

Co-Active® Coaching Skills: Creating a Safe and Courageous Space

The space that is created for coaching needs to be safe. In this space, clients will be working on their very lives. It is likely to be a place where they face their Saboteurs and other snares; they may have to face dark corners. They will need to take risks in order to grow and make changes. As a coach, you can't promise that this space will be comfortable but you play an important role in making sure it is safe enough.

The space must also be filled with courage: the client's courage to step boldly into their lives — sometimes when they're not all that sure what it is they're stepping into — and the coach's courage on the client's behalf: believing that the client is capable, strong, and enough. The championing that the coach provides is like armor for meeting dragons.

There are a number of attributes that help ensure that the space of coaching is safe and courageous. One of these is confidentiality. Clients need to know that what is said in their coaching calls will be held confidential. It is essential to the trust that is necessary in order for clients to open up their lives to coaching. This fundamental ground rule of confidentiality needs to be present and promised very early in the relationship — certainly, during the discovery session. In this discovery session, some coaches stress both the confidentiality of the relationship and the rare circumstances under which they would be compelled to break that confidentiality: if the coach believed that to withhold information might lead to harm to the client or to others, for example.

Telling the truth is another of those fundamental ground rules of coaching; it is essential to building trust and building a relationship strong enough to do the necessary life changing work. Clients expect the coach to speak the truth and not hold back. Coaches model truth telling as the means for growth. On the contrary, faking it, stepping over issues, playing “nice” when it's time to tell the hard truth — none of those strategies will serve the client in the long term.

There is a spaciousness that develops out of the trust that is created under these conditions. It is a safe and courageous space for clients to do what they need to do and be who they need to be, and a place of spacious acceptance for who they are in their lives, today, wherever that is. In an interesting way, it is the coach who sometimes expects more from the client than the client dares expect of themselves, because the coach sees the brilliance and possibility and holds on to that, while the client is small. And yet, the coach also accepts the client exactly where they are, even when they are failing or playing small. It is a bit of paradox and it is the spaciousness of coaching.