



Alternate Outcomes 1

It is usual for the coaching project sponsor to prepare a brief for the coach, perhaps outlining areas for support and development to improve performance, perhaps identifying specific skills that need to be acquired to achieve potential. But the characteristics of the coaching conversation can enable access to the coachee's wider issues, which can shed new light on the situation.

This case illustrates the value of the coach's independence, objectivity, intuition and the capacity to take time to get to the causes, making available the alternative outcomes that coaching can facilitate.

The coaching process should review and agree a revision to the brief if appropriate. In this case, specific and previously unidentified issues emerged during the initial coaching conversation.

The Background

A client E, recommended by the organisation's HR team, was having difficulty with her interview technique. Her manager had recommended her for promotion but E had failed to present herself effectively at interview. HR reported that there was a history of poor interview performance and, as the organisation was undergoing a major restructuring, E was going to be at a disadvantage; she was already seen as not achieving her potential.

The Process

At our initial meeting, it was clear that some considerable time would need to be invested in reassurance and building trust. Eventually we gently began to turn to discuss E's situation and what E would like to get out of the process.

'I'm frustrated at work but I can't sell myself I'd like to be able to interview better.'

Given her initial presentation at our meeting this seemed to be a very modest goal, but intuition indicated that there were other issues. E was quiet and withdrawn and found difficulty talking about herself. Slowly, we began to explore her story to date.

As she told of her family background, childhood and adolescence, E was soon in uncontrollable tears. E explained:

'I've never told anyone else the whole story – I've had therapy before and it didn't really work.'

It was clear from the details of her story that there were significant issues beyond the scope of a coaching conversation. We agreed that coaching was inappropriate at this stage and that specific therapeutic professional support was needed.

The Outcomes

We agreed that HR would be informed of the new situation. E agreed to consult her GP in the first instance and later went on to engage with specific expert support.

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The confidentiality of the coaching session had allowed E to be more open than ever before taking time to explore more fully some areas she had hidden away, even from herself. This enabled a new understanding of the issues and a revised action plan to be undertaken.