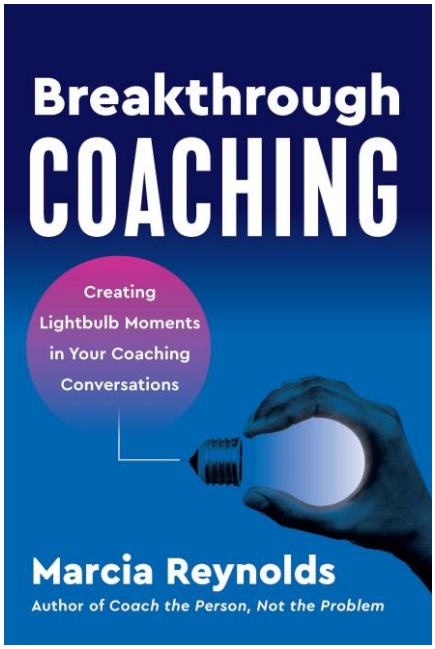

Tool Box

BREAKTHROUGH COACHING

Creating Light Bulb Moments in Coaching Conversations

By Marcia Reynolds, PsyD, MCC

1. The Science of Learning and the Role of the Coach

   Resource: Coaching with Compassionate and Courageous Empathy

2. What It Means To Embody A Coaching Mindset

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The Science of Learning and The Role of the Coach

Throughout your days, your brain relies on the past to give meaning and direction to the moment. You then act without thinking based how you define yourself from past experiences. When someone gives you a piece of advice, or you read or hear about something new to try, you will only put the new idea into action if you attempt it right away and it doesn't feel too risky. Otherwise, your brain will masterfully find the rationalization for not trying something new. Even if you do attempt a different approach to a problem, if the results aren't successful, you will likely return to your old ways of being and doing even when you know you could do better.

Most routines are never questioned. Psychologist Dan McAdams says old goals, obsolete values, and outdated self-perception give us a false sense of security even when they don't support our best interests or desires. Family therapist Virginia Satir said, "People prefer the certainty of misery to the misery of uncertainty."

Remember the last time you quickly justified behavior that kept doing something you feared or led you to making a mistake. The smarter you are, the better you are at rationalizing your actions. You accept your concocted reasons as solid facts.

To see the world and yourself differently, you need someone else to reflect your words and expressions, and ask you questions that stop the automatic processing. Neuroscientist Michael Gazzaniga said that if you have an *external thought disruptor*—someone who reflects your words, expressed emotions, contradictions, and hesitations—you can detach and view your stories as if they were a movie to be observed and analyzed.

An external thought disrupter overrides the protective brain with concise reflective statements and curious questions. The insights disrupt the brain's operating system, stimulating the examination of thinking patterns and mental models, freeing the brain to more consciously and willfully decide what is best to do right now.

A good coach is a skillful thought disrupter. Using a respectful coaching approach breaks through hard-edged thoughts holding the stories together. Only then can perceptions of the situation and oneself begin to shift.

Educational reformer John Dewey said, "Provoking people to think about their thinking is the single most powerful antidote to erroneous beliefs and autopilot." Reality is tenacious, but coaching can create the breakthroughs where the emerging insights expand what is possible for the presenting dilemma and for life.

Key points when considering the value of using coaching in your conversations.

1. Most of us spend our days living by old beliefs and repeating behaviors without question. These patterns become entrenched, keeping us from our unspoken desires. The brain resists uncomfortable self-exploration, choosing self-preservation over self-actualization.

2. Effective coaching shifts both your perception of a situation and how you see yourself in relation to this situation. Claiming who you can become is often the transformation that leads to achieving an envisioned desired outcome.

3. We all need someone else to reflect our thoughts and ask the questions that disrupt our processiong patterns to change the way we think. The widespread use of a coaching approach in our conversations not only enhances personal growth but also improve the ways we live together in this world.

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BREAKTHROUGH COACHING RESOURCE

Coaching with Compassionate and Courageous Empathy

Nonreactive empathy means you use compassion and courage to stay in the coaching conversation when your client is experiencing sadness, embarrassment, regret, or uncertainty. Staying present, compassionate, and believing in your client's ability to understand and grow may feel difficult for you but it is the most powerful demonstration of your coaching.

You can practice and develop compassionate and courageous empathy in any conversation at work, home or out in the world. Trust you are picking up on something without conscious thought, then before you interpret or attach your own emotions to what you are sensing, remember to apply these steps:

- *Notice when emotions arise in your body*—When you feel a point of tension or rumbling in your body, try to discern if you are sensing something your client is feeling or it is your own reaction to what is occurring. If you aren't sure if you are correctly picking up their energy, ask your client what they are experiencing.

- *If you share an emotion you think you are experiencing, tie it to the behavior you noticed*—For example, you could start by saying, "When you paused and looked away, there seemed to be sadness or confusion. Would you be willing to share what you are thinking and feeling right now?" or "Every time you talk about your current work team, you get agitated. Is there something about your relationship with them you would be willing to explore?"

