**CC\_S4E5**

Welcome to coach, to coach a podcast dedicated to showcasing the power of coaching. I'm your host, dr. Katie Linder, and I offer coaching to academics and higher education professionals to bring more ease to their lives and work. This season, I'm offering a slightly different format than earlier seasons.

I thought it might be useful to go over some coaching fundamentals for anyone listening, who hasn't gone through, coach training. I wanted to share some of the things that you can be listening for and each season that would be good examples of coaching structure, philosophy, and techniques. So for each of the episodes in the season, I'm going to offer solo episodes, talking about some coaching basics.

Feel free to email me with questions about these episodes or ideas of what you'd like to hear more about in future seasons. If I do this kind of format again now onto the episode.

In this episode, I'm going to talk about kind of a coaching mantra that I talk about a lot with my coach training participants. And that was really hammered into me and my own coach training. And that is to coach the client and not the problem. And this is kind of an interesting one because you know, when you come to coaching, you kind of expect that you will be doing potentially some problem solving.

Maybe you're going to try to instill a new habit or routine, or you're trying to make a decision about something. There are lots of issues that you might bring to coaching that you're hoping to gain clarity on or make progress on or move forward. But one of the things that we really pay attention to in coaching is.

The client and kind of what is the state of the client at any given time and what is the next best question that we can ask the client to move them forward in their stated goals and the agenda that we have. And sometimes when we get to kind of hung up on the problem that the client has brought to us, it actually kind of removes the coach from, um, the, the kind of close attention that they should be giving to the client themselves.

So, let me give some examples of kind of what this can look like, where it can be kind of problematic. So I've talked in a previous episode this season about the concept of powerful questions and one of the things that can happen when you're coaching the problem instead of the client is you kind of stop asking more powerful questions and you start asking more informational questions and you feel like you need to know the context of the situation, right?

And you're asking questions that basically the client already knows the answer to. And often with powerful questions. It's a question that you're asking them. The client doesn't know the answer to there. They're having to reflect. They're having to think about the answer to that question. They're having to really kind of pause and oftentimes you'll hear a client say, Oh, that's a really good question.

And then they kind of sit with it for a minute. Whereas, if you're asking informational questions, um, it might be that the client knows exactly what the answer is already to those questions. And, and you asking those questions is really more for you to understand the context as a coach, then for the client to better understand their situation.

So when you start to kind of shift an informational questions, it can be a sign that you're starting to coach the problem and not the client, because you're paying more attention to the context of the situation than to the client themselves and kind of what they're bringing to that conversation. The other thing that I tend to see when a coach is focusing on the problem and not the client, is that they can kind of lose sight of the agenda and, um, kind of the overall goal of what they're trying to do.

Um, and part of this just gets into like our own problem solving modes. Many of us come to coaching. Because we are natural problem solvers, or we are natural fixers, you know, in our day to day life where we're trying to kind of solve problems and help people in various ways. Um, and sometimes what this can result in is you start to give suggestions.

You start to really just focus on, well, what if we tried this? Or what if we tried that? And it turns into kind of throwing things at the wall to see if they're going to. Rather than kind of a deeper exploration of the client's reactions to questions and a more depth of what their experience has been in a particular situation.

So it turns into a situation where you're just very focused on the problem itself and you just lose sight of the client. Um, and, and that's like the biggest issue I think with it is really our goal as coaches is to be with the client and kind of as close to the client situation as we can be so that we can help them to figure out next steps.

Help to ask the right questions for them to get clarity and really just hold space for them to come to a better understanding of their current situation. And when we're focusing on the problem, even if that's something that the client seems to want and they want kind of advice about how to move forward, we're not really encouraging the client to go deeper or into themselves and gain confidence about how they want to move forward.

Yeah. We're just giving kind of a quick fix of, well, what if we tried this? Or what if we tried that? And often at times it's more powerful. If a client comes to that solution on their own, you know, through the facilitation of questions versus being told a particular solution by the coach, and then they just kind of accept that solution and move on.

Right. And you can see how that would cause maybe not as much confidence in the client because they were given that right by someone else. So this is something that, um, then people who are just learning, how to coach really need to kind of reign this part of themselves in where we're not offering suggestions.

