The IAC Coaching Masteries ™

The following articles originally appeared in the IAC Voice in 2008-2009. Certifier Nina East presents an expansive view of how the Masteries apply to and effect coaching. The IAC Certifying Board offers this document as an important supplement to the Masteries E-Book, Note Card and several additional articles in the IAC Voice which can be found on the IAC Blog.

Mastery #1 – Establishing and Maintaining a Relationship of Trust

by Nina East, IAC-CC

On the surface, this seems fairly simple. An essential element of any coaching relationship is a feeling of trust between the coach and client. Without it, the communication is often awkward and the client may not share important information or expectations, which virtually guarantees the coaching will be offtarget and less effective.

Clients come to coaching to experience personal growth, discovery and transformation—whether in their own lives or relationships, as part of an organization or in business. One of the most important things the coach must do is ensure a safe space and supportive relationship in which this can happen.
Pretty straightforward, right?
Well, yes and no.

While many behaviors that might demonstrate this mastery may be natural to coaches (active listening, assuring the client, being inviting), there are also some key places where coaches go astray.

Establishing and maintaining a relationship of trust is about the environment you create in which the client and coach can explore, question, discover, create and develop sustainable systems. The desired effects are that the client is open to sharing and receiving, the client perceives the coach as their personal advocate, and the client sees, or begins to see, transformation and growth as manageable.

It is not about having a nice talk or being liked, or about attempting to show how much you like the client. This actually gets in the way of the coaching, often because the coach is more focused on themselves and their performance, than in identifying and addressing what the client really needs. When you try too hard to prove you are trustworthy, you actually end up being less so.

When there is a relationship of trust, the client is willing to express concerns or fears, and the coach is alert to fears and doubts that may be more subtle. In this relationship of trust, the coach can ask

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probing, challenging questions which help the client become more open and aware. Without adequate trust, these same questions can make the client defensive, guarded, or even overwhelmed.

Another spot where less experienced coaches get hung up is in thinking they have to do—or read—everything right. The fear may be that if they don't, they'll look like they don't know what they're doing. Coaches, just like anyone else, misinterpret and misunderstand at times. The key in a relationship of trust is that when the coach is off-target, the client can disagree with, or correct, the coach. Don't get derailed if
you offer an idea and the client says, —No, that's not it.‖ The fact that the client feels comfortable enough to say that is great. It says something about their level of trust for you.

Another important element of this Mastery is that there is mutual respect and acceptance. That means that not only does the client trust the coach, but the coach must also trust the client. When a coach thinks they have to be the expert, it indicates they don't fully trust the client. When a coach is directive, tries to get the client to commit to a particular action, or tries to get the client to agree with them, they don't show the client trust.

When the coach demonstrates a respect in the client's ability to judge or decide for themselves, versus imposing the coach's own judgment or opinion, the coach is building a relationship of trust. The coach in this scenario is confident, not overbearing, and able to share opinions or possibilities without attachment. The coach recognizes that they are a collaborator with the client and trusts themselves and their skills in facilitating the coaching process.

Two final notes about this Mastery and the Certification Process

It's not about having the client say nice things about you. That may happen, of course, but at times the certifiers have observed the coach trying to get the client to compliment them. While this is your certification, this is their coaching session. Accept compliments graciously, and return the focus to the client.

Certifiers have also observed clients who are so eager to help their coach get certified, that they end the session with accolades. To be honest, this happens more often when the client is also a coach. By being overly expressive, they can make the coaching a bit awkward and actually interfere with the coach's demonstration of the Masteries. I'm definitely not saying it's a bad thing to have a client be genuinely grateful, but if your client is also a coach, or a coach in training, encourage them to simply be the client during your session and not to try too hard to make you look good.

Join us next month for a deeper look at Mastery #2—Perceiving, affirming and expanding the client's potential.

Mastery #2 – Perceiving, Affirming and Expanding the Client's Potential

by Nina East, IAC-CC

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You may remember the earlier version of this Mastery did not include the word —expanding.‖ But so much of what we do in coaching is help the client acknowledge —what is‖ in order to see beyond that to —what can be.‖ This involves going outside of previous comfort zones—beyond simply affirming—to bringing an expansive quality to the coaching.

