

# Thriving Workplace

## Useful Assumptions for Coaches & Coaching

- 1 The goal of coaching is to be helpful by providing support in the form of “guided, systematic self-development”. Responsibility for the issues and for taking the opportunities they present for growth, lie with the client. Clients may not want that responsibility or may actively resist it but it is useful to regard it as resting with them anyway. They are solely responsible (as, it could be said of everyone) for generating all the causes of the effects they wish to experience in their lives.
- 2 There is no one best way or formula for achieving the goals of these activities, but constructive <sup>1</sup> approaches have a number of characteristics in common.
- 3 Whatever issues the client brings to coaching sessions, there is no one response, best way or formula with which to address them, although constructive approaches tend to have a number of characteristics in common.
- 4 Each individual client and each coaching session is unique. Expect the unexpected and the need for flexibility. You will encounter unpredictability, variability, diversity and difference in the person, the nature and content of the issues, in the process the client uses to present them, and in the processes (within your own, generic guidelines) you may need to follow to respond to them.
- 5 Sometimes, solutions to problems take a very long time to surface.
- 6 Some problems have no solutions; they are simply part of our human situation. They can be resisted, or embraced and lived with but they will persist in some form. We live in a world that is not perfectible.<sup>2</sup>
- 7 Much of the time, all that we need do with a challenge we face in our lives is learn the generic skills of being able to *sit with the pain and discomfort of not knowing*, long enough to learn whatever lessons it has for us, rather than choosing to freak out, spin out or lash out, and to miss the point of it. This notion contains three useful ideas:
  - i. Developing a capacity for equanimity, (the ability to sit calmly in the midst of a storm rather than trying to avoid it), can help us take a level-headed approach to challenges.
  - ii. Every crisis, problem, dilemma or other challenge we encounter in life contains the seeds of useful, timely and necessary learning: if we were not ready for the opportunity we would not experience it.
  - iii. If we develop generic tools to be filed under “*What to do when I don’t know what to do*”, we can apply them to help *contain* any personal dilemma or challenge. Their application will reduce stress and anxiety sufficiently for us to rise confidently to the challenge.

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<sup>1</sup> Here, “constructive” is used to mean *servicing to improve; helpful; practical; positive; productive*.

<sup>2</sup> “. . . A world that always presents us with a sense of something undone, something missing, something hurting, something irritating . . . If it’s not your lover, it’s your children; if it’s not your children, it’s your job; if it’s not your job, it’s growing old; if it’s not growing old, it’s getting sick . . . and the only consolation is embracing it.” [Leonard Cohen]

- 8 We have all we need to be happy and to deal with whatever issues we encounter. Deciding that we are not ready to deal with something is one of the tools we have at our disposal, although we can be assured that if we choose not to learn the lesson at the time it is presented, the issue will re-surface again in the same or a different form, at some other time.
- 9 The task is not to help rescue people or make anyone we support feel better. How clients respond to challenges and how they feel about themselves in relation to them, are choices they themselves make.
- 10 Although we can influence the quality of what our coaching offers, whether or not they enjoy or find it useful are also matters outside of our control. Try not to make one of the criteria of your success in this role, determination that they will.
- 11 Often all that is required to deal with problems is an opportunity to become more objective about and considered in our thinking about them, through *talking ideas into place*.
- 12 However, few people have routine and ready access to others capable of constructive listening within a methodical problem solving process.<sup>3</sup> (Your role requires that you possess at least the basics of these practices.) They usually experience these behaviours as much more helpful (eventually) than commonplace approaches involving advice-giving, distracting, humouring, quick-fixes and “*You think that’s bad . . . wait till you hear my problem . . .*”. Bear in mind though, that initially at least they may expect and prefer those approaches.
- 13 The presenting problem is seldom the real problem. Sometimes the client will know this and at other times they may be surprised to find it is the case.
- 14 We all have personality quirks, conditioned beliefs, thought and behaviour response patterns and at times we are likely to unawaresly project or displace these on to external events which we then call problems, believing that the problem and its solution lie “out there” rather than “in here”.
- 15 Being aware of our own tendencies to projection and displacement<sup>4</sup> contributes to the health of the client relationship. Beware of trying to “fix” ourselves by “fixing” the client.
- 16 All believing and knowing is partial, conditioned and perspectival. No-one has a monopoly on the truth, including this.
- 17 We have much to learn from those who seek our support. Nurture the relationship – it is important.
- 18 While we should not withhold information the client needs, there are risks associated with advice-giving in the sense of “suggesting a particular decision or course of action”. Giving advice can effectively block the expression of feeling or clarity about a problem’s underlying causes. For reasons the advice-giver may be unaware of, the advice may be inappropriate, incomplete or irrelevant. It may encourage irresponsibility, rather than self-responsibility. If the advice fails, the client may lose confidence in or blame the process.

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<sup>3</sup> For full information about these processes and practices, visit the range of guidelines and discussion paper within the Interpersonal Competence and Problem Solving sections of the Subscriber Library.

<sup>4</sup> Roughly, projection involves attributing one's own attitudes, feelings, suppositions or desires to others, sometimes as a naive or unconscious defense against anxiety or guilt. *Projection*: A psychological defence mechanism in which there is an unconscious shift of emotions, affect, or desires from the original object to a more acceptable or immediate substitute.