

Coaching Tip: Why “deliberate practice” could be the key to your success.

Welcome to my coaching tip on why “deliberate practice” could be the key to your success.

When I trained to be a life coach back in 2007, I flew to Phoenix with 13 other wannabe coaches, gathered in a hotel suite where Martha taught us everything she knew - in 4 days. It was the fire hose method of learning and as excited and inspired as I was when I left 96 hours later, I felt tenuous about my abilities as a Coach. Because we were encouraged to practice, practice, practice when we returned home, and being the good student I am, I set out to procure clients. I sent out a friends and family letter and much to my delight and equal degree of horror, I had 4 clients just like that. One of them referred me to her two sisters and mother and within 2 months of completing my training, I had 7 clients.

As the months flew by, I continued to rack up my coaching hours, coaching my clients, people getting manicures alongside me, waiters, friends and basically anyone who had a pulse. Although I'd love to say that my coaching went swimmingly well, the truth is I was in a constant state of overwhelm and was burning out fast. I often wondered “Is this how coaching is supposed to go? I'm not sure I'm doing this right. I wish someone could tell me what I'm doing wrong or in what ways I could do things better.” I felt completely lost. I couldn't tell the difference between a thought and a feeling if a neon sticky was posted to my forehead. I found myself applying The Work to my client's feelings vs. their beliefs and would frequently chew on why some of my sessions went south while others soared. I was also inadvertently contributing to my client's story fondling, which my coach mentor pointed out to me later, by encouraging them to “say more” or worse, letting them go on and on and on until I lost control of the session. I asked leading questions, I coached with a motive, aka my ego, and unconsciously held my clients hostage for my feeling state – “if they felt better, then I got to feel better. And if they failed to have an “aha” moment, I ruminated for days over what I could have done differently

while simultaneously beating myself up for not doing a better job. To compensate for my self-perceived shortcomings, I sent my client's long follow-up emails, bringing to their attention what I didn't say, ask or do when I was coaching them live. My drive to prove I was good enough caused me to spend hours crafting the perfect email so they wouldn't discover the truth – that I was a fraud. I was EXHAUSTED. This is so NOT FUN! Can you relate?

I was coaching in all the wrong ways. I was practicing mindless coaching.

The concept is called Mindless practicing which means engaging in mere repetition (repeating the same things over and over) or practicing on auto pilot (same tennis serve, same piece on the piano, reciting a speech and presenting it) or doing something until we hear something we don't like or until we get stuck, which can lead to undesirable tendencies like teaching, coaching with an agenda, cheerleading or giving our clients advice. We don't productively learn from this method. In fact, it's a sure fire way to chip away at the confidence we desperately desire because we are, in essence, unconsciously cultivating and reinforcing poor coaching habits. It's also a complete drag. Unfortunately, it's what we're most familiar with.

Steven Kerr, learning officer at Goldman Sachs says:

“Practicing without feedback is like bowling through a curtain that hangs down to knee level. You can work on technique all you like, but if you can't see the effects, two things will happen: You won't get any better, and you'll stop caring.” Which brings me to deliberate practice. According to Psychologist Dr. Ericsson, deliberate practice, is usually slow and involves repetition of small and very specific sections of a skill rather than playing through which is far more productive than mindless practice. It's a systematic and highly structured activity. Instead of mindless trial and error, we identify and seek out the painful, difficult parts that will make us better and do it over and over again. We look and see what still isn't right or have someone tell us and repeat the difficult parts until it's fully integrated or until we pass out. In short, “deliberate practice” is focused on making progress and analyzing what went wrong or what could be better so you can produce different results the next time.

Bottom line??

No one is a natural born tennis player, violinist, heart surgeon, Olympic skier or in this case a stellar life coach. Great coaching is the result of deliberate practice. I did not wake up one day knowing how to coach and neither did Martha or any of the other coaches you have learned from and admire. Being masterful at one's craft is not the result of your inherent abilities, IQ or your experience. AND, it's not about

working harder, putting in as many coaching hours as possible; it's about working smarter.

“Being masterful is about seeking out opportunities that expose your weaknesses, things you're not good at, and learning to do them better.”

It's about being willing to suck at something so you can get better faster and sticking with yourself long enough to transcend your self-limiting beliefs. It's also about supporting and investing in yourself by getting the developmental feedback you need in order to be the highest vision you see for yourself as a coach.

I'm not going to lie to you. This type of practice is hard. It requires grit, focus, concentration and a willingness to tolerate discomfort - just like when a toddler learns to take his/her first steps. But like anything else you've conquered, it's an amazing feeling when you coach beyond the limits you thought you'd never get past.

If you are serious about improving your coaching abilities, cultivating your confidence and building your competence, here are three things you can do right now to integrate deliberate practice into your coaching:

1. Play Monday morning quarterback. Just like football teams review video of their Sunday games the following day, analyzing what they did well, and what went wrong or what they need to improve, record your coaching sessions (with your client's permission of course) and listen to yourself coach. It's extraordinarily easy and you can learn a ton about yourself.
2. Barter. Find a coaching buddy. Each of you records a coaching session with a client. Listen to your buddy's session and vice versa, then hop on the phone and exchange honest and constructive feedback.
3. Find an experienced coach mentor who will listen to you coach and give you feedback on both your strengths and areas for improvement. My coach mentor listened to 10 hours of me coaching various clients and it made a significant difference in my growth and evolution. Good mentors help you with tool selection, best thoughts to work, and trouble-shooting challenging clients or coaching issues.

Remember, it's not about being good enough, you are...it's about making progress.

And, if you're interested in a coaching critique, you can check out my package at www.jackiegartman.com under Coach Mentoring.

I hope you enjoyed my coaching tip of the week!