Perceiving, affirming and expanding the client's potential is not just in relation to what the client does, but also in terms of the client, him or herself. Who is the client being? What are they capable of? What are their gifts and talents? And what can all this mean for them?

Some coaches describe this as a —being‖ mastery versus a —doing‖ mastery—focusing more on who the client is and who they are being, believing in the client's inner greatness, no matter what the external results happen to look like at the moment.

As the coach, you are helping expand the client's self-awareness, knowledge and abilities. You are NOT trying to get them to see or believe what you believe to be true about them. Rather, you are helping them expand their own beliefs.

In other words, you are not trying to stretch them to be or do more; and you are not trying to prop them up. This simply ends up requiring more and more pressure and support when they waver, putting more of the responsibility on you and making the client more dependent upon you.

Instead, think of it as expansion, like a balloon. As the client breathes into their own balloon (their beliefs about their potential), they expand in all directions, gaining new dimension and new perspectives.

With this Mastery, the novice coach focuses on trying to get the client to change, or to see things the way the coach sees them. The coach may puff up the client, overly-compliment the client, or try to get the client excited about something—often without accessing what is most important for the client or gaining the necessary leverage for change.

The masterful coach truly believes in the client and believes the client is capable and has an everexpanding potential. The masterful coach enables the client to fill their own balloons. The masterful coach does not push or try to fill it for them. He does not try to prop them up from all sides.

Other mistakes the novice coach typically makes when using this Mastery are:

- accepting what the client states their limitations are, not even noticing that the assumptions made by the client and/or the coach.
- lacking finesse when questioning assumptions.
- challenging beyond what the client can handle—not determining appropriate ratios of challenge and support in order to create an environment for growth and expansion.

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- trying to get the client to see what the coach sees—which can (unintentionally) make the client wrong.

The result of these mistakes is that the client can become dependent on the coach for feelings of adequacy and accomplishment, which in turn sets the client up for difficulty and failure down the road. The masterful coach:

- recognizes assumptions, including their own, and addresses them appropriately.
- checks themselves on their own judgments—about themselves and about the client.
- elicits the client's input and awareness, rather than simply telling the client what the coach sees.
- shares specific feedback about the client's behavior, performance or efforts.
- helps the client create new meaning from errors or failures, which supports the client in learning and expanding more.
- may tap into the client's desire to contribute to others in some way, perhaps leaving a lasting legacy.

As a result, the client has a greater appreciation of his or her capabilities and potential and is more willing to take actions beyond the current paradigms or previously perceived possibilities.

Our clients need us to be masterful with this Mastery, whether they are aware of it or not. The goals of growth and change—whether for business coaching, personal coaching or a combination—can hardly appear without perceiving, affirming and expanding.

Further, in order for coaches to be effective with this Mastery, they must FIRST have their own houses in order. Coaches who have not dealt with their own issues of perceiving, affirming and expanding their own potential will not be as effective or genuine with this Mastery. How do you know if you've done the work? It is evident by your ability to expand vs. stretch, enable vs. push and believe vs. judge. These are subtle distinctions, yet extremely important ones for the work we do with our clients and for masterful demonstration of this Mastery.

When Mastery #2 is utilized at a masterful level, the client and the coach both begin to see more of what is possible and more of who the client is capable of being. Remember, your clients need you to use this mastery. You don't have to take an over-the-top, bop-them-over-the-head approach (unless that is what is called for, of course). Know yourself and believe in your client.

Mastery #3 – Engaged Listening

by Nina East, IAC-CC

The following link is a recorded conversation between Andrea Lee and Nina East where they discuss the Masteries. We're sharing a snippet from the interview on Mastery #3 which also includes some overall comments on the Masteries.

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https://www.dropbox.com/s/wnxjv35id2i3mdu/August-Voice-AndreaLee.mp3?dl=0

Mastery #4 – Processing in the Present

by Nina East, IAC-CC

The Certification Board has discovered that when coaches understand this Mastery, they can generally demonstrate it very well. When they do not demonstrate it well, it is typically because they do not understand what it means.

