

What We Can't Be With Runs Our Lives

Here's how it usually happens. You, as coach, recognize that there is something blocking the client's progress. You may not have a clue what it is, but you sense there is an obstruction in the flow or turbulence in the river of the client's life. You get curious about this underwater obstruction. Sometimes clients get curious too, or they know what it is from past experience. Sometimes clients want to avoid the whole exploration; they would much rather talk about the treasure they are paddling for down the river. Clients are human beings and human beings often resist going down into the dark, fearful of what monsters they might find. They often resist going into the light too. They want to stay where it is familiar (no matter how turbulent) or where it is safe or comfortable. They resist going there — even when they know intellectually that going to a new, better place in life means going through something they would rather avoid. So they resist, and it doesn't go away. You've probably heard the line, and it seems so true, "what we resist persists." The more it is avoided, the bigger and more persistent it grows. Eventually it starts to run our lives.

For example, most of us would prefer not to disappoint others. If your client is avoiding disappointing others at all costs, guess who is paying all the costs? When they decide they'll do anything to avoid disappointing others they cut themselves off from what might be possible if they took the risk or moved forward anyway and dealt with the consequences. Some folks avoid standing in the spotlight, even when they've earned the right and deserve the recognition; it's not "appreciation" they feel when they stand in the spotlight, it's "exposed" and "vulnerable"... it's a hot seat, not a victory stand. So they avoid doing things that would bring them attention or even success. They live in their own shadow, and thereby cut themselves off from all that would be possible by taking a risk, by standing in the light. If they can't be with disappointment or success, they cut themselves off from that much life, and the maneuvering room gets smaller and more difficult to negotiate. There are big boulders in the road, and "disappointing others" is just one of the many things they might avoid.

How about anger? Can't have that in my life; avoid any situation that might lead to anger! Intimacy? Too risky; take the detour here. Or confrontation? Back up, turn around, find a way around that or see the faintest warning sign in the distance and lie low.

Most of the time clients are unconscious of the boulders. Their focus is on getting around or getting by. They are not aware that they are stalled at the foot of a boulder called "Disappointing Others." They are unaware that they have been trying to drive around this thing. The boulder itself is running their life. Until they see it and deal with it, they won't be able to move forward on the path. The boulder controls the path.

Your job as coach is to have the vision to recognize this situation and point it out. Almost always when clients recognize what they've been struggling to avoid, they will agree to go into it, maybe reluctantly, knowing that to get to the other side sometimes means traveling through the hard stuff.