

Handling objections



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Why coaching training can be a waste of time, effort and money.

Introduction

As coaches we are often working in very sensitive areas. Some clients are very happy that their need is being addressed, until it actually happens. Then sensitivities are uncovered, values and beliefs may be challenged, their ability to trust is stretched, the action they are required to take frightens them. 'What will other people think?' 'Is this really what I want to do?' These things sometimes come out of the blue. The open, friendly, balanced client suddenly isn't. They object to something, and you, the coach, have to handle it. If you don't do it well, the relationship – and consequently your ability to coach the person – founders. This module looks at some techniques you can use as a coach to handle the client's objections.

You may already be saying, 'I don't need this; the way I handle my clients, objections just don't

happen.' Well, perhaps, just perhaps, one day they might.

The technique to use

The particular technique you use may depend on the situation, the personality of the client and your preferences. You will resonate with some techniques more than with others. We have outlined a number of approaches for you to try. We suggest you explore the techniques, and note those that you already use and others you feel comfortable with. Then think back to objections you have faced and consider which techniques could be effective in those situations.

Some techniques rely on the use and structure of language; others require examples.

Pre-empting objections

You know your client. You will

have thought through the best way for them to gain the skills and experience required for them to meet their goals. It follows that you will have a fair idea of what they may object to. That being the case, you can work through a 'what if' analysis as part of your preparation. Think about any highly likely objections and raise them with the client.

Key learning points

- ◆ Techniques for pre-empting objections.
- ◆ Response process – general technique for handling objections.
- ◆ Putting the objection in context – when to look at the bigger picture and when to focus on the specifics.
- ◆ Other techniques and examples.
- ◆ A word of warning.

Humour

Objections can be frustrating and annoying, and it is easy for these emotions to leak. By reframing the situation with gentle humour, you control your emotions and ease the embarrassment and discomfort often felt by the client who is objecting. This dispelling of negative emotion can enable a balanced reconsideration of the objection in an objective way.

Defuse the tension of an objection with gentle humour, maybe by feigning shock or otherwise poking fun at yourself.

Be very careful about making the client the object of humour. It can be done, but you need to be sure first that they will not be offended.

Examples

- *Oh no! What on earth will we do! (Smiling.)*
- *Oh dear, I'm in trouble now. I'll have to stand in the corner. (Looking down, shaking head with puzzled expression.)*

Justification

Sometimes, when clients object, they are saying that what you are suggesting is somehow unreasonable or inappropriate. If you can demonstrate that it is reasonable or appropriate, then they no longer have a reason to object.

Never disagree; justify why it is reasonable. Tell them how you have made your recommendation for a particular reason. Tell them how the proposal is ideal for them and what they want to achieve. If the objection is about something specific within the proposal, use one of the other techniques.

Examples

- *Yes, this is difficult, even though it makes use of the skills you already have*
- *I know this is a new approach, and it will give you the opportunity to have contact with the senior managers.*

Note: do not use the word 'but' when responding to an objection. The word 'but' in a response indicates a disagreement and can trigger a moving apart.

Shift priorities

Clients use their own criteria to evaluate situations. They may become fixated on one criterion to the exclusion of others, and this may be the basis of the objection. If you can change the criteria, change the weights or remind the other person of forgotten criteria, then you can get them to shift priorities and with that diminish the objection.

- Explore the criteria they are using to decide. Probe to find how important each criterion is.
- Appeal to their values, from which priorities stem.
- Reframe their arguments so they naturally change priority.

Further reading

TA Harris, *I'm OK You're OK*, Arrow, 1995.
 Barry Johnson and Mandy Geal, 'It's Good to Listen', *Train the Trainer*, Issue 20, 2005.
 Barry Johnson and Mandy Geal, 'Behavioural Analysis in Training', *Train the Trainer*, Issue 23, 2005.

