



Power of Acknowledgement in Coaching

By Jaya Bhateja

I associate acknowledgement with acceptance. And acceptance can be from any body and in any form. Every heartfelt “AHAA”, “HMMM”, “WOW”, “That’s Great”, “Good Work”, “Well Done”, “I Like It”, happy eye raising expression, silence, a warm smile, or a hug brings acceptance and connection with client or anybody that you are dealing with, in fact this works in personal lives as well and when acceptance takes place the acknowledgement is somewhere evolving in the other person’s heart.

Let’s do little bit of reflection to explore this more.

- Which is one acknowledgement that you still remember?
- What kind of feelings does it generate within you?
- What did you feel about that person who acknowledged you, may be even if many years back?
- What makes that acknowledgement so special that you still remember it?

You can reflect through the above questions that there are only very few acknowledgments that stay fresh in your mind and that’s because it has created some kind of acceptance of your effort/skill/presentation or even a gesture. The acknowledgement was the result of the happy emotions generated as part of the acceptance which has helped retain that acknowledgement in your mind/heart. You were so touched by those acknowledgements that irrespective of how old you grow; you would remember that forever as if they were as fresh as yesterday.

And now let’s turn the table and wear the hat of the coach and reflect

- How many times have you gifted something to your clients based on what could help? May be a book, a CD, flowers or anything that can help the client in his situation....
- How many times have you made an extra effort to offer resources to help the clients move faster?
- How many times did you think about the client even after your coaching sessions?
- Does your clients stays with you in your mind even after your sessions?
- Do you start feeling the pain of your clients when they cry in front of you?
- Do you start feeling numb when a client tells you about a major tragedy of their life?

If your answers towards these questions are “Yes”, then I believe that you might have accepted your clients with full heart; which is a great step towards your journey as a coach.

Many a times, I have observed that the coaches stay so much in boundaries of their own that they are excellent at all the competencies of being a coach; however, they miss the emotional connection which can bring acceptance to the client. If you are in coaching profession just to earn money, think about it again! Coaching is about service and service can’t be done if you have only money on your mind. Coaches needs to know how to connect emotionally and bring acceptance to every perspective of the client in order to start making the client feel connected. The barrier of forming a perception, or a barrier of agreement/disagreement just doesn’t exist in this scenario. The client is open, happy, looking forward to the coaching session, growing in perspective, and energetic throughout the journey or at least resilient.

How to know if you are connected to your client

Ask yourself:

- How many times have your clients connected back voluntarily?
- How many times did somebody tell you that “I want these sessions to never end because I feel good in these sessions”?
- How many times have your client called you just like that to share or take suggestions?
- Apart from the coaching sessions, how many times have your client made a phone call to you when they faced a down turn?
- How many times have you guided your client over phone without charging them for that conversation just because that conversation was crucial for him and money is not everything for you?

What are the perspectives generated through these questions? Can you resonate with any of them? If not, maybe get coached to find some answers as they can be very crucial from long term relationship perspective.

Benefits of connection and acceptance:

Forming an emotional connection and truly accepting your client is extremely difficult; but that takes you to places. The client is not only the client; he is your ambassador, and the way you will make him feel will decide how much he would recommend you to others. Coaching as an industry works best with the word of mouth and hence it is very important to have your heart with the client. **If you are with them in their journey, they would be with you in your journey. Stay with your clients so that they can stay with you.** Hope you don't take this as a strategy because it is not, if you are not genuinely connected and interested in the coaching relationship, it would show up and there would be nothing worse than that. It needs a huge amount of emotional connection, acceptance, kindness, feeling of deep care and concern coming from within. You need to be genuinely caring towards your clients and to be involved in their goals.

Role of Acceptance

I am sure we all agree that the whole reason why we have coaching as a “hot profession” is because of the speed of lifestyle which is making people vulnerable. Everybody today has the need to be heard and accepted. While the acceptance could be from family, relatives, or career or professional peers, seniors, profession or , friends, or spouses or may be even ourselves. The acceptor could be anybody, but the urge for acceptance exists in everybody who breathes. When we work towards our goals, we strive towards our acceptance to ourselves in that goal. **If you see from this perspective, Self-awareness itself is a form of acceptance of ourselves.** When you start the journey of self-awareness, you start with acknowledging good things residing in you, then you move deeper to find more goodness and potential within you, then you recognize them and finally accept them to stay happy. The same works with the client, if you have accepted your client whole heartily without judgment and with lot of care, you have made a place in their heart to move forward and to help them achieve what they are set for.

