

Coaching Tip: Major Dilemmas

Hi everyone and welcome to my coaching tip of the week on how to help your client cope with big dilemmas. I've touched on this topic before in prior coaching tips but I came across some notes from a Russ Harris training that I participated in a few years back and wanted to share some of what I learned from him. If you don't know who Russ Harris is, he's the father of ACT (Acceptance & Commitment Therapy) and has written books like *The Happiness Trap* and *Get Out of Your Mind and Into Your Life*. Highly recommend those books as a coaching resource by the way!

I'm sure many of you have had clients who have faced major dilemmas (if you haven't I promise you will) like whether to stay in a job, a relationship, a house or neighborhood, whether to get married or whether or not to have children, for example. These dilemmas are often the very reason why your clients hire you in the first place. In fact, I bet my brand-new navy blue bathing suit that many of you have had similar dilemmas or circumstances in your life, like taking Life Coach Training, for example, and leaving your soul sucking job, not that I'm talking about myself here.

The way your clients approach or resolve quandaries in their life can be multi-fold – some folks will procrastinate and not make any decision at all – staying in a crappy job or marriage and living with the day to day discomfort of that. Others will make very quick decisions (you know those quick starts), which will temporarily offload their anxiety but who often end up regretting that decision causing even greater discomfort and an entirely new dilemma. Others may play a more

active role and will write a pro/con list of each available option. Sometimes this works but usually when it comes to important decisions, the truth is the less likely this method will be beneficial – in other words, save that approach for the smaller decisions like which movie to see or where to vacation.

So, how can you help your clients approach these predicaments in a way that is both helpful and empowering?

Here is what I learned from Harris, about coping with difficult life changing decisions:

1. Recognize that there is no super glue fix. When you have a client that's in a rush to quickly decide something important, it's a tell-tale sign that they're in dirty pain and are likely experiencing fight or flight. You can usually tell because their anxiety is almost palatable. Making rash decisions is simply a way offload their anxiety, anger, hurt and other negative emotions. It's important you recognize these signs so you can focus on coaching them around their thinking first, rather than on the decision itself. It's also important that your client understand that nothing good comes from making quick decisions and your job is to help them make sound decisions that are aligned with their values, how they want to feel, and what they want to achieve.
2. Acknowledge that there is no perfect solution. Harris says if there were, it wouldn't be a dilemma in the first place right? This is just about the best advice I've heard because your clients, even if they're not aware of it consciously, often hold the expectation that there's a "right" decision and if they make the "right" decision it will be all rainbows and unicorns... well, maybe that's an exaggeration, but I think there's an expectation that the right decision won't include any anxiety or self-doubt. Let your client know that self-doubt will creep in either way, whatever option they choose and that your objective is to help clear the schmootz off the lens so they feel more confident in making those decisions despite their fears.

3. Not choosing is choosing. Harris says even if you're not actively choosing an option, you're still choosing. When you don't ask for that divorce, you're choosing to stay in your marriage. When you don't give notice at work, you're choosing to stay in your job. When you take your birth control pills, you're choosing to not get pregnant. You are making a choice. It's a passive choice, but it's still a choice. Let your clients know that in not choosing, they're making a choice.
4. Bring awareness to those choices. When your clients understand that they're choosing, especially when it's a passive choice, it's your job to bring that to their consciousness and activate that choice. For example, you can simply say, "it sounds like you're not ready to make a decision about your marriage or your job. Would you be willing to start tomorrow off with this phrase: 'I choose to stay in this relationship for the next 24 hours or I choose to stay in this job until the end of the week?'" By bringing awareness to their choice and using an "active" voice, they will feel less like a victim of their circumstance, more in control of their life and will likely experience less anxiety moving forward.
5. Next, assuming they're willing to say they choose to go to work until weeks' end, or stay in their marriage another day, ask them how they want to show up with that choice. For example, "If you choose to stay in your marriage for the next 24 hours, how do you want to show up? What kind of partner do you want to be? If you're not ready to leave your job this week, what sort of employee do you want to be? If they don't put your house up for sale, how do you want to relate to your community and your neighbors? How do you want to feel in your home for the time that that you're there?"

Per usual Coaches, I'd love to know if this tip has been helpful, and or even if something gets sticky for you! My inquiring mind wants to know!

Cheers,
Jackie

P.S. Are you a new or newer Coach who is in need of some support or guidance? Have you ever had a challenging client and wish you could have bounced ideas around with a Master Coach? Do you know you could use some occasional coaching yourself? Would you like some practical business advice as you cultivate your practice like building a list and attracting clients or even more skill building classes?

If you answered “yes” to any of these questions, I invite you to check out The Coaching Den – it will give you all of this and more...and did I mention that it's crazy affordable? Check it out here:

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