Processing in the Present represents the leading edge; the next evolution of coaching skills. When you examine other coaching skills or models, you will not find a skill quite like this one. While it may be challenging to grasp at first, I assure you that once you master it, you will come to relish using it as it can help you zero in on what is going on for the client much faster, and provide a rich resource for the client.

From the IAC Coaching Masteries ™ E-Book: "Mastery #4, Processing in the Present, is demonstrated when the coach is attentive to the client, processing information at the level of the mind, body, heart and/or spirit, as appropriate. The coach expands the client's awareness of how to experience thoughts and issues on these various levels, when and as appropriate. The coach utilizes what is happening in the session itself
(the
client's behavior, patterns, emotions, the relationship between coach and client, etc.) to assist the client toward greater self-awareness and positive right action."

The two key words in this Mastery are "processing" and "present."

In order to "process," the coach must be discussing, bringing up and/or pointing out to the client what she or he is noticing. The coach is not "telling" the client what they ought to be thinking, feeling, doing or knowing, but is initiating a coaching conversation that helps the client find deeper meaning, insight or a new perspective. When the coach thinks something is going on for the client that is affecting their progress, but fails to address it, the coach is not processing in the present.

By "present," we are referring to what is happening for or with the client right here, right now, in the midst of the coaching. How the client thinks, feels, and behaves in the coaching session, itself, in addition to what they are saying, is a rich resource for coaching. Often what the coach senses the client is not saying is most important. Obviously, it is important to have established a relationship of trust (Mastery #1) in order to do this without being unnecessarily abrupt or triggering the client's defensiveness.

Consider this illustration. A coach makes a suggestion or asks a question and the client hesitates before saying "yes," or does so tentatively. The masterful coach will back up and ask the client about their hesitation, verifying that the "yes" is accurate and that the client is ready to move forward. The novice coach tends to accept the "yes" response without assessing what may have caused the hesitation or

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verifying that the client really does mean "yes." In doing this, the novice coach forges ahead based on what may not be the client's true feelings or intentions.

The coaching relationship itself is also a source of information. The interactions between coach and client are often very telling. Acknowledging this and using it can propel your coaching, and the client's progress, forward exponentially.

Masterful coaches

- use what the client is doing, thinking, saying in the moment to heighten the client's selfawareness.
- appropriately share what they are noticing in the client's voice or body language. - identify themes or inconsistencies in what the client is saying or doing, helping the client explore their knowing at a deeper level. - acknowledge and address the client's emotions as indicators of the client's efforts, alignment with goals, and a source of information.
- recognize that the coaching relationship is often a mirror for other areas of the client's life –a microcosm of what occurs elsewhere.
- are alert to the client's avoiding, resisting, or deflecting behaviors as indicators that there is more going on for the client, or there is something occurring between the coach and client which needs to be addressed.
- tunes into what the client is experiencing in the moment –mentally, emotionally, physically, and spiritually.

On the other hand, novice coaches may

- tend to be caught up in the words or details of the issue or story, missing the deeper thoughts or feelings that are the root of the issue.
- ignore or miss the client's hesitation, enthusiasm, disinterest, etc. - not notice how the client is experiencing the coaching – and do not ask.
- focus only on future goals and actions, neglecting to notice how what is happening right now is affecting progress toward those goals.
- not notice when the client brings a topic up several times within one session, or over several sessions.
- not recognize their own counter-productive behaviors (such as interrupting, verbal tics, changing the subject, sharing something that is not relevant, controlling or directing the session, etc.).
- be afraid to address the client's emotions.

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As you can see, when Mastery #4 is utilized at a masterful level, the client and the coach both begin to experience the coaching on a deeper level, co-creating meaningful insights and significant shifts for the client.

One final note – it is not intended that you try to bring the client's body or emotions into every session, or that you force the issue with this mastery. As always, you want to use all of your coaching masteries to assist the client in whatever ways possible toward their goals and desired results.