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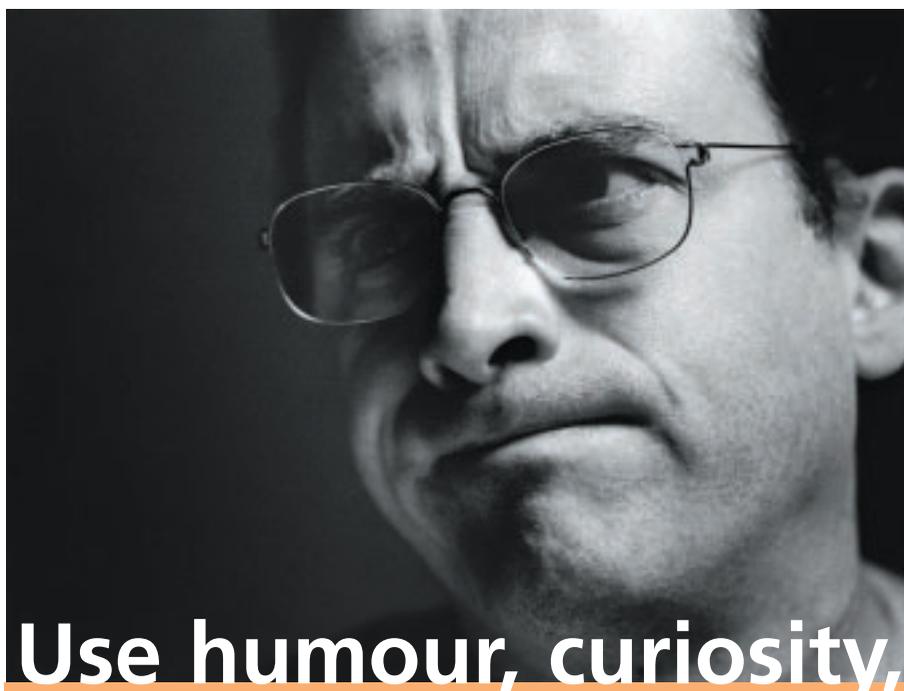
- At the same time, or alternatively, increase other priorities that will lead them to move towards a required solution.

Examples

- *I understand your loyalty to your colleagues. Perhaps you should also consider your loyalty to your family. (Constant value loyalty. Priority shift: colleagues to family.)*
- *You are right. Integrity is vital, but it is more than just doing what you said you would do. Should you also consider the downside for others? (Notice how 'but' is used here to shift the emphasis from an absolute to be more inclusive of the second sentence.)*

Conclusion

We have put together for you a range of objection-handling techniques. You have a duty to your clients to help them achieve their goals. Some of the techniques done well can be very powerful and may seem like manipulation. Well, they are if you think they are. So beware when using these powerful techniques that you are not handling the objections to achieve your ends.



Use humour, curiosity, deflection – but make your response appropriate

- Make the objection seem rather weak and the handling of it rather strong, so that it cannot be brought up without the client appearing not to have listened.
- It is sometimes useful to outline the objection and ask the client what they think the solution is. In doing this, the client squashes the objection.
- It is also useful to tell a story about other people who objected and then looked foolish.

Examples

- *Some people find doing this difficult because it exposes them to the scrutiny of their peers. How would you guide them through it?*
- *I had a client who thought working through this process was demeaning, so she didn't do it. When it came to the crunch at the conference, her confidence deserted her and she 'dried up'. Her colleagues had to take over.*

Response process

Let's consider the general process of handling an objection. Clients always have a reason for objecting, so it is often useful to work through the objection, taking the client with you by staying on their agenda.

Listen – Listen empathetically, enter into the client's emotions, 'walk in their shoes'.

Understand – Seek clarification, paraphrase and summarise. The purpose is to ensure that you fully understand the objection, that the client understands that you understand the objection, and – most important – that the client understands the objection that they have made. Interestingly, when the client understands their own objection, it can diminish in importance or disappear altogether. Similarly, as the objection is clarified, it changes to be something that may be more manageable by the client.

Acknowledge – Clients have the right to object, so make it clear that you accept their right to object without accepting the objection.

Assess – Having listened, understood the objection and acknowledged the person, assess the situation. This may require seeking more information, seeking feelings, and seeking proposals. You should now be in a position to empathise with the client's objection and have a clear idea about a way forward.