- *Quickly own and release your impulse to save the person, fix their problem, or share your own story that you think mirrors theirs*—If you feel bad for them (sympathy) or want to tell them they are right to feel the way they do (commiserate), stay silent. Breathe and return to feeling curious and believing in their ability to move forward with your coaching. Stay silent while they process their thoughts. When their emotions begins to subside, you can ask if they would share what is on their mind.

- *If they have trouble articulating what they are experiencing, ask if there is a connection to what they now understand to the problem or desired outcome they previously stated*—For example, you might offer, "It feels as if you are hurt or sad by what is going on at work. Do you think there something important you are not getting from your situation?" or "I hear you trying to explain what is going on but your pattern of saying "but" in every sentence has me wondering if your fear of other people's judgments is holding you back. What do you think is really holding you back from taking the steps you named?" Be quiet until they respond, giving them time to think about your statement.

- *If they seem confused by what you are offering as a reflection or question, offer your thoughts in another way*—rephrase your statements more concisely without explaining yourself, or accept they have a different meaning than you thought. Ask them what is important for them in this moment. Let them know you genuinely desire to understand what they are processing.

Remember, you are there to help them think through their situation, so they see what they want to do next. They will feel better if you let them move through their reactions at their own pace. It may take time for them to put the right words to what is emerging in their thoughts, but the new perceptions will take form in time.

What it Means to Embody a Coaching Mindset

They want you to be present, not perfect.

To be your client's thinking partner, you must trust in their ability to find their way as you stay in the moment and ride the ebb and flow of the conversation. This means you must trust yourself as well. Your reflections will be useful, and your questions will make them stop and think. This will happen even if you didn't catch what they claimed was their biggest fear or your question was confusing or off target.

You must let go of being the perfect coach to have the profound impact you seek. Developing your trust, compassion, and courage, for your clients and yourself, are the foundational elements needed to embody a coaching mindset.

Your ongoing learning and practice, as well as your commitment to integrating emotional intelligence and self-care routines, will keep you on your path of mastery.

Once you trust yourself, your confidence and respect for their learning capacity will foster the sense of safety they need to respond to your coaching even when it feels challenging. They know you are there for them. They know you will not harm them emotionally. They know you will help them find their way without pushing them one way or another. This energetic exchange comes from quality and texture of your presence.

You receive what they offer with no judgment. You trust your reply is worthwhile. When you are curious, caring, and respectful, you embody a coaching mindset.

To expand the awareness of others through coaching, you may need to release the identity you had in your previous roles where you gave advice or healing. Giving up the value you provided for others in the past is not easy. Listening to someone speak without wanting to shape what will transpire takes courage.

Philosopher and novelist Iris Murdoch said we must learn the process of "unselfingt" to sense the sacredness of the human you are with. To unself while coaching, you must believe the energy that connects, aligns, and fosters insights to surface is more powerful when you are not analyzing or considering what to say next. You trust in the magic of the coaching process.

Unselfing is clearly a good idea but difficult to do. Applying your coaching skills while being present will take patience as you are overcoming a lifetime of distracting mental habits. Staying open and *not knowing* without thinking can feel unnerving. It is also amazing as you discover you are wiser and more capable than you ever imagined.

Three tips for fostering psychological safety and uplifting the human spirit with your energy.

1. To be of value to your clients and colleagues, you must seek to be profound with your presence as well as proficient with your skills.

2. One of the best ways of being a better coach and human is to declare, "I am a judgy, biased, imperfect person." Accept your humanity so you can appreciate theirs. Notice and release your own reactions so you value all of what your clients willingly share, trusting you receive what they offer with no judgeent.

3. By giving up the habit of *already knowing* what someone means or wants, you deepen your connection with them. Ask what their words mean and stay curious when exploring what they want that is not occurring now. They will feel seen, heard, and valued.

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BREAKTHROUGH COACHING RESOURCE
UNSELFING –
Becoming Profoundly Present

Self-transformation means we cross over (*trans*) so something new emerges (*formation*) in our sense of who we think we are. To embody a coaching mindset as well as develop coaching skills, you often need to let go of old roles and communication habits to take on the identity of being a thinking partner with your client. This is a process known as Unselfing. When you let go of other identities to be the coach, you can together, with your client, nurture deeper understanding and realizations that light the way forward.

For the client to feel you are there for them and you won't judge their words or reactions, you must unself by releasing these five mental habits:

1. Needing for the client to find the session valuable.
2. Knowing where the conversation will or should go.
3. Dwelling in the coachee's story and pain.
4. Wanting to be appreciated.
5. Clinging to being the expert, leader, mentor, problem-solver, or parent.

These habits come from wanting to feel good about who you are as their coach. They are fueled by the fears of rejection and insignificance. They block connections and the possibility of transformation.

The collective mind can emerge when you release your needs, opinions, and thinking you know what is best to happen next. You must remain calm and comfortable to sense the experience with the client. Then information can flow to you, and you can offer it back impartially for clarification and understanding. The spontaneous loop expands thinking. Consciousness lifts for both you and your client.

Coaching feels easy and graceful when letting the mind run freely in the open, unselfed field. Your presence is strong yet subtle; what emerges it is greater than you but doesn't reduce your value.

