

What's Your AQ (Awareness Quotient)?

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As coaches, we all have certain competencies that are of significant importance to us. One of my favorites is from ICF Core Competency 8: "The coach helps clients to **discover for themselves** the new thoughts, beliefs, perceptions, emotions, moods, etc. that strengthen their ability to take action and achieve what is important to them." (emphasis mine)

What I have learned is that this essential competency is even more important for coaches.

We want our clients "to discover for themselves..." In other words, we want them to become "aware of." Awareness is powerful. It is an ability to observe how we think, believe and act—and then to see (or be aware of) the consequences of these thoughts, beliefs and actions as they happen. In real time. It is a practice of slowing down our thoughts long enough to experience them from a different point of view, almost as if we are watching ourselves as we react in the moment. With this new perspective, we begin to notice, in order to discover what is stopping us from moving forward, what is getting in the way.

Working with the coach, the client will be asked such powerful questions as: "What comes up for you when you consider asking your boss for a raise?" "What obstacle(s) are you facing?" and "What are your options?" Answers to this kind of question create a new awareness. As a result, clients begin to break away from the restrictions of their habitual thoughts, feelings and emotional patterns. Coaches encourage their clients to use this new discovery, this new "consciousness," to create fresh pathways forward. Awareness creates choices and change. It allows the client to work on removing obstacles to their success.

But what of the coach's capacity for awareness?

Over the past few years, it has become increasingly apparent that the coaching relationship is not only about increasing awareness in the client or helping them "discover for themselves" new thoughts and perceptions. It is about how we, as coaches, must devote a considerable effort to increasing our own self-awareness, our own discoveries about ourselves. We need to work constantly on creating a greater consciousness of what is going on with us during the coaching process. Just as the coach may ask the client questions that lead to liberating discoveries, the coach may also ask themselves: *What is this stumbling block I encounter each time I have a client with this same issue? What will help me communicate more clearly with my client? What is it about my coaching style that I can improve in order to avoid hitting this same wall?*

Case in point: one of the hurdles to increasing our self-awareness is our ego. In fact, coach supervisors and mentors often notice that one of the significant obstacles faced by new coaches is just that: ego. The self-talk begins. *Am I good enough? Does the client like me?* The ego needs to know if the clients are impressed with the coach's skills or if they think the coach is attractive, intelligent or talented. Ego may feed off potential insecurities of an inexperienced coach as they start their career. It can sneak up on us when we are not looking!

But, as we know, the ego can only survive in the past (nourishing our worries, regrets, guilt, blame) or the future (creating expectations, anxiety) as it distracts us from the “now” —where awareness thrives. We must ask ourselves: *Am I truly centered on my client and not on myself?*

Being aware and in the moment allows us to avoid the ego’s distractions and remain focused on what is happening with the client. It is the client’s agenda that is front and center, and not the coach’s thoughts about what is best for the client. We are fully present, allowing the other person to just be who they are. Our own thoughts, emotions and beliefs are brushed away as is the ego’s need to criticize or judge, abandoning ourselves to what is happening. This is a pure example of “letting whatever happens be OK.”

Along with powerful questions, a supervisor or mentor coach may decide to suggest techniques such as mindfulness, meditation or yoga to new coaches. These resources are powerful ways to improve their capacity to be fully present, to get beyond the ego’s interference.

The opportunities to grow as a coach are endless if we are open to ourselves, our clients and the potential of an ever-increasing effectiveness as professionals. Be continually open to “the new thoughts, beliefs, perceptions” that will become a permanent item on the coach’s self-awareness or AQ checklist.

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