

SETTING UP THE COACHING CONTRACT

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A key element at the start of any coaching engagement is agreeing the 'contract' – what does the client want to work on and what can the coach offer. The questions below are written with the client in mind, although they may also need to be covered with any other stakeholders, when you have multi-party contracts such as those involving the client's line manager or the HR officer who is organising the coaching arrangements.

We can think of contracting on three levels:

procedural – the administrative aspects such as when and where you will conduct the coaching, what are the financial arrangements, what procedure applies for cancellations, and so on.

professional – what is the coaching meant to achieve, how will practitioner and client work together, what professional skills will the practitioner bring, what are the boundaries of the coaching, etc.

psychological – what may happen out of awareness if we fail to pay attention to any underlying dynamics, are there risks that the client may idealise the coach, or that the coach may 'mistake' the client for a child, or that we get too cosy with each other, or avoid being honest...

I usually list these levels in the order of procedural, professional, psychological

because they relate to the ego states of Parent, Adult and Child – or what are the rules, what are the options and how might we be 'naughty' and do things we shouldn't. However, when talking to clients it may be more natural to talk about the professional level first, then to add procedural, and only to address psychological when we've established enough rapport.

Checklist: One-to-one contracting

Professional

How do we each understand the nature of the coaching or mentoring we are about to engage in?

Can we reach a shared understanding? What process shall we agree to now for either of us to use to raise any future discrepancies?

What is our agreement about confidentiality? Although it is usual for the coach to maintain confidentiality about the client, do we need this commitment in both directions if the coach is likely to be using self-disclosure? This may be particularly important when a mentor is also a senior manager whose admitted weaknesses or failures should not be gossiped about.

What does the coachee or mentee hope to achieve via the process? Is that realistic?

What professional skills and knowledge does the coach bring? How competent do they feel to assist the client in attaining the hoped-for outcomes?

What are the professional boundaries of the relationship, e.g. is the coach qualified and expected to give business advice? How will we distinguish between coaching and counselling?

Who else is available to the client if the coaching raises issues that are outside our agreed boundaries?

Procedural

How often will we meet and for how long each time?

Where will we meet and who will organise the venue?

Will we always meet in the same place or shall we vary the venue?

What are the venue requirements, e.g. privacy, not overheard or overlooked, or maybe at the client's workplace so behaviour can be observed?

If we are engaged in distance coaching (e.g. phone or Skype), what rituals shall we establish to ensure as good rapport as if we were face-to-face?

Do either of us have 'gate-keepers' who need to be briefed so they don't protect our diary by being reluctant to add in meetings?

What shall we do about cancellations, how will we let each other know, who is responsible for re-arranging a cancelled session (whoever cancelled it, perhaps?)

If this is paid coaching, will charges still apply if the client cancels, how much notice is required, what happens about holidays?

What happens if the coach has to cancel a session?

What notes will be kept? By whom and where?

What information might the coach provide to others? e.g. will the coach report to the customer and if so, what will be covered?

Will the client see what the coach reports, and if so, will that be before or after the report is made?

What information will the client provide to others? e.g. will the client report on their own progress to their own manager? Will the client provide

management with feedback on the coach's performance? Will the coach see this, and if so, when?

Psychological

How might we unwittingly sabotage our relationship, e.g. being too nice to each other, getting into a parent-child dynamic, becoming competitive, etc?

What previous experiences of coaching or mentoring might influence this new relationship? How can we ensure that we don't bring outdated expectations into the dynamic?

What ground rules shall we agree so that either of us has a clear process for raising any problems in the future, in a way that will guarantee the other person will listen?

How will we recover trust if, in spite of our best intentions, something still goes adrift in our relationship?

Is there anything else we need to share at this point – have we been as open as possible about any anxieties or concerns, however vague these may be?

NOTES & SOURCES

Berne's ideas on contract are contained in *Principles of Group Treatment* Eric Berne, Grove Press Inc., 1966.

For more ideas on multi-party contracting, see *Reflective Practice and Supervision for Coaches*, Julie Hay, Open University Press 2007.

In the previous newsletter there was an extract from our book *Working Together, Organizational Transactional Analysis and Business Performance*, which was published by Gower on 22 June. We would like to let you know that we have changed the name of this model to OK Modes.

Anita Mountain & Chris Davidson