It is helpful to develop new mental habits that support unselfing throughout each day. When engaging in a coaching conversation, practice the following steps:

1. *Open yourself to being a self-less witness*—Before your coaching session, walk inside or out for ten to fifteen minutes with a quiet mind. Notice your world without your *I* getting in the way—what you think about what you see. Instead, just notice your experience. What makes you smile, feel curious, or open with gratitude? What colors and details pop out? What are you seeing that you didn't see the last time you walked in this space? You miss so much when your *I* leads you through life. If thoughts enter your mind, notice if there is anything important to consider, and then let them float away, knowing you can come back to them later. Release your *I* so you can be with the world around you.
2. *Bring your self-less witness into the conversation*—Sit comfortably in a chair, exhale fully, and feel your body relaxed but awake. As you begin the conversation, feel energy moving up and down the center of your body from your gut to the top of your head, simultaneously calming your body while sparking your curiosity. Your entire presence is attuned with this moment.
3. *Envision your client as strong, complete, and capable of achieving great things*—When you feel a disconnection with your client, remember your client is resourceful and not broken or inadequate will raise the level of energy between you, even when they doubt themselves.
4. *Let courage and love fill your body with warmth*—Remember you are a compassionate thinking partner. Your courage will inspire their willingness. Your care and belief in them will activate their confidence. The way forward will emerge as you knew it would all along.

BREAKTHROUGH COACHING EXERCISE
Taking a Judgmental Field Trip

Purpose

Judgment is not often defined as an emotion; it is perceived as a thought instead of a physical reaction. Accepting judgment as an emotion means you can notice your reaction and choose to feel something else. This exercise will help you discover what judgment feels like so you can develop the ability to shift to feeling curious when judgment arises while coaching.

Instructions

Go to a place where you know your judgment gets triggered, such as the grocery store, airport, the home of a family member, or a work meeting you dislike attending, and take the following steps:

1. *Notice how your body tenses up*—When you are in environments that disturb you or with people you tend to conflict with, the tension might start even before you walk through the door. Notice when you feel a tightness in your stomach, chest, or neck.

2. *Shift your emotions*—What emotion would allow you to be a neutral witness? Can you feel patience, curiosity, or even humor? If you need to interact with people, what emotions will help you have a positive experience? Can you feel gratitude, courage, love, or compassion? Breathe in the emotion you want to feel instead of judgment so it fills up your heart.

3. *Catch a judgment relapse*—When you start to feel impatient, anxious, or annoyed, release the tension and return to the emotion you chose to feel instead.

The next time you practice coaching and you are in the role of client, choose to be coached on your experience of catching your judgmental reactions and your attempts to feel something else. Allow yourself to be coached on your stories and long-held beliefs. Explore when you judge yourself for your reactions. Commit to what you will do next in an upcoming challenging conversation or situation.

Developing a practice of catching and releasing judgment will elevate your coaching impact.

How to Shift to Coach the Person to Solve Their Problem

People grow when they expand how they see themselves and the world around them.

The focus of your coaching is on what defines the person's present perspective. You want to know how they are demarcating the challenge they say they want to discuss and how they see themselves in relation to their dilemma. You want to discover what is getting in the way of this smart person's ability to see or act on options and possibilities. You coach the person's perspective to expand their stories so more answers and actions come into view.

When they begin to clarify the parameters of their story, you reflect and are curious about what is making them believe in the opinions and assumptions they share, what they fear will happen if they do something they said they wanted to do but afraid of the reactions of others, and what they said they desired that wasn't possible. Seeing their thinking helps them recognize the gaps in their logic and the justifications they unconsciously repeat to avoid taking risks.

You don't try to fix them with advice or lead them to the *correct* answer. You don't need to find patterns from their past, only asking how their past is impacting their choices today. You summarize what you think are key statements they shared and ask follow-up questions that prompt them to examine the map of their thinking. Then they can see how the paths they are on serve them now and what roadblocks may be slowing them down or blocking their movement. Most likely they will see a new a path forward that feels more meaningful and inspiring.

This is the gift of coaching. The human brain doesn't like uncertainty, so it clings to what it thinks is known. Writer Ephrat Livni described the fallacy of knowing and the need for understanding in her article "It's Better to Understand Something Than to Know It." Livni said, "Knowing is static, referring to discrete facts, while understanding is active, describing the ability to analyze and place those facts in context to form a big picture." Coaching expands what people understand about their situation beyond what they think they know, providing a two- and even three-dimensional portrayal of themselves and their situation. The lightbulb pops on as creative insights come into view. The new awareness leads to growth.

When you focus on the person's thinking, the result provides new ways of seeing and solving problems, seeing what they can do differently on their own. The discovery process generates both confidence and enthusiasm, embedding the learning and commitment to act, creating a new story to live by.

Three tips for focusing on the person to see a way forward in the dilemma they present.

1. Coaching is a spontaneous interaction that often leads to greater self-awareness more than goal achievement, but you keep the problem they stated in mind to make sure they are addressing what needs to be resolved or changed to move forward.

2. Never give up on their ability to discover what to do next. Recognize your urge to give advice as a judgment of their resourcefulness. You aren't there to make them feel better; your job is to coach them to see better.