Mastery #5 – Expressing

by Nina East, IAC-CC

This mastery is just what it sounds like – how the coach communicates with the client. Paraphrasing from the *Coaching Masteries Ebook*, expressing is ***how*** the coach communicates his or her commitment, direction, intent and ideas. It is not just how the coach communicates, but whether that communication is effective.

This mastery can be closely associated with Mastery #3 – Engaged Listening, but the two are not the same. A coach could be very effective at listening and picking up nuances of communication, but may still not be able to express that in a way that the client can hear, that maintains trust in the relationship or that adds value for the client.

The objective is that the coach's communication helps put the client at ease, aids in developing trust (as in Mastery #1) and enhances the value of the coaching for the client (rather than being a distraction, for example). It is important that the client understands what the coach is expressing, and that the client may question the coach when it is not clear.

It is clear the coach's expressing has a direct effect on the coaching. It is important to note that a masterful coach does not have to be perfect and get everything right. The coach does not have to be profound or state everything perfectly…but the manner in which the coach communicates must add to the coaching session, not take away from it or serve as a distraction.

A key distinction is that the coach is communicating FOR the client, not TO the client. When the coach chooses to share something about his or her own experience or life, what is their motive? The coach must understand the difference between self-referencing for the benefit of the client versus selfreferencing for a specific effect, or to make themselves sound knowledgeable or better.

Masterful coaches:

- maintain focus on, and attention to, the client. The coaching is client-centric.
- use both verbal and nonverbal skills effectively.
- are comfortable with silence, not feeling the need to talk when the client is quiet.
- are attuned to how their communication is moving the client forward, or interfering with the client's progress.

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- are not worried about making a good impression.
- invite the client's input, self-disclosure and expression of feelings.
- use pace and energy effectively.
- know how and when to interrupt so that it serves the client.

On the other hand, novice coaches may:
- use a pace of expression that is inconsistent with the energy of the session.
- be inauthentic in their communications.
- neglect to use the client's own words or expressions, preferring to use their own instead. - not match the client's level of enthusiasm (either too high or too low), creating a disconnect with the client.
- overuse verbal affirmations (such as —yes‖, —hmmmm‖, —ah‖) to the point they become distractions versus encouraging the client.
- be ineffective in making a point – sometimes being too wordy, being off-topic, or using references and metaphors the client does not understand.
- use laughter or humor inappropriately.

When the coach is a masterful at expressing, it is clear that the coach is adding to the value of the coaching via what they say, do, do not say or do not do. The exchange between coach and client is natural and
expands the coaching. The coach's communications become a springboard for an even more open discussion and meaningful results for the client.

Mastery #6 – Clarifying

by Nina East, IAC-CC

In keeping with the simplicity of the IAC Coaching Masteries ™, the title of this mastery is very descriptive. The goal of using this mastery is to reduce or eliminate the client's confusion or uncertainty about the issue, the appropriate course of action, or the meaning behind what the client is bringing to the coaching session. With a greater understanding of what is really going on, the client can have more confidence about next steps because he/she will be focusing on what is most important, and letting go of what is not.

I suspect that this mastery will seem fairly obvious to coaches. Of course we have to help the client clarify, right? If not, we may be assisting them down the wrong path and/or focusing valuable coaching on time on something that may not be that relevant. As coaches we want to respect what the client brings to the session, but we have to remember that it is not uncommon for even the most sophisticated and self-aware clients to be off-target when identifying the —problem‖ or the most important issue facing them.

By taking the time to clarify, you are not implying the client is ignorant or does not know what they are talking about. Rather, you are respecting the client by realizing that:

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- often clients are too close to their own experience to be able to see or know all the factors affecting the situation.
- clients may make assumptions based on habit, experience or beliefs, and not be aware they are doing so.

- clarifying helps clients get —unstuck,‖ often resulting in improved focus, awareness of previously unknown information, new possibilities and increased energy.

All of these are reasons clients hire coaches. It is important that we give adequate time and attention to clarifying.

