

You Have to Go Slow to Go Fast

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I have been training, supervising and mentoring coaches for over a decade to hone their skills towards mastery and, for some, to gain their ICF credential.

I believe that with continuous reflective practice any coach can get closer to mastery. I am also confident that I can help coaches learn how to manage their performance anxiety to allow their talent to flow naturally while teaching them advanced skills to facilitate change more quickly and easily.

I have seen a few bad habits get in the way of effective coaching from some of the most seasoned and best-trained coaches in our industry.

Therefore, in this article, we will explore one bad habit to break and follow with a new habit to create in its stead.

Bad Habit to Break

Thinking that good coaching means to fully reach the client's outcome for the session in an arbitrary 60 minutes.

There is no *preferred* destination other than where you are at any given time in the conversation. Thinking so will take you off track. This is true in life and true in coaching. If you pay attention to the process, the destination takes care of itself.

Anyone who has studied coaching competencies knows that the setting of an outcome, an attendant measure of success, and deeply exploring the meaning of this outcome are integral to effectiveness. What happens though, as a dutiful coach, is that we feel compelled to get them there, wherever "there" may be in that *session*.

This self-induced pressure to reach a destination in an arbitrary time slot triggers our limbic system (the emotional seat of the brain) resulting in a diminished capacity of the pre-frontal cortex, which is where we do our rational thinking and our coaching. Our prefrontal cortex gets flooded with cortisol when wondering if we will or won't get there—if our status as a competent coach could be diminished in our or our client's eyes if we don't reach Point B. Pressuring ourselves is a recipe for this stress response, resulting in a distraction and unconscious, ineffective coaching.

So, the paradox is that the thing you want is the very thing you significantly diminish attainment of by the mere wanting of it. Your self-induced pressure to deliver the outcome leads to a decline in your ability to deliver.

Good Habit to Create

Deeply breathe, meditate or simply close your eyes for a moment to get centered before you coach so that you can genuinely s-l-o-w yourself down enough to get present and reap the benefits of what presence allows for.

Slowing down allows for getting conscious in the moment. It sets the ideal conditions for you to notice what you might have otherwise missed. It allows you to more deeply listen and reflect back with startling accuracy. It opens the gateway to listen beyond the words-- to get beyond the surface "what" of their narrative. It primes us to listen for who they are being in that moment not just what they are thinking and doing.

Presence creates the fertile ground for conscious and effective coaching to take root. When we are present we do not have a pre-determined agenda for *how far* or even *where* the conversation should go. We know it will get where it is supposed to go and there is no impulse to change that which is not in our control. We relax into the fact that everyone has a unique journey in their path and we respect that journey by not trying to speed it up or steer

it. We reconnect to the fact that our most important role is to hold a space for and facilitate their reflection without rushing them towards a solution. They will see what they need to see on their time, not ours.

By being present we allow for whatever is meant to emerge. We can sense the clients' energy better in this state and this allows us to make better decisions about the next coaching move--where to go with what they offered us.

Here's an example. Just because a client states that she wants to come away from the session with a strategy to confront her leader about not getting that promotion may not mean that is what she will still want to get to as her session outcome once she starts to unpack her thinking – which has not even happened yet! Maybe she will see that it's about managing her feelings of rejection and inadequacy while simultaneously learning to market her results better within the organization. If we rush past their declaration of the outcome initially presented and don't take the time to luxuriously explore what achievement of this outcome will mean for them, how motivated and committed they feel, how getting this promotion is fundamental to their development, what it will allow for, and how it will feel, and the like, then we have not helped them fully explore.

It is not about our ability to make the client-declared outcome manifest in one session but rather our ability to explore that topic fully with an eye towards it so that what is meant to emerge does. Whether 10% or 99% of the clients' session outcome is achieved, *moving towards it is the aim*, not how long time it takes to set the agreement or where the path may lead. In many cases, if we slow down to deeply explore the value the outcome imparts and their vision of their ideal self, they may actually find something deeper. How many times have you sought a goal only to find out there was something else tucked *right* below the surface to think through **first**?

Masterful coaches are not attached to the client's self-declared goal post. They know that there is no way to predict where the session will go and a timeline cannot be attached to a client's evolution. A masterful coach also does not assume that what the client says they want is what they ultimately need. It's a starting point for the journey, which is always a great thing.

Coaching is like life. Things happen on the universe's timetable, not ours. It may be slow, fast or somewhere in-between. The dilemma for coaches is that we have to detach from what the solution will look like and how long it will take. If we don't, we are likely to miss it.

Many coaches forgetting that the "achievement" of any outcome is not our work. Our work is to have the client set a destination for the session and to use that as a direction to start the conversation. Achieving or not achieving the client's exact outcome is something we cannot control. Nor should we!

I can hear the pushback already. "It is our job to facilitate insight, is it not?" Yes! But where is the timeline posted? Did I miss it? Nowhere in the plethora of human potential literature does it say it is fruitful or reasonable to have an expectation around the "how long" or "when" this happens. It's always been about having an aim, making progress one step at a time without attachment to the result. Yet, when we coach we think we need to achieve the client's outcome in an arbitrary 60-minute session. Can you see the insanity in this?

Rushing the client to solution or action signifies that you are not present and as a result, not as effective as you could be. Plain and simple. Slow down! Let things move at their own pace.

Here's what I encourage you to think about as you practice getting comfortable with the pressure and uncertainty of achieving an outcome in a structured session.

No matter how small your outcome may be for a session, rushing towards it never correlates with attaining it. Conscious intuitive, coaching does!

Go slow to go fast. You cannot rush a miracle. Going deep is the BEST insurance that your client will gain value. So what if the session outcome was not (fully) attained! Was something valuable learned?! **The point of setting an outcome for a conversation is for steerage, not velocity.**

Be as present as possible. You cannot be present if you are focused on achieving. Slow down, breathe and get present as many times as you need to in the call. It's normal to have performance anxiety. Give yourself permission to take deep breaths each time your nerves kick in.

Reflect back their outcome as many times as you need to! You both need to be crystal clear that this declaration is what they truly want and that **you fully** understand it. Rush through this part and you may wind up heading in the wrong direction. You've got to aim before you fire or, as Stephen Covey says, you may climb the ladder only to find out you are on the wrong wall!

I have learned that clients often come to insight as they set the session agreement! Why? They start to see beneath what they think they want to what they need, for who they need to be, what the challenge really is...not what they thought it was the first time they articulated it to the coach

You can think of setting the agreement for the session as helping them sift through thousands of words floating in their brain that represent what they are struggling with for who-knows-how-long into a sentence or two. This takes time and patience.

Bottom Line

The moral of this story is to be present so that you can go slow and deep, not fast. Fast does not beget *fast*. As David Whyte says in *Crossing the Unknown Sea*, "Speed doesn't come from speed. Speed itself has never been associated with good work by those who have achieved mastery in any given field. Speed is a result, an outcome, an ecology of combining factors on a person's approach to work; deep attention, well laid and sharpened tools, care, patience, the imagination engaged to bring disparate parts together in one whole."

Good coaching can only occur when you are supremely present and knowing there is no guarantee of a result in 60 minutes.

Coach with presence and the rest will take care of itself.

"Speed is addictive; it undermines nearly everything in life that really matters: quality, compassion, depth, creativity, appreciation and real relationship" Tony Schwartz