5 Executive Coaching tips for presence

Top Tips

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‘The Essential Ingredient In Effective Coaching’

“Poirot” I said. “I have been thinking.”

“An admirable exercise my friend. Continue it”.

I’m passionate about helping people develop so when I was asked to be an executive coach for the bank, I grasped the opportunity! I have worked as a coach for a number of years now and I’m fortunate to have seen first-hand the positive impact this has on an individual, team and organisation. I don’t underestimate this responsibility and if I were to provide a strap-line for anyone wishing to undertake this role, it would read “This is a great privilege. You are taking on the potential to help others bring about transformational change!”

I believe coaching is an art and standards need to remain high through continuous development and professional qualifications. As well as qualifications, there is a plethora of tools, models and psychological approaches available for the coach to ensure this happens. This insight continues to grow through global professional bodies and experts in the field. To attempt to apply all of this can be overwhelming for a coach at times! Furthermore, in my opinion, it is not always necessary.

I believe the essential ingredient in effective coaching is for the coach to be fully present and provide space for the client to think. This belief has developed and strengthened for me since I started coaching. Prior to this I had a vision of needing to be a “hard-nosed” coach and for coaching to be effective, each client had to receive every aspect of my coaching spectrum - from positive psychology to cognitive behavioural therapy!

What do I mean by the coach being present? It’s about the coach being engaged with the client – questioning and listening to what is being said – and more importantly, paying attention to what is not being said. It’s about providing space for a person to think and process their thoughts without outside influences or triggers. The client needs to feel heard by the coach in a non-judgmental way and the coach needs to help the client notice what is happening for them. Thinking is when the hard work occurs and it may and in most cases, should feel uncomfortable for the client. Why? Because thinking helps you reach conclusions and conclusions can sometimes be unpleasant! This is when the coach has to be confident to “hold that space” with the client. A person can consciously (or unconsciously) move away too quickly from uncomfortable or new feelings and not exploring these feelings with a coach, poses a risk of losing valuable learning.

Demands on leaders are ever increasing, meaning they have less time to focus and think about their development. Often a coaching session is one more appointment in a day of back to back meetings. With limited time, personal development with a coach should be viewed as an opportunity. Any leader would be astute to accept this and with space to think, the coaching will be meaningful, reigniting passion and drive into regular schedules.

From my experience of coaching and being coached, I now fully appreciate the power of another person being fully present for another. This in my view is the essential ingredient. In our day to day lives, how often do people really listen to one another? Coaches must not forget or underestimate the power of basic communication skills and listening to all

“Thinking is the hardest work there is, which is probably why so few engage in it”. Henry Ford

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their senses. When coaching is working, a coach is fully present in the moment and the client is thinking and feeling at a deep level. This is where both will hear, see and feel things that may never have been noticed before. This undoubtedly provides new insight, a different perspective and opportunity for transformational learning.

“A beautiful thing happens when we start paying attention to each other. It is by participating more in your relationship that you breathe life into it.” Steve Maraboli

The 5 Steps to ensure presence as a coach

The key to a successful and effective coach is that they are able to give their full, undivided attention to their coachee during their session. Failing to do so will not only lead to poor results, but can also make a coach appear disrespectful or disengaged with their coachee. Have a read of these five steps that will ensure that as a coach, you are entirely present when coaching:

1. Clear your mind before coaching.
   When you are coaching a colleague or team member you MUST be wholly present for your coachee. This can be a challenge, as in business and life in general; we are constantly processing multiple items and issues which can distract us from being wholly present for our coachee. You need to be able to control these distractions and to park them whilst coaching.

   Make a note of things that are on your mind or that may distract you from focusing on the coachee and put them to one side. If, on occasion, you find it difficult to remove these distractions; you may need to take some time out and create your headspace by going for a quick walk and changing your environment.

2. Be energised and focused.
   Prior to meeting the coachee ensure you spend a little time on an activity that will boost your energy, such as a walk or meditation. Hydrate to help your thinking. Make sure you are well prepared and ensure you have read your coachee’s notes, prep form or journal so that you are focused on the client’s agenda. Coaching is about the coachee and not you as the coach.
3.

**Turn up as you!**
The relationship between you and the coachee is paramount towards success of the coaching – a lack of relationship or connection will inevitably restrict or limit the openness and therefore value of the coaching session. Not all coaching relationships work; be confident that being you is enough to work with the coachee and provide effective coaching.

![Image of a person with exaggerated glasses and a serious expression](image)

4.

**Listen at the deepest level.**
Make the coachee the centre of your universe and use all your senses to listen and notice what is going on. Playback their body language and acknowledge their emotion. Make sure to share what you feel and your overall reflections of what is occurring.

Listening takes energy – make sure you are prepared and able to give this energy to your coachee.

![Image of a child sitting with their head down](image)

5.

**Embrace the silence.**
When you ask a question of your coachee resist the temptation to fill any silences or ask another question. The coachee needs space to process their thinking. It’s rare to have the experience of being listened to beyond a conversational level, so the meaningful answers may take time!
Linda Davis

Linda Davis is a senior leader in leadership and development and has worked in the financial services sector for 17 years. With extensive experience of creating and leading large internal and external teams and specialising in the design and execution of leadership solutions, transformational learning strategies and change programmes.

A qualified Executive Coach, NLP practitioner and teacher who is passionate about life-long learning and continuous improvement. Linda provides coaching to business leaders and voluntary coaching to graduate teachers on the Teach First programme.

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