

Coaching Tip: Coaching Your Clients Who Indulge in Overwhelm and Confusion

Welcome to my coaching tip on coaching your clients who indulge in overwhelm and confusion.

Years ago, I took on a large yearlong project for a company I was working for at the time. There were a lot of moving parts including managing a team of people and a curriculum. It was super challenging but I really wanted to be the lead on it. I knew it would stretch me to my edge but I felt ready. At least I thought I was. During my weekly check-ins with my sister she would always ask “how are you doing?” and I would always answer the same way “I’m completely overwhelmed”. Until one day she said “you’ve been saying that for an entire year”. Rather than digging into the source of my overwhelm, in other words, coaching myself or getting coached, I blamed my overwhelm on the project, aka the circumstances, which caused me to sink even deeper into overwhelm. As a result, I felt completely out of control that year. Not only didn’t I achieve the results I wanted, I was miserable. What I didn’t realize then was that I was indulging or wallowing in my emotions or what the dictionary defines as yielding to an inclination. Wanna hear more? I thought so.

Okay, so there’s a big difference between encouraging your clients to feel their feelings, noticing and naming, which was the topic of my coaching tip two weeks ago, and going along or even inadvertently encouraging them to indulge in negative emotions. Noticing and describing sensations, or emotions that register in the body, identifying the accompanying feelings and thoughts to get underneath

what's driving the negative emotions is useful for our evolution and growth, but it turns out that we when we wallow in the drama of those emotions ("this isn't fair", "why did this happen to me?"), we get stuck. This circular loop can activate the beta-endorphin and dopamine pathways in the brain just like addictive drugs do. Essentially we can create an unconscious addiction to our negative feelings.

Studies show that people who indulge in emotions are often looking for validation from the outside world, they want someone else to fix their problem or they want confirmation that what they're feeling is normal, even appropriate. Your clients may behave this way with you. We know this as story fondling. Wallowing in negative emotions can also be a way to defend against failure. For example, keeping busy may generate the feeling of overwhelm, but it can also generate feelings of worthiness and value because our society, and our culture values productiveness. Being a slave to our to do list, in order to feel "productive", aka valuable, means we never have to put ourselves out there – we don't have to expose ourselves emotionally. If we're not willing to feel uncomfortable, we might not be interested in discovering or accomplishing what we wholeheartedly believe is valuable or worthwhile to us rather than what our culture or society dictates.

Staying overwhelmed or confused has no worthwhile value in of itself except to insure against the possibility of failing. By telling yourself and others that you're overwhelmed or confused, you multiply those feelings and fail before you even try. My mentor Brooke Castillo calls it "failing ahead of time". Let's use an example: imagine you're watching a toddler attempt to walk for the very first time but let's pretend that his brain is fully developed, like yours and mine, and he's about to take his very first step. But before he does, his reptilian brain kicks in and says "this walking thing is too overwhelming", or "I don't know how to walk, it looks so hard, I've never done it before, maybe I can read a book about walking so I can make sure I get it right the first time" or "look at Susie, she's 3 months younger than me and walking like an expert...I'll never be as good as she is". His thoughts are so depressing and so overwhelming that he cries and wallows in his feelings. He never learns to walk because he's too afraid to fall. Another scenario is

that he doubts his desires and generates feelings of confusion with these thoughts: “I don’t know what to do...there’s a cool puzzle I could play with or I could look at that new book that mom just bought – or maybe I want to play in the backyard”. In other words, his mind generates too many other options, which not only distracts him from his original desire, walking, but also actually dilutes his desire to walk. He asks, “Do I really want to walk at all?” Doubt. Babies don’t do this of course – sure they get shiny object syndrome but they don’t quit walking before they walk because they don’t have thoughts about failing. They don’t care if they fall, they just do. And they do it over and over again until they master it.

The more you say I’m overwhelmed or confused or scared, the more likely it is you’ll exacerbate and compound those emotions and that’s when you’ve crossed the line into emotional indulgence. This is why I never let my clients say “I don’t know”, it’s a sure-fire way to stay in the cycle of confusion, overwhelm, fear etc.

So, what to do when you’re coaching a client who is feeling confused or overwhelmed?

First, always seek to find the culprit of those negative feelings by uncovering the thoughts causing the overwhelm or confusion (refer to toddler example earlier). Asking Why questions will help you with this. What I have found even more powerful is nudging your client to the make a decision and commit to it. This strategy can serve two objectives: First, your client’s fears, worries or thoughts will immediately surface when you ask them to focus on one thing. Second, actually choosing to focus on one thing, one goal or accomplishment generates less confusion and becomes the fuel that creates results. Brooke says the opposite of confusion is deep work. Being bold cures most negative ailments from overwhelm and confusion to depression and fear.

Here’s a general step-by-step guide to help your clients reduce confusion and overwhelm:

1. Ask them for one small thing they want to accomplish and why?
2. Ask them how they would feel if they accomplish this one thing?
3. Ask them if they're willing to practice and make mistakes along the way in exchange for feeling less confused, perhaps even gaining more clarity?
4. Ask them to plan for how they're going to reroute their mind when they hit a roadblock. For example, they might use an ACT tool like "I'm noticing I'm having the thought that I have too many choices. I'm noticing that I'm creating confusion when I believe I have too much to do. I notice that I'm thinking that failure is not something I can handle. I notice I'm distracting myself with things that aren't that important." Like right now, I want to get my car washed and pick up my favorite granola before the store closes instead of finishing this coaching tip but that's my reward. I planned for this before I sat down to write and record this tip and I took care of it because I knew I was distracting myself when I hit a snag.
5. Ask them to plan for real world distractions in advance. Emails, Facebook, phone calls. Maybe they address emails twice a day, surfing FB is only a reward at night, getting a babysitter to help with the kids for a couple of hours on Saturday morning.

Remember, when we commit to something it will be a bumpy ride of emotions just like the toddler who is learning to walk – he gets up, he falls down and scrapes his knee – failing can sting but what hurts more is making the choice to not take action by indulging in negative emotions and never knowing the sweet success of sticking with something long enough to get the results your heart truly desires.

And Coaches, I know that it may be challenging to step out of this and coach your clients if you're also feeling a degree of overwhelm or confusion yourself, but have no fear (or have some fear, that's okay), I can help you with this. I'm giving away free 20 minute mini sessions around this topic if you book your session by Friday, February 3rd. You don't have to use it by Friday, but you do need to book it by then. You

can hit reply to this email and I'll send you the link to my calendar or if you're reading this, you can use the link below and choose the **Free Mini Session** option from the menu.

<http://jackiegartman.acuityscheduling.com/schedule.php>

Mwah to you all and thank you for listening!

Cheers,

Jackie