

## Coaching Tip: When It's Inappropriate to Coach Your Clients

Hi everyone and welcome to this week's coaching tip on when it's inappropriate to coach your clients. As a coach, you know that there are two types of pain: Clean pain and Dirty pain. "Clean pain" is what we feel when something hurtful happens to us. It is inherent in life. You lose your dog or a loved one, you get passed over for a promotion, you discover you can't have biological children, you finger gets caught in a car door, and you get a divorce. Clean pain generates primary emotions – current and direct responses to that event – you're hurt, sad, devastated, disappointed, and angry. You never coach someone who is experiencing Clean Pain.

"Dirty" pain is the result of our thoughts about that event. We might say, "it's not fair, this shouldn't be happening, this is wrong, he shouldn't have done this", and we suffer secondary emotions as a result. It exacerbates and actually conceals our primary emotions when we spin stories about these events.

In Buddhist teachings, this is known as Samsara. Essentially, it means that we self-generate our own suffering with habitual responses to clean pain. We make up stories, get entangled in thoughts and cling to antiquated belief systems that have been adopted from our family of origin, societal or cultural norms, religious dogma, etc.

It's important you know the difference because you only coach Dirty Pain.

When you're coaching someone who is experiencing clean pain, their natural tendency will be to avoid the pain, it's not their fault or something they're doing on purpose – as human beings it's normal to seek pleasure and avoid pain. Think about it, if you ever touched a hot pan or pot, you instinctually will pull your hand away, right? You don't even have to think about it. The same goes for emotional pain, rather than feeling the pain you might instead overeat, drink too much, endlessly surf Facebook, binge watch *The Crown*, or even argue with your emotions to get rid of those negative feelings. We call this fight or flight.

So, when you are coaching someone who is experiencing something significant that's "clean", your job is to encourage them to surrender and move toward the pain rather than allowing their primitive brain to take the wheel and veer away from it. It reminds me of what experts tell us to do when you've hit ice or rain and your car starts spinning. Rather than over-correcting, which is what we intuitively want to do, you want to turn into the slide which will help you regain control –it's totally counter-intuitive, but the same applies to our feelings. Lean in, not out.

Getting back to Samsara aka Mind poop, this can serve as a distraction and ultimately obscure our primary emotions/clean pain. Being willing to embrace and feel our emotions will help process the grief – sadness, disappointment, anger, etc. Let me give you a quick example. I was recently passed over for a pretty amazing opportunity. It was so important to me that I postponed a big trip for it. I was over the moon excited, I totally visualized it happening and thought it was in the bag. I was making plans for it, clearing my calendar, and even telling my friends and family. Unfortunately, I was passed over –and it had nothing to do with me. There were simply factors outside of my control. I remember thinking "it wasn't fair" and I even caught myself blaming others. But deep down, I was just deeply disappointed and sad. I acknowledged the stories that I momentarily dipped my toe into but quickly remembered that this was grief – and to lean into rather than going down the rabbit hole of my thinking – coaching would not be appropriate for me at this juncture. If a friend just lost her Mother or her cat, you wouldn't say "let me do The Work on 'she shouldn't have died'". Can you say insensitive?

Jill Bolte Taylor, author of *My Stroke of Insight*, after having a major left hemispheric stroke, says that it takes only 90 seconds to process an emotion if you give yourself permission to feel it. So here I was – completely bummed out, sad and disappointed. This wasn't intellectual, it wasn't happening to my client, it wasn't something I was reading in a book or watching on *This is Us*. This was happening to me. So, I had a choice, I could practice the sweet embrace of leaning into my feelings or I could commit mental suicide and let my thoughts run the show. I use the adjective sweet because when you take off the armor and stop fighting the troops of negative emotion, what you experience on the other side is a deep connection to yourself. By embracing my disappointment, by acknowledging it, and talking about it, I was able to feel the full expression of just another emotion, one that was just as fleeting as their friends, happiness and excitement. By feeling my feelings and refraining from coaching myself out of it, I felt something that delighted me – a greater strength and resilience than I ever thought I had. In other words, by staying in the dark hallway with my feelings, I saw a light I never knew existed.

So, when you have a client who is experiencing clean pain, acknowledge their brand of Samsara, and stay in the fox hole with them long enough so they can see that there's nothing to be afraid of.

Here are few strategies for helping your client's process clean pain:

1. Create a safe space for them to tell their story if they need to. "Safe" means no judgment and no agenda other than encouraging them to feel whatever they are feeling.
2. Have them describe the vibrations in their body.
3. Ask, "What are you feeling?"
4. Invite them to feel their feelings as intensely as possible. Make them big, as big as they can. Ask them to notice and follow the flow of their feelings. What happens to those feelings?
5. Ask, "If this feeling were a person, place or thing, what would it be?" Have them describe the object in as much detail as possible.

6. Encourage them to journal about what they are feeling, preferably first thing in the morning before they have coffee or go about their daily routine.
7. Invite them to spend time walking in nature – the mountains or the beach, for example. Being in nature has natural healing agents.
8. Suggest they make an appointment with grief for 10-15 minutes a day. Ask them to curl up in a cozy chair maybe with blanket and a cup of tea. Suggest that they listen to anything that elicits their emotions. For example, if they just broke up with their partner, have them listen to their favorite love songs or they can journal or just be silent.
9. Step into their shoes and give words to what you suspect they might be feeling if they're having a hard time articulating it or if they're story fondling. "I have a hunch that underneath all these thoughts, you're just feeling really sad. Tell me where I'm wrong." You can follow up with "say more about your sadness".

I hope you enjoyed this episode of "when not to coach your clients". And, as usual, please let me know how you're using my tips! I'm still accepting chocolate chip cookie recipes and any new Netflix shows recommendations!

Cheers,

Jackie