The key to masterful clarifying is paying attention to certain important distinctions, and avoiding the common mistakes that novice coaches make.

One distinction is that when clarifying, the role of the coach is to discern rather than solve. Your job is not to figure out what is really going on with the client and then come up with a solution. Your job is to help the client distinguish between what is a surface issue or symptom, and what is the source of the issue. If we stay focused on the symptoms, the client may experience temporary relief or achievement, but if the underlying issue is not identified and addressed, you will be discussing the same issue in an upcoming coaching session.
(Hint: if the client keeps bringing the same topic or issue to the coaching sessions, it would be a good idea to focus on clarifying to get to what is really going on.)

For example, a client may tell you the most important issue they are dealing with is how to get an employee to follow directions. If this is dealt with at the surface, or on a superficial level, the client may develop a plan of action for instructing or holding the employee accountable, but the same problem will likely arise with this employee again, or with another employee.

In this same example, through the masterful use of clarifying, the client may discover that the problem is not so much about getting the employee to follow directions. Instead, you may look at how the client is
communicating (intentionally or unintentionally), what the client's beliefs are about employees and supervisors, the client's confidence level or something else entirely. It is important to delve beneath the initial statements to discern what is really going on.

Another key distinction to make is that clarifying may not simplify the issue. The issue may still be a complex one, but getting down to the core of it and identifying the relevant factors will still help simplify the possible courses of action.

Masterful coaches:

- do not feel pressure to clarify for the client, but rather actively collaborate with the client. They know their job is to facilitate the clarification process, but not come up with all the answers.

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- are curious and interested–wanting to understand before coming to any conclusions.
- identify patterns in the client's thoughts, words, actions, and feelings–often connecting what is happening to something the client already knows or has experienced.
- ask open-ended and —either/or‖ questions to help the client explore, versus closed-ended questions requiring only a —yes‖ or —no‖ answer.
- recognize when a client's perspective has shifted.
- are not afraid to say when they think there is something else going on, beyond what the client has identified.
- pay attention to —offhand‖ or casual comments, knowing they are often indications of what is really going on.

On the other hand, novice coaches may:

- make assumptions, or not notice when the client is making assumptions.
- ask leading questions–trying to get the client to —see‖ or believe what the coach thinks is right.
- think they know what is best for the client, or what the right answer is, which makes it easy to fall short on engaged listening (Mastery #3) and miss some critical pieces of information.
- miss or ignore hints and clues the client offers about what is more important.
- not address a topic that the client is clearly avoiding or minimizing.
- avoid addressing the client's emotions.
- not be clear whether the most important issue was identified and addressed adequately.

When the coach is masterful at Clarifying, the client's perspective shifts. The client knows something they did not know before–about themselves, their capabilities, the situation, their beliefs or assumptions, etc. The exchange is natural–not peppering the client with questions or interrogating! The coaching discussion reveals what is most important or having the greatest effect on the client's situation or experience. By identifying what is most important, the client has less confusion and uncertainty, can move forward in a more effective way, and more relevant possibilities from which to choose.

Mastery #7 – Helping the Client Set and Keep Clear Intentions

by Nina East, IAC-CC

No matter what type of coaching you offer, helping the client stay focused on goals, feel capable, and be inspired toward next steps or experiences are all intended outcomes of your work. The content or focus area of the intentions may differ, but the need for them will not. For example, business, career and executive coaching may tend to focus on achievement, accomplishment, specific tasks or measurable outcomes, while spiritual and life coaching may focus on awareness and experiences, with outcomes that are less tangible or measurable. Either way, all of these are goals you help the client set and keep.

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When helping the client set and keep clear intentions, the role of the coach is not to set the goals for the client, or even to determine what would constitute success or progress. Instead, the role of the coach is to help the client clarify the direction of progress and remain mindful of what is most important.

We've all had clients who take a lot of action but don't really get anywhere. (We may even do that ourselves, at times!) Just because they are busy does not mean they are moving in the direction of their goals. In fact, a common avoidance strategy is to stay really busy so they don't have to face the difficult actions or scary issues associated with the intended goals. Often the client is not aware that they are using an avoidance strategy. Therefore, a key distinction in this mastery is recognizing the difference between progress and movement, and helping the client recognize this distinction for themselves.

