



# 50 MISTAKES COACHES CAN MAKE

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***“Whenever you make a mistake there are only three things you should do:***

- Admit it***
- Learn from it***
- Don't repeat it”***

## **Mistake 1**

### ***Not sharing your inklings.***

- Inklings are what you sense that you can barely feel or put words to.
- Inklings are even more subtle than intuition.
- Most coaches wait too long before sharing inklings because they don't want to be mistaken or needlessly divert the client.
- Get over it. Develop the type of relationship with your client where you can share what your inkle.

## **Mistake 2**

### ***Being too "noisy."***

- Some coaches are too loud - not just voice or decibel level, but emotionally needy or consuming or even needing the client to succeed.
- They compete with clients for the available space and energy during the coaching session.
- These coaches experience high client turnover.
- Solution is to let clients be the way they are and enjoy them that way, and not use clients to get your validation needs met.

### **Mistake 3**

#### ***Jumping in too soon with advice.***

- When you "know" you've got the perfect advice for a client and feel the need to interrupt them to share it with them, your advice probably won't be heard properly.
- Remember, clients need to share first (and be heard) before they are open to advice/solutions.
- Ask yourself: "Why I am so eager to jump in with my tips, suggestions, advice, solutions?"
- This is a major problem with coaches today.

### **Mistake 4**

#### ***Chasing the client down tunnels.***

- Client presents the coach with many possible avenues to walk down.
- The trick is not to race down the first path the client presents, or that you can see where to go.
- Instead of speaking too soon, wait and listen more until a very powerful place to talk appears.
- You'll know it's the right place, because the client quiets down and begins to look with you, instead of tossing you lots of stuff to look at.

### **Mistake 5**

#### ***Diagnosing psychological conditions.***

- Coaches are not therapists. As such, coaches don't work with clients in certain areas, called diagnosable psychological conditions.
- Psychological conditions include (among others):

- Drug addiction
- Depression
- Paranoia
- Schizophrenia
- Personality disorders

## **Mistake 6**

### ***Working with the wrong client.***

- You won't be good with every type of client.
- Don't work with clients whom you don't like, who are at a very different place than you are, who don't understand or benefit from what you have to offer, or who are not excited and motivated.
- Don't coach clients who have needs that are beyond your training, expertise, experience or interest.
- Always have coaches to refer these folks to.

## **Mistake 7**

### ***Trying to coach the uncoachable***

- Some clients just don't want to change how they do things. We call the clients "uncoachable" because coaching would include the process of growing, developing, and evolving oneself.
- They may be very fine people; just not coachable, right now.
- Educate the client on how to be very coachable and give them fair warning before letting them go or referring them to another professional.

## **Mistake 8**

### ***Coaching every client the same way.***

- While not every coach is or needs to be a chameleon, it is important to customize your approach to fit for the needs of each client.
- True, you will maintain your own special style, but utilize the tools, concepts, distinctions, strategies and advice that will most benefit the client.
- Some coaches slip into the trap of "This is me; take it or leave it." Keep opening yourself up.

## **Mistake 9**

### ***Taking responsibility for the client.***

- I take full responsibility for the quality of my coaching, but never for the client's success - that part is up to them.
- Some clients want/need you to lead their lives or solve their problems for them. Protect yourself.
- On the other hand, don't step back too far - lend a big hand, arrange for extra support for the client facing a big challenge/problem. Do go out of your way to assist. But do so from a place of choice, not obligation or responsibility.

## **Mistake 10**

### ***Being linear.***

- Linear coaches see life, growth, and success as a logical progression from A to B to C to D, etc.
- You know you are linear if you try to impose your order on your clients or think clients must go through certain steps to reach their goals.

- This approach isn't very effective in a world that is becoming increasingly chaotic.
- Tip: To loosen up, learn about attraction, synchronicity, synergy and serendipity.

## **Mistake 11**

### ***Coaching "at" the client.***

- Some coaches talk "at" people in general, including clients, instead of dancing easily in a natural, give-and-take, two-way conversation.
- These coaches don't realize this until someone points it out. Periodically, ask your clients if you are talking at them, or if you are able to be with and speak with them.
- Having a mentor coach who can point this out is another good reason to have a mentor coach.

## **Mistake 12**

### ***Giving lame advice.***

- Some advice is so outdated, bland, and/or ineffective that it should be embarrassing to the coach.
- The solution is to work with a coach who is hip, progressive and wise enough to learn from similarly minded colleagues. And to read current magazines and books so that you are current.
- Otherwise, you're in the recycling business.

## **Mistake 13**

### ***Being a mouse.***

- Eek! Eek! It's one thing to be gentle and patient. It's quite another to be a wimp or mouse.