Ask yourself

- How many times has it happened with you that after one or few session, you didn't feel like talking to a client and continued the sessions just because only the client was interested?
- Were you present with your mind and heart in that conversation?
- How many clients just had one or just few sessions with you and ended the coaching sessions with you by giving some excuse of time and schedules and then never came back?

The reason could be that they couldn't connect with you in some of the initial conversations. And let me submit that it has happened with me also. I am sure that it happens with everybody during some point in time in our coaching career. If you reflect on this, then you can start devoting your efforts to build connection in first few sessions. Start being with the client and start making the relationship with genuine care and genuine concern. It is a very deep level of acceptance, which makes the client feel acknowledged for what they are and that acceptance makes the relationship strong.

Impact of Acknowledgement and Acceptance

I resonate with Acknowledgement so much so that I try to use it genuinely with almost everybody in my life and that's the beauty of it that it can be used anywhere, everywhere, and with anybody and everybody. Most of the times, we forget to tell ourselves how good are we at doing a particular thing – and it could be as simple as handling a particular responsibility.

I would just take a small example of a working woman who is a mother and stays in a nuclear family. She often forgets that she is performing so many roles daily without any complaint. In the morning, she is a nurturing mother and a loving wife; after few hours she changes herself into a professional who understands her responsibilities and focuses on to become as competent as her peer groups at workplace ; by the evening, she is back inside her skin of a mother, and wife... probably even a daughter-in-law, daughter, and also becomes a home manager who needs to see what in the house needs her attention. and Only then does she gets a few hours (or may be none at all) to be herself. All these roles in a single day is not worth if it is not accepted or acknowledged by her family, children, people at work, and may be in laws or parents. They might not be giving her gifts or encouraging words everyday to acknowledge her contribution; however, a continuous acceptances in the form of smiles, care, love, encouragement, and opportunities keeps her going.

In my opinion Acknowledgement plays a big role in creating harmony in any relationship. Here is how I relate to it through five step model.

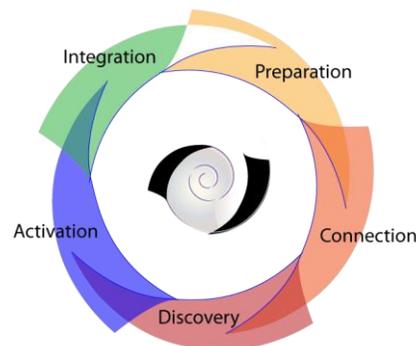


I truly believe that if acknowledgement is used regularly and genuinely, it can do wonders to the coaching process. Coaches need to find every small opportunity to provide a gesture of acceptance to the client, which can bring a sense of acknowledgement to the client and engage them for the journey of their life . Needless to say, the more engaged the client is the more fruitful coaching process becomes!

Use of Appreciative Inquiry in coaching

One of the best examples of integrating acknowledgement in coaching is the [Appreciative Inquiry](#) process. Here, the coach focuses on the strengths of the client, eliciting all that worked well for the client and leading from there to the client's goals, where these successful past experiences can be deployed but emotionally and in action.

for more details on appreciative Inquiry, do read **Appreciative Inquiry Handbook** by David Copperrider and **Appreciative Coaching** by Sara Orem.



In a recent coaching session i attended, every member of the group gathered to appreciate one another. This process created an emotional bond, which in turn fostered trust within the group.

The basic idea is then to build - or rebuild - around what works, rather than trying to fix what doesn't. AI practitioners try to convey this approach as the opposite of problem-solving. They take a positive focus on how to increase exceptional performance instead of improving poor skills and practices. AI assumes that this line of reasoning is motivational. Progress does not stop when one problem is solved: it naturally leads on to continuous improvement. The method draws from stories of success in an attempt to create meaning.

Acknowledgment need not to use the formal words like "I appreciate", "I acknowledge", " You have done a great job", etc, etc. its forms needs to be used in blended way using non-verbal clues like a positive Aaha, a thoughtful WOW, a genuine word saying "Amazing", or as simple as a genuine smile which communicates that "I appreciate what you are saying" etc. But the coach needs to be really authentic with the way they accept their clients. My message to the coach community is to be as open as possible to acceptance of their clients to bring authenticity in their approaches. Use acknowledgement as a linkage from one stage to another rather than using as one of the stage.

A cautious blend of formal/informal acknowledgement, true acceptance & appreciative inquiry can do wonders to your coaching practice.

Quote:

Real life isn't always going to be perfect or go our way, but the recurring **acknowledgement** of what is working in our lives can help us not only to survive but surmount our difficulties."

Sarah Ban Breathnach

Just on a lighter note: Acknowledgement needs to be like baking powder in the cake rather than only like an icing!

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