Members, continue reading here.

By helping the client set and keep clear intentions the coach is helping the client move forward purposefully, transforming their experience versus merely changing it or trying something new. Masterful coaches:

- Ask questions to reveal the client's intentions.
- Bring the client back to what is important when they get off course or are distracted by tangents.
- Question the client's intentions or assumptions, particularly beliefs which may be limiting, while respecting the client's goals and preferences.
- Recognize when the client's commitments are not aligned with the client's true desires and goals.
- Are mindful of the context in order to help the client set appropriate intentions for the environment in which they are operating.

On the other hand, novice coaches may:

- Not notice when the client is hesitant about a particular intention or agreement.
- Push the client toward the original goals the client identified when the goals are no longer relevant.
- Move forward with setting goals and intentions before they have done sufficient clarifying to ensure the coaching is focused on what is most important to the client.
- Try to get the client to do what the coach thinks is best, based on the coach's experience or opinion.

When the coach is masterful at helping the client set and keep clear intentions, the client is more excited or confident about the future (and the present). The client often has a realization that removes a mental obstacle, and is more engaged and excited about the new direction or a fresh approach to an ongoing goal.

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Mastery #8 – Inviting Possibility

by Nina East, IAC-CC

Many coaches tell me that Mastery #8 is one of their favorites. I think this is because when inviting possibility, the coach's job is to create an environment that allows ideas, options and opportunities to emerge. By definition it does not require closure, completion or perfection.

The way in which Inviting Possibility is used is important, though. When used properly, this mastery can help the client make dramatic leaps forward in their goals. It is also possible to misuse this mastery, producing an undesirable effect on the coaching and with the client.

Inviting Possibilities is happening when thoughts, ideas and actions are expanded. The client's awareness is stretched beyond the norm, and he or she has more options than previously realized. It is essential that the coaching discussion be one of discovery and exploration. While the coach may share ideas or perspectives, it must be done with the client's needs in mind, and for the purpose of expanding what is possible, not narrowing down or moving toward resolution prematurely.

There are three critical distinctions the coach must make when using this Mastery at a masterful level.

First, the coach must not impose his or her expertise. The coach may have ideas and suggestions, but when coming from the perspective of an —expert,‖ the coach is deciding what is best for the client. It is better for the coach to adopt a —beginner's mind‖ – listening as if for the first time, with eyes and mind wide open for whatever might appear. The coach does have wisdom and experience, but when inviting possibility, the idea is to bring in or generate something new.

Second, the coach must try to avoid being prescriptive either by providing all (or the majority of) the possibilities, or by relying too much on what they think has worked for others. Instead, the coach will be more effective and masterful by taking on the perspective of —creativity.‖ Thinking in terms such as —how else might this work?‖ vs. —This is how it works.‖

And third, the coach must avoid moving to resolution too quickly. Coaching is meant to help clients find the results they want, and sometimes coaches will identify a few possibilities and then attempt to get the client to decide on a course of action. Often the client is also feeling the pressure to make a decision. This mastery improves the decision-making process by making sure previously unconsidered or unknown options are explored.

Masterful coaches:

- Help the client see the situation from a larger perspective.
- Notice how ideas build upon each other, and support this process by not forcing a decision.
- Remain open to possibility, even when the client is not.
- Are comfortable with letting the unknown present itself; in fact, they invite this.

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- Are provocative when necessary, and encourage the client to explore ambitious options.

On the other hand, novice coaches may:

- Force the concept of —possibility‖ into the coaching session rather than letting it emerge naturally.
- Lead the client toward a particular answer or option.
- Provide all, or most, of the options that are identified, rather than coaching the client to discover their own.
- Ask leading questions – or perhaps too many questions.
- Try too hard to figure out what the client ought to do next.
- Prevent the full exploration of possibilities because of concerns about reaching a resolution or making a decision about the next step the client will take.

