

Saboteur

As clients step forward to change their lives, an inner alarm goes off. Homeostasis — or the tendency to maintain the system — is a strong, universal force and your clients' plans to make changes in their lives will certainly tilt the well-oiled machine. All of us have a self-sabotaging inner voice — or voices! — that hold us back. Preserving the status quo is part of this Saboteur's job. So, it's no wonder that when clients contemplate moving forward in a big way, it wakes up the Saboteurs. The bigger the dream, the more hefty the Saboteurs become that you will be wrestling with.

Sometimes called the "Inner Critic," "Negative Self Talk" or the "Committee," the Saboteur has all the reasons ready for why this plan (whatever your client has in mind) is a stupid, dangerous, hopeless or otherwise ill-advised course of action. The Saboteur is particularly adept at taking a small piece of the truth and fabricating it into the blanket reason for stopping, or never starting.

As a coach, you want to be alert to warning signs that your client's Saboteur may have taken control of the voice box. Often it's a sense of circling the issue, round and round and round. When the Saboteur is present, clients sound like they are building a case, or defending their decision. It is heady; there may be a flatness, a smoky, foggy feeling of being lost in a haze of arguments. When things seem unnecessarily complicated, it is often the Saboteur weaving ankle snares to trap the client in a web of confusion. If you notice yourself battling with the client, check to see if you are actually battling with the client's Saboteur. Above all, when the Saboteur is speaking, you will notice a dissonance that is the very antithesis of the resonance associated with experiencing a value.

For coaches, there are two general approaches for working with the Saboteur once you've identified its presence in your client's conversation. (However useful these tools may be, please remember that the foundation of successful coaching lies in making sure that you are interacting with your powerful client and NOT with the Saboteur. Your client is ALWAYS stronger, smarter, and more resourceful than his or her Saboteur.)

1. Presence the Saboteur more fully by asking your client to personify it. Who is speaking here? What is this voice saying? How would you describe this voice? The client can even describe the Saboteur's appearance, character, personality, and agenda — casting all the aspersions he desires. Once it becomes really clear that the client and the Saboteur are NOT one and the same, have the client choose who's going to be boss here. And yes, coach, on this one you get to have a vote!
2. Defuse or bypass the Saboteur by orienting the client toward his or her Captain and Crew, values, and/or Life Purpose — all of which have a stronger pull on the client than the Saboteur does.

- Look for that small piece of what is true about what is being said and acknowledge it as one of a myriad of factors; don't let it kill the whole idea.
- Look for the positive intent buried in the client's Saboteur voices. At some level, the Saboteur's job is to keep your client from doing something perceived to be dangerous or unwise. What is the risky part in this move? Bring that to the light of day without all the drama.
- Point clients to their values. When clients stand in the place of what they deeply value they are resolved, grounded. There is a radiance in this place, a light that is too bright for the Saboteur.
- Enlist the strength of the client's Captain and Crew. They clearly see the separation between the true self and the Saboteur's story.
- And you can always ask the client, "What is the REAL truth here, not the Saboteur's version?" Clients do know; when they check inside for the truth they almost always find that it's right there.