

Life is all about relationships, beginning with the relationship with self, loved ones, friends and business colleagues. What shows up in one area of relationship is often mirrored in others. Our coaching clients will always bring their relationship beliefs, attitudes, behaviors and issues to the coaching conversation. How does a client's relationship with self determine their level of coachability? What are some fundamental relationship coaching processes and tools that any coach can add to their toolbox? How can coaches help their clients recognize relationship patterns that may hinder the client's ability to be successful in all areas of life? Join us as we explore the various opportunities for incorporating relationship coaching techniques and processes into all segments of coaching.



Coaching Client Relationships

It's all about skills, attitudes and choices

By Frankie Doiron

Coaches help clients achieve their goals by identifying the “gap” between where the client is (now) and where they want to be (the goal). Then, the action steps required to realize the goal are developed and put into motion. Yet it is often the client’s own lack of skills, unproductive attitudes, or misaligned choices that sabotage their success.

Coaches need to be able to readily identify the client’s specific obstacle (skills, attitudes or choices) and apply one or more processes to get the client unstuck and into positive, goal-oriented action.

In the realm of relationship coaching, it is quite common for clients to demonstrate challenges in one or more of these three areas. The coaching paradigms used by relationship coaches are very powerful ways to shift the client and can be adapted for all types of coaching.

Note: A fundamental difference between relationship coaching and traditional coaching is that relationship coaches educate as well as coach their clients, especially in the area of skills.

Skills: Learned habits/patterns of adaptive behavior

Well-honed skills can be an asset. A skill deficiency – what clients are not able to do effectively – can be a liability. Coaches need to look for instances where skills training is needed and facilitate skill acquisition through practice, to help the client be successful.

The overwhelming majority of people have had very little training in interpersonal skills and as such have relationship skills deficits. Typically, we learn such skills through trial and error from our earliest relationships and through thousands of hours of role-modeling from parents, family members, and friends. In this fashion, we learn ways of dealing with conflicts, handling differences, expressing emotions, etc.

No matter what type of role-modeling we received, we have a choice to create a new paradigm. Most of what we do in a relationship (or life) is a pattern of learned behavior that we can modify if we choose to. Emotional responses are habits that can be modified as well.

A common area for skills training in couples coaching is conflict resolution, which is what is really meant when couples say they don’t communicate. Most couples seek help because of unresolved conflict, which really is a skills deficit in communicating effectively.

Before we can coach a couple to help them satisfactorily resolve conflict on their own, we first need to teach them the skill of resolving conflict rather than to focus on the “what” and “why” of their differences.

Here are some skills training techniques to use with clients:

Role Play means you create an artificial improvisational situation. The client always plays themselves; you play the “other” person. This allows you to observe the client as though in a real situation, because it is not scripted. It is a good starting point to determine the client’s challenges and skills.

Rehearsal is when you act out a situation that has already occurred or that you anticipate will occur. The brain cannot distinguish between something that is anticipated to happen, or a situation that has already happened. Therefore, this is more powerful than role play, especially as a follow-up training technique, where you are “practicing” specific action steps.

Skill Building is when you build on one of the client’s strengths to practice a weak skill. For example, the client may have trouble making eye contact but enjoys telling jokes. Have them practice making eye contact when they tell jokes. It will make them feel more confident and be easier for them to make eye contact.

Task Analysis is where you make a list, in sequential order, of the steps involved in executing or performing the skill that needs to be practiced. The step-by-step list

helps the client break a skill down into smaller, more achievable steps and helps identify any area where they might get stuck.

Attitudes: Beliefs, interpretations, points of view, stories, etc, that get acted out in our behavior

Behavior and its consequences follow attitudes. Attitudes are influenced by our personality/temperament, family of origin, past experiences, etc. They can be productive or unproductive, conscious or unconscious.

If your client has interfering attitudes that undermine their goal, they are not going to achieve it. A coach

help the client achieve awareness of their unproductive attitude.

Paradigm #1 – Mirroring With Follow-up Questions

Feed back to the client the attitude you just heard. You can use the clients' exact language or follow up with a question about the attitude you're hearing. When you get validation from the client to confirm their attitude, you are on the same page with your client. Go with their reality. Don't judge or advise.

Ask these questions in sequence:

- How does this attitude impact your goal? (remember attitudes are choices, so the question is intentional)

able, and take action that is aligned with our goal.

Paradigm #3 – Events + Response = Outcome

Events are things that happen to you in your life; you can't prevent them and you can't change them. But you can choose how you respond. Your response will determine the outcome.

The 4 Primary Responses are:

- **Negotiate** means you will find a way to make it work.
- **Resist** means saying no to the situation.
- **Accept** means accepting the situation as it is.
- **Leave** means removing yourself from the situation, emotionally or physically.

Describe this paradigm to your client, then brainstorm with them what their response could be, helping them to take ownership and control.

Choices: Decisions made in the moment that result in an action

We are always at choice. While our choices tend to be the result of our attitudes and skills, we can choose our attitudes and skills and can always choose differently. Since our clients always have a choice, coach your clients to make effective choices that will help them get what they want in their life and relationships. Good choices always align with the client's goal.

Clients get stuck. But what is the underlying obstacle they are facing? By identifying whether it is a skills deficit, an unproductive attitude, or the way the client makes choices, you will be better equipped to help them overcome the challenge and achieve their goals.

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can help uncover and address those interfering attitudes. (Clients often do not have enough awareness to say “I have this attitude I need help with.”)

We have the power to choose our attitudes. Attitudes show up in how the client presents themselves; what they are saying, the stories they tell, the explanations they give, and the behaviors they display in session and report occurring outside of session.

When you spot an attitude that may be sabotaging the client's goals, invite them to examine it and choose a more effective one. Use any of the following coaching paradigms to

- What is the consequence of you having this attitude (or belief)?

- Would you like to change or keep this attitude (or belief)?

- What would be a good replacement for this attitude (or belief)?

Brainstorm with the client about possible alternative and “productive” attitudes.

Paradigm #2 – Awareness + Choices + Action = Positive/ Intentional Change

Help the client become aware of the unproductive attitude. When we become aware of something, then we can take look at the choices avail-