

3 Tips for Developing Presence in a Hyperactive World

Susan Sadler

We've all had them: conversations in which you feel your mind wandering. To some extent, it's human nature. In fact, there's a popular notion that we have around 70,000 thoughts per day, though this is still undecided as there's no agreement among researchers as to the definition of a thought. If your mind wanders during a coaching session, that can be a problem. Maybe it's a fleeting distraction, a random thought or something that's more challenging to brush aside. The reality is we coach in environments with constant demands for our attention.

Coaching presence is one of the most important coaching competencies, as it underpins all the other competencies. Without presence, it will be difficult to demonstrate other competencies, such as establishing trust and intimacy, active listening, powerful questioning and more. Coaches often describe presence as being in the flow, an openness, and a connection to the conversation. People who have experienced someone's presence speak about its value and impact and how it made them feel.

It may seem counterintuitive that presence is both a way of being and doing—demonstrable and observable. It's a mindset as well as a combination of skills. How do we continue to develop it then, when the expectations, distractions and demands of the world move at breakneck speed?

Mindset

The mindset of a coach, before and during a coaching session, is paramount. Presence is, among other things, quieting one's mind and being open to whatever shows up and unfolds. It's how to listen without an agenda while picking out important beliefs, values, issues or challenges. It's how to be judgement-free and not secretly wishing your client were better at scheduling or prioritization (as an example). It's how to have more compassion and not rush to a solution. It's being comfortable with *being* and not necessarily *doing*.

While the competency of presence is well defined in the ICF Core Competencies, the demonstration of presence may feel more nebulous. If silence is an important part of demonstrating presence, how do we keep tuned in? Here are **three tips** to develop your coaching presence:

Mindfulness

If you already have a mindfulness practice, leverage it to quickly bounce back from, or even eliminate, distractions. Tap into what allows you to quiet your mind and let go, applying it in a coaching context. Anecdotal evidence suggests that mindfulness helps to clear one's mind more quickly under pressure, a key ability impacting presence.

Personally, I've struggled with internalizing many of the mindfulness courses and practices that I've learned. It took being side-lined by an injury and surgery to develop a meaningful mindfulness practice. I had to slow down. Meditation has allowed me to regroup more quickly in many different challenging contexts and situations.

Presence can be Learned

An important aspect of a coach's professional development is continuous learning. A recent article on learning in the [Harvard Business Review](#) suggests that "through the deliberate use of practice

and dedicated strategies to improve our ability to learn, we can all develop expertise faster and more effectively. In short, we can all get better at getting better.”

Writer and marketer Mike Fishbein [correctly states](#) that “learning takes time. You’ll inevitably face failure and even boredom along the way.” Fishbein quotes author Robert Greene of *Mastery*: “Practice, particularly in the beginning, is never exciting. To persist past these moments, you have to feel love for the field, you have to feel passionately excited by the prospect of discovering or inventing something new.”

The takeaway? It takes time to learn. There’s no finish line. Whether you’re a new or experienced coach, you’re always learning and evolving.

Acceptance

Coaches aren’t robots; you may have an “off” day. Show yourself the same compassion and acceptance that you give your clients. Acknowledge that you’re doing the best job possible at that moment in time. Be kind to yourself. If you’re not already doing so, take time to pause, breathe and reflect on being in the moment, the dance of coaching and letting go—even when you’re not at the top of your game. Focus on what you did well and learn for next time.

There were times in my early days of coaching when I talked too much and was too solution focused, too eager to “show” my client my value. It was my mentor coach who taught me that my presence was truly the gift of coaching. Yes, brainstorming strategies, tactics and action plans are all important, but what moves and inspires people is your presence. That has always stuck with me. If you intentionally prepare your mindset before coaching and develop and learn to enhance your presence skills, it will continue to bloom. Trust that your presence is enough.

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Susan Sadler, PCC, of [Sadler Communications Pte Ltd.](#), coaches people to have more confidence, courage and creativity, as well as a more professional impact. Wherever you are in your career or your life, you can always lift your game. And coaching can help.