3. Listen to their story. Use reflections to help them articulate the beliefs behind what they feel is right, wrong, and what they *should* be doing. Is there a fear or sense of obligation? What is real and what is imagined? With coaching, they can find a way forward while letting go of ideas that held them back.

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BREAKTHROUGH COACHING RESOURCE

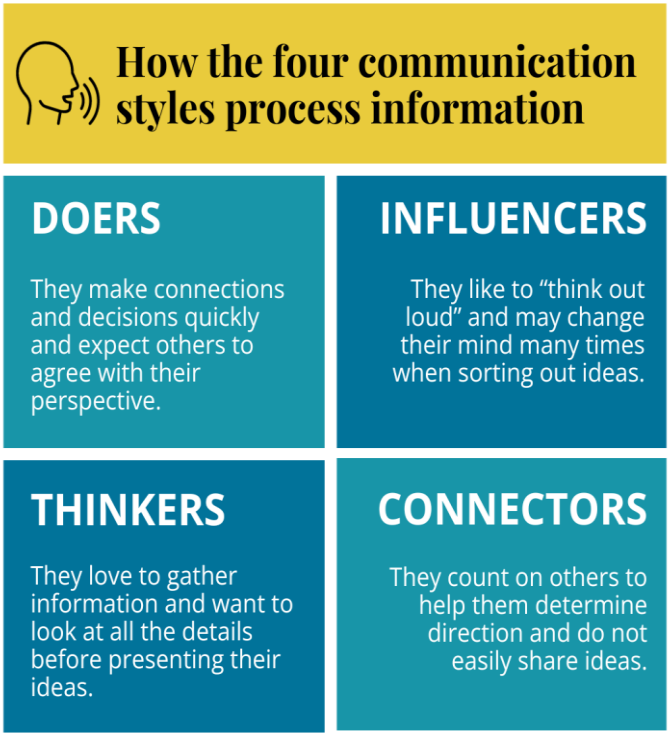
Different Ways of Processing Information

Understanding your client's thinking style is key to understanding how they will create new perspectives. Some people think fast and the coaching flows quickly. Some people need to look at all the angles before they feel comfortable articulating what they want or an insight that is coming into view.

Remember:

- Doers are direct and concise
- Thinkers are critical and analytical
- Influencers are relational and talkative
- Connectors are non-direct and supportive

Here are some tips for coaching ideas into complete and actionable thoughts:



Doers

- Accept their focus on what change needs to occur but be sure you both see the same vision even when they show impatience.
- Don't back down when they resist your questions about how actions will impact others, how reasonable their expectations and timelines are, and what else they need to consider that may have been overlooked.
- Make sure they articulate the exact steps they will take so you both know what might happen next. Their plan becomes their measure of success.

Influencers

- Once they describe what they want to change, ask them to state their outcome in one or two sentences.
- Call out any time they dismiss their desired outcome after saying "should" to help them explore how they let other people's judgment impact their decisions and dreams.
- Stay friendly. Laugh with them. Acknowledge their emotional shifts. Make sure they state out loud a new awareness they now see or what was most important that they learned from the conversation.

Thinkers

- Know they will share their thoughts with you when they are ready. Be patient.
- If they jump to actions early in the conversation, ask if they would clarify the what they want to create first and what annoyances they might have to deal with when working toward their goals.
- Don't react if it feels as if they are attacking you or your skills. Their inquiries may sound critical, but they could be analyzing what is occurring in them as they are coached or defending what they fear will be ridiculed.

Connectors

- Give them time to talk through how others might react to their ideas and actions and what they will do to stay focused on growth.
- Call out any time they say "but," after stating what they want to do to help them overcome self-doubt and fear of failure.
- If they are silent for a long time, ask if they would be willing to share what they are thinking about.

BREAKTHROUGH COACHING EXERCISE
What Are You Listening For?

Purpose

Practice exploring the meaning clients attribute to their words, the identity they bring to their current situation, and who they would like to be when they realize their desires, the vision of what they would like to create, and the obstacles they perceive are holding them back.

Instructions

One person coaches a volunteer client for no more than twenty minutes. An observer times the conversation, letting the coach know when two minutes are left. When the observer indicates there are two minutes left to coach, the coach will end the session by asking the following questions:

1. What do you understand better now?
2. What is the next step you will take?

The coach should review the following guidelines before the session:

1. Start the session by asking what challenge or possibility the client would like to explore.
2. Accept and appreciate the client's perspective of the challenge.
3. When the client pauses or begins to repeat thoughts, ask if you can summarize what you heard they want to address or change and why. Once they confirm or alter what you shared, ask questions and summarize responses that do the following:

   - **Explore the *meaning* of their words.** Identify key words they use to describe the obstacle, what they are feeling, and what they think they need. Remember to ask your questions one at a time; do not combine multiple questions.
   - **Explore their vision of what they want** instead of what they have now. How would they like this story to end? If everything turned out well, what will have changed?
   - **Explore how they define their identity in the situation**. Once they describe the challenge or problem, ask who they see themselves being in this situation today. When they clarify the vision of the outcome they want to create, ask what they might change in themselves to feel more content, fulfilled, or successful.
   - **Explore potential obstacles**. What do they need to address or resolve right now to be able to move toward their vision? What beliefs about themselves or others do they see as holding them back? What fears about the future are stopping them from taking any steps? What *shoulds* from family, friends, bosses, or society are confusing their choices?

