

Managing a Distance Coaching Relationship: Lessons Learned...

For most of my career, I have coached corporate senior executives and entrepreneurs in a face-to-face manner. Meeting face-to-face allows the coach to pick up on cues, body language and the “coachee’s” passion. Face-to-face coaching also provides the coach with indicators of avoidance, anger, fear or happiness – allowing the coach to experience when the “coachee” is being authentic.

In the past six years, my coaching practice has evolved to also include telephone coaching – but generally, this starts after I have met with the coachee several times. In the past four years, I have coached a number of clients without ever meeting them. This type of coaching required that I re-think my delivery model and become much more intuitive in picking up cues from the “coachee’s” silence; speech cadence; voice inflection; spontaneous questions; efficiency and effectiveness in completing assignments; willingness to take chances and a variety of non-verbal expressions.

Engaging in distance telephone coaching has required that I spend much more time in the beginning developing mutually agreed-upon coaching goals; articulating what coaching can and cannot achieve; ‘de-bunking’ coaching myths and fallacies; describing the process; establishing a schedule for the coaching sessions; developing meaningful “homework” assignments; implementing a stronger follow-up email communications strategy and reminder program; requiring email updates and check-ins, etc.

I also discovered that I needed to notch up my laid back coaching style. I am very intense and passionate in my coaching approach, but my communication style is a soft-spoken asking questions style. I feel this style has served me well, but I also realized that I needed to inject more inflection in my voice, show my enthusiasm, become much more descriptive in my communication, have more prepared examples, etc. I also stand more than I sit, I listen more than I speak and I ask for feedback (written and verbal) on a more frequent basis.

A coach can feel he or she is on target with the “coachee” in a distance coaching situation and too late find that they are not fulfilling the “coachee’s” needs. The best way to find out if you are meeting the “coachee’s” needs is to ask – ask your current and your past clients. You might be surprised with their answers.

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