- Sometimes, it's a personality style or limitation. Other times, the coach lacks confidence or hasn't been trained properly.
- The trick is to have access to the full spectrum of communication styles - from quiet to loud, from patient to challenging, from responsive to initiating.
- Most clients want a coach who isn't afraid.

## **Mistake 14**

### ***Waiting to say what you're thinking.***

- Most coaches are hesitant to share their inklings/thoughts until they are surer of what they feel or think, so they wait for evidence or the right language to phrase and share.
- Coaches are also hesitant to offend the client, so they hold back some of the negative reactions they are having.
- Clients deserve to hear your thinking the moment something occurs to you. Share it professionally, but don't withhold it.

## **Mistake 15**

### ***Expecting too little from clients.***

- You won't know how much the client can do until you ask them 3 times to do something far bigger than they brought to you.
- In other words, double/triple the goal and see what type of response you get. Ask again. In some cases, don't take no for an answer if you believe the client is up to it, but afraid. Remember, these are clients, not kids or friends. You are being paid to expect/ask a lot of them.

## **Mistake 16**

### ***Slipping into a parental role.***

- Most clients don't know quite what role to put their coaches in - sports coach? Friend? Parent?
- It's our job to teach our clients how to work with us as a collaborative partner in their life.
- You know you're being parental when:
- Your tone slips into parent-to-child-talk.
- You care more about the client's success than they do.
- You seek to protect the client from life/themselves.
- You see your client as a child/helpless.

## **Mistake 17**

### ***Pushing the client too hard.***

- How hard should/can you push a client and still have coaching be about their life and not yours?
- You know you are pushing too hard if:
- You feel tired at the end of the coaching calls.
- The client is fighting/resisting your pressure.
- You are convinced that your way is smartest.
- You are frustrated by your client's slow pace.
- You get angry, hot, or righteous during the session.
- Solution? Talk to the client about it and/or pull back. Let the client lead the coaching for a while.



## **Mistake 18**

### ***Needing the client's coaching fee.***

- If you are at the edge financially and can't afford to lose a client's fee, you will not be able to coach clients fully because you cannot afford to.
- The trick is to have 50% more billings that you need for all business and personal expenses - this provides a healthy reserve that gives you room to coach from your heart, not your checkbook.

## **Mistake 19**

### ***Blindly accepting the client's goals.***

- Very few clients are crystal clear on their goals at first, so take the time to make sure you (and the client) are clear on the best possible goals instead of the first goals presented.
- Go for value-based goals when possible.
- Encourage client to let go of the pipedream goals.
- If too many goals, it is likely that the client's personal needs are not being met or that their integrity is weak. (Really.)

## **Mistake 20**

### ***Trying too hard.***

- In your quest to serve, you may try hard to:
  - Make a difference
  - Coach properly
  - Push the client to change/evolve
  - Keep the client motivated and focused
- You know you are trying too hard when you feel tired or frustrated and/or the client is resisting.

- If the client is fighting you, ask them why and ask them to direct the coaching for the session.

## **Mistake 21**

### ***Not hearing what client is saying.***

- At some point during most conversations, people stop listening because they can guess what the person is about to say next.
- The trick is to listen newly to each client, even if you've "heard it before." Fact is, you've never heard this before because every time is different.
- Respect your clients; pay attention. Ask questions, even if you're sure you understand. Seek to learn, not to assume.

## **Mistake 22**

### ***Letting the client rattle you.***

- Clients will say things to you about you or your coaching that may upset or rattle you.
- Find out what's behind their concern and, at the same time, extend your boundaries to protect you.
- Clean, clear, and full communication is a part of the agreement between coach and client, and it's up to you to ensure that the client honours this.
- Clients are human and have bad days. Do understand and be patient, but don't step over it.

## **Mistake 23**

### ***Laying your Personal O.S. on the client.***

- Personal O.S. = Personal Operating System, aka laying your trip on the client.

- What works for you won't necessarily work for, or even be right for, some of your clients.
- The stretch for the coach is to be comfortable - and effective -- with clients who think, operate, and live from a different set of rules, priorities and assumptions than yours.

## **Mistake 24**

### ***Getting side-tracked by diversions.***

- When clients don't want to achieve something, solve a problem or face something, they will create diversions (consciously or unconsciously).
- Typical diversions include:
  - Personal or professional crisis
  - A new "much more interesting" goal
  - Sudden interest in you/your life
  - Sudden interest in abstract/conceptual conversations
  - Rat-a-tat talking about themselves/unrelated issues
- Solution? Press client to stick with and complete what they set out to achieve or resolve.