4. Agree on a desired outcome early in the conversation and notice if the picture shifts or changes as the conversation ensues. What is the tangible outcome that you can agree to, a picture of what the client wants that is not occurring at that moment? This is not an action, decision, or feeling. What will they have when they act, decide, or feel differently?

Debrief: Stop to answer the following questions after each coaching session.

- Coach: What did you learn by focusing on coaching the client's perspective of the situation and themselves?
- Client: How did the coaching help you identify what you want to create or change, and what you can do to move toward your desires?
- Observers: What did you learn watching the coaching session unfold?

What is Their Desired Outcome, Really

Painting a clear desired outcomes is the conduit between problems and progress.

Clarifying the desired outcome can take 5 minutes up front, but it could take most of the session to coach the client to declare and claim what is essential for them to create, change, or release to move toward what they *really* want now.

Defining the outcome is a co-creative process where you invite the person to clarify what they want while exploring how they might see the situation and themselves in a broader way. You direct this process with firmness and care, adapting to the pace they need to process their insights. You maintain their feelings of safety and trust as they move through the discomfort of letting go of their story. You sense when the conversation stabilizes as they confirm their desired destination. You gain their permission to dig deeper into what is holding them back and what can and cannot be done to clear the way forward. You coach with compassion even when you bravely challenge their thinking.

The first version of the desired outcome is then woven into the conversation where it can expand or change as the coaching proceeds. Keeping a sense of their desired outcome in mind gives more substance to the steps they declare they will take when closing out the conversation. The entire interaction gives the client the power to drive their future while knowing where they are going and the possible rewards for staying on the path. Their story shifts from feeling stuck under a cloud of confusion or displeasure to feeling of a strong sense of purpose. Discovering what they really need to have, be, or do to achieve what they want builds confidence and motivation.

Be willing to name contradictions you hear when they state one thing they yearn fir and then follow it with a different or opposite desire. Challenge their judgments of themselves when they say they want to do something and say why they can't after the word *but*. Is the *but* a reality to address or a fear keeping them stuck? Directly state when they have gotten off track, asking if they want to maintain focus on the outcome they agreed to earlier or if what has emerged feels more important.

You will hear what needs are haunting them or what they are longing for but don't feel they are worthy of receiving. You will notice the sputtering of excuses when they are afraid to use their courage to let go of obligations pinning them in a place they don't want to be. You will hear what is just below the surface that wants to come out but is still a blind spot for them.

Offer what you think is there. Be silent as they think about what you offer and what it might mean to them now. This is how you co-create their awareness and what they now see as reality.

Three tips for determining the direction of the coaching conversation based on what the client actually desires now.

1. When clients list several problems, summarize what you hear and invite them to choose what they want to work on first. Then you can determine what they want create, what a change would look like, or what they want to happen that isn't occurring now.

2. When you agree on what they desire, ask them what needs to be addressed or resolved to make their desire a reality. You can also ask them how they see themselves in this picture today, and then how would they like to show up instead of who they are being now. Then explore what needs to be addressed to become this person and create the change they want to see.

3. Because client stories have many layers, what they want to focus on creating often changes during the session. Share what you notice about the shift in focus and ask how this relates to the original outcome. If they confirm a change in what they want to create, make sure they paint the new picture to ensure you agree on what it looks like, why it is important now, and what needs to be addressed to achieve it.

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BREAKTHROUGH COACHING RESOURCE

Avoiding the Common Traps When Clarifying the Desired Outcome

Do You Recognize Any of These Common Traps?

1. You agree to the problem they have or what they want clarity on but not the outcome they want as a result when the problem is solved, or they better understand their situation.
2. They present more than one challenge to explore and you choose what to focus on instead of inviting them to choose.
3. You lead the client to what you think is right for them to pursue as an outcome.
4. You move too soon to solve a problem and take action without exploring what is important about the change they want to see and what needs to be addressed or resolved before deciding on steps to take.
5. You don't explore what has stopped them from resolving this dilemma on their own—which could lead to a more critical change or personal improvement they want to achieve.

Practices to Help You Avoid the Common Traps

- *Don't get lost in their story or buried under the details*—You want them to share what they see, but it is up to you to grab the key words and emotional expressions, reflect and ask them what the words mean to them, and relate to what they want instead of what they currently have. If they repeat what they said or keep piling on details to their story, interrupt by (1) asking permission and (2) telling them the purpose for your interruption, such as asking "Can I interrupt you to make sure I know where this conversation is going?"
- *Don't accept what they don't want as an outcome*—What will they have when they get what they want or what does the opposite of what they don't want look like?
- *Don't use generic questions*—When you ask, "What do you want by the end of the session?" or "How can we best use our time together?" they may just repeat the problem. Customize and verify your questions using their words, their frustrations, and what they allude to wanting to help them identify what could be a clear and positive resolution to the problem they presented.
- *Don't accept vague desires you can't both see*—Instead of accepting vagueness, get specific. Here are a few examples:
  - ✓ If they say they want to make a decision or plan, ask, "If you make the right decision or lay out a plan you feel good about, what would you have as a result?"
  - ✓ If they say they want to feel something different, such as more confidence when speaking up or trying something new, ask what their definition of confidence is, what they want to do differently, and what outcome they hope this shift gives them, such as "If you had the confidence you need to do what you think will make you a better leader… connect with others better… handle yourself in meetings more powerfully, what would it look like?" Be sure to define who they will be when they take on the emotion they want as well as what they will be doing.
  - ✓ If they say they want to understand what is going on better, ask, "What would a better understanding give you?"

