

1. The essence of coaching

An important part of the coaching process is that the coachee must become aware, in concrete terms, of the goals he or she is pursuing. Without a question or a goal, focused guidance becomes difficult. The coach has an important task here in emphasising the coachee's own responsibility and in clarifying together what the coachee actually wants. In doing so, the coach makes sure that the goals are meaningful to the coachee and fit in with his or her norms and values. If goals do not match what is important to the coachee, or if they entail negative consequences for the coachee, then the chances are fairly high that no investment will be made in those goals.

In addition, a good coach explores what has prevented the coachee from achieving their goal(s) so far. Only by identifying obstacles can you consider possible solutions for overcoming them and avoid them spoiling things again.

Finally, it is essential that the coach explores which knowledge, skills, resources and strategies the coachee thinks they need in order to achieve the goals that have been set. The coach guides the coachee in obtaining these. In doing so, the coach continually encourages the coachee's capacity for self-directed learning, so that the coachee learns to solve problems and issues themselves.

The coach's basic attitude in this process is always positive, supportive, genuinely interested and curious. The coach does not judge, because there are several ways of achieving results. All that counts is that the coachee benefits from the coach's support and that it helps him or her move forward.

Exercise 1.1

Setting positive goals. In the coaching process it is important to formulate positive goals, that is, goals that express what the coachee does want rather than what they no longer want.

Do the following exercise with a friend, family member or colleague

- Ask your partner to describe a problem they would like to see solved. Probe further into the problem: how long has the problem been going on? How did it arise? What is the cause of it? Why has the problem not been solved yet? And so on.
- Ask your partner to describe a problem they would like to see solved. Probe further into possible solutions and the end goal: how will you know you have achieved what you want? How will others be able to tell? What do you need in order to achieve this? Who or what could help you with that? What are the first

alternatives that come to mind for getting closer to your goal? What could you do? And so on.

- Discuss with your partner what the differences are between the problem focus and the solution focus, and write them down for yourself.

Exercise 1.2

Setting goals that fit in with the coachee's norms and values. Practise the following with a friend, family member or colleague:

- Ask your partner to describe a problem that he or she would like to see solved.
- Formulate a positive goal. Then ask your partner to visualise the desired outcome. It is important here to tell the coachee to see themselves and the situation as an onlooker, so that the result can be assessed objectively. Ask the coachee what they see, how it feels to see themselves like that, whether they are satisfied with the result and whether the result might have negative consequences for the coachee or for others. Ask the coachee whether what they see fits with their norms and values and with what matters to them. Then ask the coachee to 'experience' the desired outcome in their imagination, in the first person and in the here and now. Check with the coachee whether the experience is satisfying enough to be worth pursuing. Also check whether the result has any negative consequences. If it does, the coachee's goal must be adjusted.

Exercise 1.3

Being positive. A good coach regularly pays a compliment and points out to the client the things that are going well. Disapproval and negativity have no real place in a coaching conversation. A session always has a positive focus and emphasises what is good in a situation or in a person. Things are never 100% negative or 100% positive, and every form of behaviour is functional in a particular situation. Someone who gets angry with others quickly, for example, is often well able to indicate their boundaries clearly, and someone who often tells lies is creative.

Now relabel it yourself:

- A narcissistic person is....
- A superficial person is....
- A jealous person is....
- An indirect person is....
- An impatient person is....
- A distrustful person is....

For every kind of behaviour there is an appropriate situation and context. As a coach, you help the coachee to apply behaviour in the right situation. You also teach the coachee to be less hard on themselves and on others. If the coachee says: 'I'm just afraid it will go wrong' as a coach you could say, for example: 'The good thing about making 'mistakes' is that they are learning experiences you need in order to get where you want to be'. And at: 'My colleague does everything at her own pace; if I have to wait until she does it, it will never get finished!' as a coach you can say: 'Your colleague sounds like someone who doesn't let herself be rattled'.

Now try it yourself:

- 'He never keeps us informed or involves us in the decisions he makes!'
- 'I get so tired of those emails asking me for a progress update when I explained everything just a few days before'
- 'He always changes his mind just when we've got started...'

Looking at behaviour in a fresh and positive way can bring new possibilities to light and allow matters to be resolved in a more positive way.

Learn to give compliments: For one week, pay two people a compliment every day.

Exercise 1.4

Solutions versus problems (positive versus negative). Spend a whole day focusing on problems. In conversations, concentrate on what isn't going well, what is causing it, why it is so annoying and what it all entails and brings about. Then spend another day focusing on solutions. In conversations, concentrate on how things could possibly be done differently, what can be learned from earlier experiences, what the future situation should look like and what you have learned from it.