Respond – Structure your response carefully, perhaps using one of the other objection-handling techniques below. Ensure you respond fully and

adequately to the objections given. Beware of introducing new issues or you may create more objections.

Confirm – Finally, check with the client that they have understood your response and that it addresses the concerns.

If the client still has the objection, repeat the loop. See if you have listened well enough in the first place. Check that you have assessed their situation correctly. Ensure that the response fully and adequately addresses their concerns.

Chunking

We can take a more general viewpoint of, or place a more detailed focus on, any need or situation.

Taking a different perspective on an objection has a dual effect: first, of reframing to create a different focus

and a new understanding, and, secondly, of distracting the client from their difficulty. Chunking up lets us see the bigger picture. With the bigger picture, specific problem issues seem smaller and less significant. So our worries about what Fred will think of us are small in comparison with actually handling the redundancy.

Examples

- *Let's look at the big picture. Why do you really want to achieve this?*
- *Let's think about the outcomes.*

Chunking down moves into the detail, giving specifics and addressing concerns. It helps people who have difficulty with the vagueness of concepts and gives them something concrete to hang on to. So the apparent size of the objection is reduced from, say, not making sufficient profit to improving Fred's performance.

Examples

- *That's interesting. What will be the first step?*
- *Tell me how you will do that ...*

Conditional exchange

The conditional exchange builds an agreement that if I solve your problem, you will take some specific action that will help you move towards your goal. When the other person offers an objection, make it a condition of resolving their objection that they take some specific action. The important principle within this is that both the action by the client and your trade with the client give the client something.

You can use this approach to make any trade – for example, if you want the client to answer a questionnaire, offer a cup of coffee. Always phrase the proposed

bargain in the form 'If I ... will you ...', rather than 'Will you ... if I ...' Our brains work very quickly, and starting with 'Will you ...' causes the client to think about objections and miss the exchange. On the other hand, starting with 'If I ...' will cause the client to think about what you are offering, shifting their train of thought and hearing the offer.

Examples

- *If I give you the main options, will you consider the one that best suits you?*
- *If I clear it with your boss, will you ...?*

Curiosity

The child in us is curious, seeks new things and is uninhibited. So when you say, 'Wow, isn't that interesting?' you are inviting the client's 'child' to a game, to explore, to an adventure. When the client offers an objection, don't just ask 'Why?'; phrase your response in a form of curiosity: 'Now that is really interesting; I wonder why?' This is not a challenge, but a non-threatening exchange. Continue the exchange in a mode of curiosity and naively seeking. The result can be a shift in perspective by the client from the objection being a stopper to the objection being a challenge to an adventure.

Examples

- *I know you don't want to go down the XX route, but I am fascinated; could you just guide me through your reasoning?*
- *Most people really go for this approach. I am really curious as to how you decided otherwise.*

Deflection

Avoid handling an objection by listening to it and showing understanding of the concerns. If you

accept the client's objection, you are accepting them as a person, and the additional rapport created may be enough to overcome the objection. Then carry on as if nothing had happened. Say that you will come back to it later. Maybe you won't have to. Refusing to answer their objections now may be demonstrating authority and control over the situation. If you can get away with it, they may cede more power to you.

Examples

- *Yes, I see what you mean ... mmm ... So XXX makes you feel uncomfortable. Yes, I understand that. Now let's consider YY.*
- *Good point. Can I come back to that later? ... Thanks ... Now the other thing we were saying was ...*

Feel, felt, found

When the client objects, you empathise with how they feel. You are building rapport. Then you talk about how somebody else felt, and this sharing at the emotional level builds trust. This causes the client to see themselves as a member of a group, so they are not alone. Then you move it forward by telling the client how the person changed their mind, found it was a good route to take and was successful.

Examples

- *I can tell you feel that it looks rough. I coached a woman last month who felt the same when she first looked at it. But when she tried it, she found that it was comfortable to do and she mastered it in about three weeks.*
- *I can see that you feel apprehensive. Many others have felt the same way. And what they have found is that it is easy once you get started.*