Then the rest of the session can focus on exploring what is inhibiting this smart person from moving toward what they want.

BREAKTHROUGH COACHING EXERCISE

Agreeing on the Picture of the Happy Ending

Purpose

Practice coaching to get an agreement on what the desired outcome looks like. Coaches often assume they know what the client wants without full exploration. This exercise will help you recognize and go beyond your assumption steeped in *already knowing* with curiosity and patience.

Instructions

Both the coach and client need a piece of paper and pencils (colored pencils or markers if available).

Coach to discover how the client is framing their story based on what they aren't getting and what they might want instead. 10 minutes of coaching and 3 minutes of drawing. An observer is the timekeeper.

1) The client starts by explaining a challenge they are facing, and WHY they see this as a challenge or dilemma. Clients should be brief in their explanation to give the coach the opportunity to clarify the client's desired outcome.

2) THE COACH CAN ONLY 1) summarize what the client shared, 2) ask for the meaning of key words and phrases, 3) reflect any emotional shifts that occur, and 4) explore what it looks like when the client gets what they want instead of what is occurring.

3) After 5 minutes, both the coach and client draw a picture of what they think the client's desired outcome looks like. How does the client want their story to end up looking like if they address or resolve what is making the situation a challenge? The picture can be a real scenario with people or a metaphor that represents the desired outcome.

4) After 3 minutes, compare pictures and talk about what is similar and what is different.

Debrief: After each person has been in the role of coach, the group discusses what they learned about coaching to get clarity on the desired outcome.

Debugging the Operating System

Coaching a client's operating system creates the mental space needed to expand their assessment of choices.

Looking inside the operating system is often called *vertical coaching*. The conversation dives beneath the surface explanation of the problem to explore thinking patterns and habits inhibiting movement toward a desired outcome.

Coaching begins with examining the operating system that currently exists. Both the coach and client look at the programs directing their thoughts, and then seek a shared understanding of why the challenge exists, the meaning of key words and emotional descriptions the client uses, and the picture of what the client desires instead of what is occurring at the moment. They locate obsolete files, drivers that need updating, broken links, and any other bugs in the brain that negatively impact perception.

The desired outcome needs to include what they want to create and who they see when they look at themselves in the picture they create of their future selves. Once they know who they want to be, they can look at how they define who they are today and the rules holding their identity intact. When the rules are revealed, they can define new rules to live by.

They may resist changing the rules when they fear other people's judgments. Their social needs both support and obstruct transformation. Needs are developed strengths that have helped the client survive and thrive. Needs become bugs in the system when others don't react to the client's behavior in a way the client thought they should. Needs also impact progress when clients fear their needs will not be met in the future if they change, so they choose to stay stuck and frustrated to avoid pain and failure.

Coaching around identity can also surface conflicts of values. Clients may have to sort out their conflicts relating to multiple desires. Often, their decisions are distorted by the values advocated by family, colleagues, work norms, societal rules, and friends imposing what they believe is right and wrong. Conflicts of values stifle clients from committing to change.

Going deeper into the operating system can help the client see how to have their social needs, values, and picture of their best self honored to feel balanced and fulfilled while they take steps that ensure progress.

Three tips for shifting how someone thinks about the situation and themselves so they willingly and courageously find their way forward.

1. The mental operating system runs continuously in the background throughout the day and night. While clients tell their story, listen for key phrases that follow the words *really*, *but*, and *should*. Don't judge their versions. Let them find the gaps in their logic and outdated beliefs when they hear them for themselves.

2. Much of coaching is based on the client's identity. Their definition of self in relation to the situation either supports or inhibits achievement of the desired outcome. When they define who they want to become they change both the narrative and the outcome.

3. Coaching someone to muster the courage to say yes to themselves when they face possibilities of disappointment or being shamed by others is one of the greatest gifts of coaching.

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BREAKTHROUGH COACHING RESOURCE

The Relationship of Social Needs to Emotional Reactions

The strengths that have helped you succeed are also your greatest emotional triggers. Needs stem from times you experienced self-worth and comfort. You then seek to repeat this experience most of your life. When you don't get a need met in a social interaction, you take the neglect personally.

When a significant need is disregarded or ridiculed, you react with some form of anger or go inside filled with self-doubt. You may counterattack or stay silent when you don't have the courage to say something about it. Even if you pretend nothing happened, you may never forgive the transgression, further damaging trust in the relationship.

The key is to catch yourself reacting when your emotions are triggered. Then you can determine how best to address what transpired. You might ask for what you need, bringing awareness to the offense. You might realize no harm was done or that you took the other person's words too personally, and the best you can do is breathe and let go, choosing to feel something else. Be sure your reason for saying nothing isn't a rationalization because you are afraid to ask for what you need.