We're not really trying to just give solutions to problems, even if a client describes something. Right. And we think we know what the solution is to that problem. Um, we need to be careful that we're not just offering that. Um, and that we're, we're actually kind of creating more of a, an inquiry model where the client can explore a lot of different options and, and kind of decide which direction to go.

Now the other piece of that is oftentimes when you have a situation where you're getting into offering advice to a client, it can be a little bit of a slippery slope because that's really not what we're supposed to be doing as coaches. And, um, sometimes clients we'll see that as a more efficient way of interacting with you.

Um, and so it, if we start to do that, they will start to ask for it. So we need to be kind of careful about. Setting the parameters and boundaries of the coaching relationship. So that clients kind of understand the role of the coach in helping them to come to clarity. So the other thing that I would say is really sacrificed when you coach the problem and not the client is you really lose the chance to see things that could be under the surface.

So especially in situations where you start to propose solutions and you're, you're kind of actively trying to say, well, what about this? What about that? And you're kind of troubleshooting and doing pros and cons of different options. Um, you. You lose the chance. I think, to kind of go to a deeper level where the client might actually have solutions to something that you would not have considered.

And that this is just because you're not in their shoes completely. They're going to have creative solutions that might be based on information that you don't know, context that you don't know. And it's really coming from their own kind of internal sense of what they need to do to move forward. And when you start to get into kind of just a brainstorming solutions oriented mode, sometimes you sacrifice depth for more of a surface level exploration of how to solve something.

And to be clear, you know, coaching is about helping clients to solve problems. It's not as if we don't get to solutions through the coaching methodology and the tools and the questions, right. But it's often, um, a more powerful way to get to those solutions when it's really client led. And when you're working with tools and questions that are very focused on the client and their needs standing of themselves and the world around them.

So really, you know, when you think about coach the client, not the problem, it's kind of a lesson in trusting the process of coaching. And if you've gone through coaching before, or maybe if you've listened to the previous seasons of coach to coach, and you've kind of heard how people come around to different ideas, different ways of thinking mindset shifts, you know, through the process of coaching you'll I realize that there's a process that's happening and kind of unfolding that allows the client to increase their confidence in their own self awareness.

And that's one of the most important things. I think that coaching offers is that kind of increase in confidence that ability to have tools and methodologies for making decisions, for tying things like decisions and values together for better understanding, um, how you want to prioritize things or create routines or habits for yourself as you go through your life.

Um, there's so many components of coaching, right? That are strengthened when they come from the client and not from the coach. And this is a real, um, kind of difference between coaching and other things that I talked about earlier in the season, like mentoring or advising or consulting, where that really is your job to give.

Your expert opinion on how someone should move forward. And in the, um, coaching process, the client is always the expert and we have to trust them to know the information. So if you ever find yourself as a coach thinking, I know better than the client in this situation, um, that's not good. That that usually means you're coaching the problem and not the client.

The other thing that this can be really lead to is you as a coach will have your own agenda. And this is one of the things that you really want to watch out for when you're starting to coach people, is that you come in and you are following the agenda that you have kind of co-developed with the client.

And you're not in a situation where you are coming in with your own ideas of the direction that they should go. You're you're listening to the client and you're using their responses to decide next year. And one of the challenges. Of coaching the problem and not the client is you end up having your own agenda and you start to think, you know, what the solutions are.

Um, and yeah, you need to be careful that you're not letting that guide your questions because then you're not really listening to the client anymore. You're, you're kind of off on your own sense of how things should go. Now, this is a very challenging thing to do to coach the client. Not the problem. It takes a lot of practice because oftentimes in our day to day lives, we, we do a lot, like I said, we do a lot of problem solving.

We do a lot of fixing and so this can feel very natural to give opinions, to be experts. And especially for folks coming out of higher education. Oftentimes, this is kind of our, um, our currency, our cultural capital is that we have like expert opinions on things. And part of the culture of higher education is being an expert and, um, sharing that expertise in different ways.

And so that's just an area of coaching that is really a shift for a lot of people who are coming out of higher education is that we're not thinking about expertise in the same way, and it's a lot more facilitative of what the client's expertise is and what their kind of. Um, self knowledge and self awareness is that they can bring to a particular situation.

So that's a little bit about coaching the client and not the problem and how to trust the process of coaching. I'll see you in the next episode. Thanks for listening to this episode of coach to coach for any resources mentioned in the episode, check out the episode. Show notes at dr. Katie linder.com/coach.

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