will happen in that relationship and, systemically, all of your client’s other relationships as well. If you don’t have a way to handle these situations, you are limiting the value of coaching for your client.

Some things to look for: Where are the gaps for your client? What process or agreement can you put into place that will support this transparency and honest feedback? How can you begin your coaching relationship with transparency as a way of assessing your client’s ability to engage in it?

5. How are you in relationship with your client?

This may be surprising as a clue for successful relationship coaching, but it is the most important. Have you ever noticed that your clients often have coaching issues similar to yours? There are many reasons for this, but I want to point out two.

Mirroring – People whose personalities and actions tend to push our buttons the most are generally our greatest teachers. These individuals serve as our mirrors and teach us what needs to be revealed about ourselves. Our clients don’t recognize the mirroring roles they are acting out for us at a conscious level. Nonetheless, it is no coincidence that we end up together.

Entrainment – A physics phenomenon of resonance, entrainment has an effect on all of us. Entrainment is defined as the tendency for two bodies to lock into phase so that they vibrate in harmony. In other words, like attracts like. How we are strongly influences, and arguably determines, who we have as coaching clients.

I experienced resonance, mirroring, entrainment and a look at

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what role I play in my relationships through working with horses. As a result of their dependence on detecting what is going on in their environment for survival, they are master ‘resonant meters.’ With my clients, behaviors and mirroring of this resonance tells both of us what we are really resonating.

So, I ask you, what are you resonating in the areas of:

- Setting the foundation of your coaching relationship
- Your relationship with boundaries
- Accountability
- Honesty, transparency and confrontation.

And how is your client mirroring these behaviors? Noticing what you are doing in the coaching relationship is a big clue and tool for supporting change for your client! •