The following list includes common emotional triggers, meaning you react when you feel as though you aren't getting or will not get a need met that is very important to you:

Be accepted	Be respected	Be liked
Be understood	Be needed	Be given control
Be right	Be treated fairly	Be given attention
Be seen	Experience freedom	Have autonomy
Feel in harmony	Experience balance	Maintain order
Have consistency	Feel safe	Have stability
Achieve new goals	Effort is Recognized	Work is significant
Feel loved	Have fun	Feel content

Some of these needs will be important to you. Others will hold no emotional charge for you. You might recognize a need you don't see on this list. Add what is most important for others to recognize or give you to feel safe, essential, and fulfilled.

Identify three needs you hold most dear. The next time you feel an emotional reaction in your body when interacting with others, ask yourself if your brain thinks you didn't get one of your needs met that you expected to be honored.

When you honestly declare your needs, you can begin to see people's intentions more objectively. From this perspective, you are free to choose what you will say or do next.

Developing an awareness of your needs will help you recognize them in your clients when coaching.

BREAKTHROUGH COACHING EXERCISE

Coaching the Who

Purpose

A person's identity—how they define themselves in a situation—forms their assumptions, fears, judgments, and ultimately their behavior. Exploring your client's beliefs about who they are in a certain situation or the expectation of who they are supposed to be could uncover what is making the situation difficult for your client to resolve.

Instead of coaching on actions to take—the what and how—use this session to practice shifting the coaching to exploring who the client can become if they stepped into a different sense of self. Identifying who else they can authentically be in the situation will change what they will do and how they will do it without needing to spend much time on action plans.

Instructions

One person coaches a volunteer client for no more than twenty minutes. An observer times the conversation, letting the coach know when two minutes are left.

The coach should first review the following steps before the session. You will explore identities organically, only asking the client to label who they think they are being if it would be useful.

1. Start the session by asking what challenge or possibility the client would like to explore.

2. Get clarity and agreement on what is frustrating, scaring, or confusing your client.

3. Ask them how they might define who they are in the situation. You might ask them if they could name who they are being. If they name a role, ask them how they describe themselves in that role. Be sure they state how they feel they are showing up today not how they wish they would or how other people want them to be.

4. Ask them if they would like to feel and be seen differently than who they are being now. Ask them what they need to feel more content, fulfilled, confident, or successful (use the words they defined as their desired state). Ask them what is most important about becoming this person. Coach them to paint a picture of who they want to be in this situation, including what they would be feeling as well as doing.

5. Explore what needs to be addressed or resolved to shift into being the person they see in their ideal picture. What beliefs about themselves or others are holding them back? What fears about the future are stopping them from taking steps? What *shoulds* from family, friends, bosses, or society are confusing their choices?

6. Before closing the session, ask them what they have discovered about themselves in the conversation. Then ask what they are willing to do next.

Debrief after each session, by stopping to answer the following questions:

- Client: What was most useful for you in this interaction? Was there anything that was confusing or didn't sit well with you?
- Coaches and observers: What did you learn about coaching the client's identity, how they see themselves in a particular scenario and who they can become if they choose to make a shift?

Turning Insights Into Commitments

A new awareness must be spoken to embed it as a new belief.

When clients pause with a slight smile or gasp, or they look away as they go inside their head to consider a thought that popped up, ask if they would share what just came to mind. These reactions indicate an insight is arising. The idea could feel exciting or trigger tears. Don't miss this moment. The thought that is forming is critical to coaching.

Whether they say they now see what they need to do, or they aren't sure what the thoughts mean that are now coming up, ask them to state what they are thinking about. Share what you hear and stay with the train of thought until the ideas are fully formed. They should be able to state their insight in one or two sentences to embed the thought as a new belief.

Once they state their insight, then the real goal of coaching can take place – a commitment to taking at least one step to realize the change they want to create. To ensure progress, an action must be taken. If this action is a result of the insight, the client will feel more committed to and confident about taking the step. Having a breakthrough insight is a pivotal moment, but the subsequent decisions of what to do next measure the success of the coaching.

Declaring and then acting is the only way to assess progress even if the action isn't measurable, such as when they focus their actions on shifting an emotional state or on finding the time to think about what is changing for them now. They must make a commitment to do something after the session ends.

The process of creating the goals at the end starts early in the session; getting a commitment for action at the end of the session is a result of your focus on achieving an agreement on what the client desires to create or change. The actions they commit to at the end of the session must bring them at least one step closer to what they agreed they wanted up front.

When they state what they commit to do, ask how they will overcome any obstacles that could get in the way to increase the likelihood of success. If their action includes having a conversation with someone, ask what they will do if the interaction doesn't get the results they hope for. Helping them prepare contingencies overrides a sense of failure if something happens that doesn't match their vision.

You may also ask who they will be when they take the actions they are committing to. A powerful way to end the session is having them recognize who they are becoming.

Three tips to catch and articulate insights that lead to the commitments that ensure progress will be made.

1. When clients express a startling insight or are excited by something they now see, share what you hear and then ask them to repeat their insight out loud in a sentence or two. Follow up by asking, "What does this insight mean to what you said you want to create or change?" Give them all the space they need to grasp what has emerged.

