

Lesson 4

Attending Skills

After you have established a foundation of presence with your client, you build rapport by employing *attending skills*. Attending skills are behaviors that demonstrate to your client that you are giving her your full attention.

Here are some basic attending skills you can practice, not just with coaching clients, but with everyone:

Eye contact:

When you look someone in the eye, you demonstrate your presence, interest, and sincerity. When someone avoids eye contact, they are avoiding the truth. They may be lying about something, feeling unworthy, or attempting to sidestep the issue at hand.

When you maintain steady gentle eye contact, you invite your client to step into connection and truth. You are saying, in effect, “You are important. Let’s shine the light of awareness on you, your life, and the issues you wish to get clear on and master.”

Many people are uncomfortable with eye contact and avoid making it because they have developed habits of not facing themselves or their issues. When you seek to establish eye contact with your client, they may not return it. Yet if you stay with the process and the client moves toward more honesty and authenticity, they will return your eye contact naturally and easily.

Eye contact should be steady but gentle. If you are too intense with it, your client may feel intimidated. Find the “sweet spot” in which you are offering consistent eye contact, but do not make it overwhelming.

If you are coaching over the telephone, you cannot practice eye contact. But if you imagine looking your client in the eyes, you can create a similar energy and result.

Body Posture:

Your body language speaks far more than your words. The greater part of communication is non-verbal, so communicate support, interest, and attention with your body. Sit up straight and lean in to your client when you want to make a point. Do not cross your arms or legs, for such behaviors represent resistance or blocking. Choose a chair that is comfortable but does not cause you to sink away from the client, or slouch. Nod when you feel you understand a statement your client has just made, and when you want to reinforce your client for speaking a truth or taking a risk. You will not be able to demonstrate these behaviors over the telephone, but if you do them anyway, you will energetically send important signals to yourself and your client.

Short Affirmative Responses:

Support your client by offering short affirmative responses. Brief phrases such as “yes,”; “I see”; “I got it”; “sure”; “understood”; “that’s great”; or any other affirmative statement will encourage your client to keep speaking his truth and move toward clarity. As coach, you are like a cheerleader egging the client to keep running with the ball. Pace your affirmative statements so the client is not distracted, and be sure your words are sincere when you offer them.

Touch:

Touch can be a touchy subject! Tune in to decide if and what touch may be appropriate during your session. In general keep enough distance so your client feels safe and has space. As your coaching relationship develops, a brief reassuring touch may cement your contact and support a client at a crucial moment. A longer touch or a hug at the end of the session may sometimes be appropriate. Always respect personal and professional boundaries and never touch a client in a way that may seem invasive. Reserve touch for important moments of reinforcement, and tune in to whether or not your client is interested in touch. Never touch for your own purposes. Do it only if it helps the client.

Be Distraction Free:

Do not use your computer while coaching on the telephone. Do not check your email or surf the Internet. I don’t recommend taking notes on a computer during a session, as

the sound of typing can be distracting, along with the various chimes the computer makes. If you must take notes, do it with pen and paper.

Do not have a television or radio playing in the background. Do not eat. Do not play music during your session, unless part of the session includes a guided meditation or process that will be enhanced by music.

Do not interrupt your coaching call by taking calls coming in on call waiting. If possible, disable the call waiting feature before the call. Put your cell phone on silent mode, and do not answer it while you are coaching on a land line. Do not use a cell phone for coaching, and ask your clients to use a land line rather than a cell phone for your coaching calls. Cell phones often have interference or background noise, and nothing is more frustrating than hearing only every third word in a coaching call or the call dropping. All of these practices will honor you and your client, and ensure positive results of your coaching.

Exercise:

- 1.** Practice eye contact with everyone you meet over the next few days. This will be a fun and rewarding adventure. Apply the skill to everyone, including the checkout clerk at the supermarket. When you practice with your family members, you may be surprised at how little eye contact you have become accustomed to sharing, and how much more connected you feel when you offer it.
- 2.** Notice what your body posture is saying at various moments in your conversations. If you discover that your body posture is sending signals of resistance or less-than-full presence, correct your posture so you empower yourself and your listener.
- 3.** Tune in to what touch may be appropriate to support people with whom you are communicating as a way to indicate your presence and support.

4. Practice “cheerleading” with short affirmative phrases.
5. Become aware of any distractions you may have in your environment, or ways you are not fully present with people. Practice giving your full attention even in situations unrelated to coaching, i.e. do not do emails or surf the Internet while speaking to someone on the telephone. Build your coaching attending skills with everyone you connect with.

Affirm:

**My words, body, and expressions communicate
care, support, and presence to my clients.
I set the tone for powerful progress in coaching,
and my clients progress because they know I am with them.**

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