

Co-Active® Coaching Skills: Self Management

Co-Active Coaching is built on the premise that clients have the answers and that the coach's job is to hold the client's agenda. In fact, in the coaching model, the coach is virtually invisible — and yet, completely *present*. In order to achieve both requires the context of self-management. It means managing your own “stuff” in lots of different ways.

For starters, it means believing — *really* believing — that your clients *do* have their own answers. There is a temptation to be the expert or the problem solver, especially when your client seems stuck or floundering. They may even *want* you to give them the solution — and thereby become dependent on you for their results rather than learn how resourceful they can be. So self-management starts with holding back your advice and opinions. It means leaving out your personal experience and your own story of the way you've dealt with similar issues. The self-management mandate is especially important in the beginning as you learn to trust and see that clients are ultimately creative and have great, often unexpected answers of their own that they are more likely to own than prescriptions from others.

Eventually you will find that there are times when it is appropriate to share valuable experience or expertise and that the best way to do that in a Co-active Coaching relationship is to ask permission first, and to be clear that you are changing from your coaching hat to your consultant or mentor hat. Self-management also means managing your own Saboteur. As you develop your skills as a coach you are likely to notice when your performance is subpar which will be a natural opening for your Saboteur to butt in with comments like, “That was a stupid question.” Or “I’m totally lost here.” Or “Whatever made me think I could do this.” And so on.

Unfortunately while you are carrying on an internal conversation with your Saboteur, you are no longer in conversation with your client, so self-management is about noticing the Saboteur and then as quickly as possible, returning to the client. Remember to be gentle with yourself. Collapsing into Level 1 happens. It happens when the coaching appears to be going badly; it happens when the coaching is going brilliantly too and you stop to notice that — once again you disconnect from your client while you bask in your self-enjoyment.

There will also be times when simply interacting with clients will be a challenge — when circumstances in your own life threaten to consume all of your attention: you've just had a fight with your spouse, you find out you are being audited about taxes you owe, you learn that your aging parent's health has taken a sudden turn for the worse. Self-management means leaving your own stuff outside so you can be totally present to your clients in spite of what might be going on in your own life. If you can't do that — don't coach. Let your client or clients know you can't be present; it's essential that you tell the truth because it preserves the trust of the relationship. Some coaches go through a grounding ritual of some kind each day, or before coaching calls. It can be especially valuable during challenging times to find a way to ground yourself or to re-ground yourself after a particularly difficult coaching session.