When the coach is masterful at inviting possibilities, the coaching enters new areas, often producing a meaningful insight that takes the client by surprise. The client experiences what it feels like to have ideas and possibilities expand. Inviting possibilities is a collaborative process – with both the coach and client participating and engaging fully. Typically the client will be excited about, intrigued with and/or open to the new possibilities or a new way of looking at the existing issue.

Mastery #9 – Helping the client create and use support systems and structures

by Nina East, IAC-CC

When you are coaching a client, it is *critical* to help them create and use appropriate and sustainable support systems and structures. It helps the client to be more confident and secure in moving forward and to embrace responsibility, and it addresses sustainability so the client does not have to rely solely on their own willpower.

While it is the ninth mastery, and it is often focused on near the end of a coaching session when coach and client are co-creating what comes next, elements of this mastery are occurring throughout the coaching session. When the coach understands the difference between system and a set of action steps, their value to the client goes up dramatically.

Well-designed systems ensure the client will be more confident, able to move forward, and sustain their intentions because the systems are designed with the client in mind. They take into account the client's specific needs, values or goals; and the best systems consist of supportive, complementary and enhancing structures, versus constraining or overwhelming ones.

Systems science shows that systems help people think about and manage the whole, achieve meaningful participation (theirs and/or others), be reflective, and enhance human spirit and freedom. Think of

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systems as a collection of parts (activities, beliefs, structures) that are highly integrated to achieve or produce an
overall goal. In other words, systems are not a series of different action steps or list of —to dos.‖ While action steps are important, in and of themselves they do not make a system. The —system‖ piece comes when the coach helps the client see how it all works together and design a more effective way.

Many times the reason a client hires a coach, whether the client realizes this or not, is that they need help redesigning their systems because the ones they are currently using are producing unsatisfactory results.

Every client already has a system of some sort they are using; an established way of doing things. In fact, they probably have multiple systems for various roles they play and responsibilities they have. This collection of structures, activities, beliefs and values has worked together to a certain degree to produce the results they are currently getting.

Typically a discussion of systems and structures will include a discussion of relevant resources and references - identifying what is working and what is not, and seeking to expand capabilities via design rather than force or willpower. A key, often overlooked, aspect of systems is the client's identity – their beliefs
about who they are. Anytime the client's identity is incorporated into a system or structure, the likelihood of follow through is increased exponentially.

Masterful coaches:

- Clearly understand the difference between a system and an action plan.
- Address multiple systems and structures – such as physical, organizational, emotional, cultural, mindset, spiritual, etc.
- Are co-creative. They do not expect the client to come up with everything on their own, nor do they think the coach has to have all the right answers.
- Help the client identify their current systems, and discern the system's strengths and where they need upgrading.
- Help the client identify which systems may be needed, not just by what the client says, but also by picking up on the client's patterns, challenges, and the context in which the system will be used.
- Are not offended or upset if the client does not select a system the coach suggests, rather the coach helps the client use it as a springboard to a more appropriate fit.
- Ensure the client's structures are in alignment with the client's value system.
- Honestly discuss inner conflicts which might interfere with sustainability, whether the client brings them up or not.

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On the other hand, novice coaches may:

- Focus on action steps rather than designing systems and structures.
- Not build the systems and structures around the client's core issue, instead focusing on something —easier‖ to discuss.
- Recommend resources, structures or systems without taking the time to get clear on the individual client's needs, cultural expectations or the context in which the system will be applied.
- Recommend resources that may be inappropriate – for financial, cultural or organizational reasons.
- Neglect to address the sustainability of the system.
- Over-rely on —accountability‖ as a system, making the client dependent rather than independent.
- Feel pressure to be the —expert‖ and come up with all or most of the ideas.
- Only identify support structures that are readily apparent (such as a spouse, coach, job description or current role in an organization).

When the coach is masterful at helping the client create and use sustainable systems and structures, the client is able to move forward more purposefully and with more confidence. Clients know that, ultimately, they are responsible for their own success, and realize the value of deliberately creating systems that support their intended goals and outcomes.

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