

Lesson 20

Content and Process

There are two elements of a productive coaching session: **Content**, the logistical, action-related aspects in service of a client's goals or intentions; and **Process**, the feelings, energies, and internal experience through which the client moves to achieve her goals. Both are important, and must be addressed in appropriate balance in order for the client to master what she wishes.

If you focus on content alone, you will but skim the surface of how results are manifested, and probably not see much progress. This is so because the client's external situation is an expression, or outpicturing, of his consciousness. If the client's consciousness does not shift, he may perform all kinds of actions, even proper ones, and the results will remain the same.

Some trainings and forms of coaching focus on logistics only. While they satisfy the thinking minds of coach and client, such methods rarely create satisfying results because they overlook the fact that the client must grow in awareness before outer results can shift. When thoughts and feelings change, everything changes. If everything changes but thoughts and feelings, external changes do not come, and if they do, they are not deep or lasting. Yet one moment of shifted awareness can make a huge difference in results.

Other trainings and forms of coaching focus almost exclusively on feelings and process. While this is helpful and has more power to create shift than focusing only on logistics, it's possible to become so absorbed in self-analysis that you overlook action or results. Many people who are process oriented simply go in circles because they do not get grounded and take action toward their goals.

An ideal coaching session addresses both process and content. The dynamics run something like this:

1. The client presents a logistical situation, such as “My job is not paying me enough” or “My husband is spending too much time at work and not enough with me and the kids.”
2. The coach acknowledges that she has heard the client’s concern, understands it, and demonstrates empathy.
3. The coach suggests that we look at what feelings, thoughts or beliefs might be fueling the situation.
4. The coach helps the client explore and recognize any limiting beliefs, fears, resistance, or counterproductive dynamics behind the client’s approach to the situation, and encourages the client to explore how she might see this situation from a perspective of greater ease, trust, self-honoring, vision, and/or forgiveness.
5. The client experiences a shift in awareness in the form of deepened acceptance of self or others, release, relief, or awareness of broader options.
6. The coach assists the client to formulate action steps to put this new awareness into practice.

While this formula is general and the steps do not always occur so simply or in this precise order, these are the elements of a productive coaching session. If you review them, you will notice that some are about action and some are about awareness. If you can help your client uplevel her awareness, the action steps will flow naturally, suggested by the client herself, or by joint formulation with the coach.

Tangible results are important. Feelings, experience, and internal dynamics are important. Holistic coaching takes into account all levels of a client’s experience and uses them to help the client progress.

Here are some sample process questions you might ask your client:

“What is your strongest feeling about this?”

“What do you think might be going on inside you that has drawn this situation to you or is keeping it in force?”

“Do you notice a pattern between this situation and [your past relationships] [your last job] [the way you deal with authority figures]?”

Here are some sample content or logistical questions you might ask your client:

“What would be the next step you could take to move toward getting this done?”

“What would be a doable target date to get this handled?”

“How do you think [name of client's role model or expert] might approach this?”

Exercise:

1. Note a situation presented by one of your clients:

2. Describe the content level of the situation:

3. What is the process (feelings, beliefs, attitude, expectation) behind the content that has attracted this situation or is fueling it?

4. What ideal results would your client like to attain?

5. How might you help your client become more aware of the process so he or she could experience a shift in the content?

6. What action steps might your client take toward achieving the goal?

7. Do you personally tend to be more content oriented or more process oriented?

8. How might you improve your coaching skills (and life) by bringing your own content and process more into balance?

9. In your own words, how would you explain the difference between content and process, and the importance of balancing and integrating them in coaching and in life?

Affirm:

**I use my awareness of my feelings
as well as action steps to achieve my goals.**

I help my clients balance content and process to achieve their goals.