2. Insights can lead straight to actions. The declaration of what they will do after they share their insight is the actual goal of the coaching session. Ask what they want to do now or plan to do at a specific time in the future. Be sure they state when and how they will act even if it is to take some time to reflect on the insight.

3. Ask about any hesitation you hear or see when they say what they will do. What could get in the way of them completing their commitment? Is another desire emerging as they envision themselves moving forward?. After this exploration, ask what they are willing to confidently declare is the right action for them to take next.

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BREAKTHROUGH COACHING RESOURCE

Exploring a Fear of Failure

No matter how confidently your clients express their new awareness, they may still hesitate when they declare the actions they will take. When explored, you might uncover a fear of failure. They often mislabel their fear, saying they suffer from an *imposter syndrome*. The term has become generic for the fear of not being good enough to succeed.

Calling their experience a syndrome is like saying they have a disease that can't be cured. A syndrome indicates a persistent pathological pattern of behavior. The brain resists facing failure by setting up the expectation that the outcome won't be very good instead of thinking things will turn out all right no matter what. Your client then believes the worst will happen. They look at their inability to trust themselves as a condition they can't overcome.

Don't accept the label of having an imposter syndrome. Coach them to reframe how they see themselves reacting when they aren't sure how things will turn out. When they must complete a task that will test their abilities, ask any of the following questions that relate to both possible losses and gains. Hopefully, the answers to these questions will overshadow their fear of failure.

"If you make a mistake, what is likely to happen? If this happens, what could you do next?"

"What is the likelihood you will crash and burn if you don't perform perfectly compared to the chance you will learn how to fly?"

"How can the times you don't perform as you had hoped support your learning, growth, and the affirmation of your strengths?"

"What else can you feel in this moment other than fear?"

"Are you grateful for the opportunity? Gratitude can inspire the courage to act despite your fear."

You might also explore four archetypal patterns that could feed into a feeling of never being good enough. These four patterns often lead to strong performances, bolstering feelings of power and success. They also have a shadow side, sabotaging and derailing long-term desires:

- *The Expert* expects to know everything quickly. There is no place for mistakes and being wrong even when new to a role or task.
- *The Lone Wolf* believes work must be accomplished alone and will resist asking for help.
- *The Superperson* feels the need to excel at every role and task they take on. They feel their performance must outshine anyone else who has held their position before.
- *The Perfectionist* sets impossibly high personal standards and thinks everyone should deliver impeccable results.

Explore these possible behavior patterns; if they see themselves in one of these patterns, ask them what benefits they have gained from owning this identity. Then explore the consequences. You will often see these patterns in high achievers. They leave jobs with the excuse of boredom or inadequate pay when they were afraid of not doing well when given a new task. This doesn't make them imposters. It often means they are committed to doing good work, so they hesitate when they think they won't be able to shine.

Coach your clients to reframe how they might use their strengths and emotions to increase trust in themselves that their best effort will be good enough—if not stellar. They can thrive in difficult times; they might make mistakes, but they won't fail if they choose to understand the lesson they can use going forward.

BREAKTHROUGH COACHING EXERCISE

Gleaning Insights From Outcomes

Purpose

Explore how clarifying the desired outcome, especially when it morphs into a new direction, can create lightbulb moments.

Instructions

The client takes a few minutes to think about what they would love their life to look like one year from now. If one year seems too short, they can choose to vision 2-3 years from now knowing many things can change in that time.

Each round includes 15 minutes of coaching and 5 minutes debriefing. If available, have an observer be the timekeeper. The intent is to recognize what insights emerge when the client can clearly see their imagined future and what they need to do to make the picture real.

Coaching:

1. The client starts the conversation by describing what they would most want their life to look like one year from today (or 2 or 3 years as they chose to consider before the session).

2. The coach reflects this picture to make sure they align around the image of the desired future.

3. The coach makes sure the vision includes who the client will be if they stepped into this reality, not just what they would be doing differently from today. This sense of being and the evolution needed to shift their self-concept might spark an insight and lead to a new desired outcome.

4. The coach explores what needs to be addressed or resolved to create this future. As the client considers what they need to do to make their vision come true, the coach should reflect insights the client has and ask if these ideas change their picture or add to it.

5. When the observer tells the coach that 2 minutes remain in the session, the coach asks the client to share one new idea they learned about themselves in the session and how it changed or enlightened their vision.

Debrief:

- **Client:** What was most useful for you in this interaction?

- **Coaches:** What did it feel like to stay focused on clarifying the outcome while noticing what insights emerged? How did you reflect and help clarify the meaning and value of the insights? What did you learn in the process?

- **Observers:** What did you discover about the types of insights that show up when coaching the client to articulate what they *really* want to create?

I hope these tools helped you elevate your knowledge and skills in using reflective inquiry to create more lightbulb moments when coaching.

Would you mind leaving a review of Breakthrough Coaching where you purchased your book?

It means a lot to me if you help me spread the word about the power of coaching to expand minds and uplift spirits. Your support is important as I work to provide training and tools for coaches around the world.

Thank you!

Marcia Reynolds