## **Mistake 25**

### ***Pushing client hard through blocks.***

- All clients get stuck; how you (and they) handle this is important.
- I prefer to obliterate the block than to push, pull or convince the client to move through the block.
- In any case, blocks are there for an often very good reason, so help the client fully understand the nature and dynamic of the block instead of stressing the client to push through relentlessly.

- With true understanding and full acceptance, most blocks disappear on their own.

## **Mistake 26**

### ***Avoiding difficult/touchy topics.***

- Clients hire you for specific work, but it's hard to do great coaching if you cannot include all relevant aspects of a client's life, work/business.
- Rather than avoid sensitive subjects, simply ask the client how much room you must speak about stuff that they haven't brought up themselves.
- Or ask directly: "Can we talk about X?"
- If X is important to you, it's probably important to the client as well.

## **Mistake 27**

### ***Not initiating topics of discussion.***

- You don't have to limit what gets discussed during a client coaching call strictly by what the client brings up.
- 25-50% of the topics discussed are ones that I brought up, at the beginning/end/during the call.
- Obviously, segue to and from your topics and let the client decline if they aren't interested, but do bring stuff up that you feel is relevant. It's another way to add value and stay ahead of the client.

## **Mistake 28**

### ***Talking about yourself too much.***

- I feel it is valuable to share stuff about yourself (relevant experience, commiserating stories, illustrative anecdotes, personal challenges in that area, etc.)
- The trick is to keep your sharing short. Any personal story of yours that runs over 60 seconds is suspect.

## **Mistake 29**

### ***Not sharing personal experiences.***

- Coaching isn't therapy; you can and are encouraged to share stuff about yourself and relevant life experiences when it will help the client better understand themselves/the situation.
- If you put a limit of 30-60 seconds on your share, you'll probably not go too far.

## **Mistake 30**

### ***Holding the client back.***

- To protect the client from failure, stress or pain, the coach sometimes holds back their coaching or suggests the client scale back their goals.
- Tough call, but I prefer to fully inform the client of the possible risks of their large goals and seek permission to be totally upfront as needed and then see how far the client can go.
- The mistake coaches make is to play God or to hold the client down to what the coach could do.

## **Mistake 31**

### ***Using clients to meet emotional needs.***

- If you're getting high/really excited about your client's successes, you might be getting your needs met vicariously through their success.
- It's cool to feel great/happy for the client, but if your mood is altered significantly (up or down), you may be getting some of your personal needs met by the client.
- Remember, your coaching is 'over' at the end of each session. The results are a great by-product.

## **Mistake 32**

### ***Needing credit for client's successes.***

- Coaches never really know exactly how much their coaching contributes to a client's success.
- I've found it easier to seek/take no credit for my clients' success than trying to figure out the difference my coaching has made with a client.
- I used to feel slighted when my clients didn't appreciate or recognize the full value of my role/wisdom, but that was just my stuff.
- Be happy for your client's success; don't seek credit, even if your role was key.

## **Mistake 33**

### ***Using clichés' and jargon.***

- We all use clichés' and jargon to some extent, so it's a simply a matter of frequency.

- The problem with personal development jargon is that it confuses one party and/or weakens the discussion because you are hiding behind jargon.
- Use a non-jargony mentor coach to replace jargon with simple words and to replace your clichés with fresher advice.
- Jargon puts people off. Clichés' make you sound dumb.

### **Mistake 34**

#### ***Falling into the "I-am-the-coach; you-are-the-client; listen-to-me" trap.***

- This is a power trip.
- Some clients like/need it, but it's remedial coaching and can create a dependency.
- If the client is that resistant, find out why or work on an easier goal.
- Modern coaching is a collaborative partnership.

### **Mistake 35**

#### ***Underestimating the client's abilities.***

- My view is that humans operate at 20% of their capacity - creative, intellectual, emotional, spiritual - so there is lots of room/potential!
- I ask far more of my clients than they would ask of themselves and keep asking until they say stop - you never know how much the client can do until you push them far beyond their "limits."
- Don't play God and ask your clients to do only what you feel they are "ready for." Bad form.

## **Mistake 36**

### ***Expecting too much of the client.***

- How much should/can you expect of a client? If you're not sure, ask the client - they'll tell you!
- I've found that I often would expect my clients to be as quick as I am and to make huge changes in minutes. I was frustrated, the client stressed.
- Every client has a natural pace that they can handle/sustain. Find out what that is and adjust your coaching expectations accordingly (or find out if the client wants to accelerate that pace as a coaching goal itself).

## **Mistake 37**

### ***Teaching concepts without context.***

- How can you teach attraction without teaching about personal foundation?
- How can you teach love without teaching acceptance and forgiveness?
- How can you teach success without gratitude?
- How can you teach strategy without vision?
- How can you teach coaching without wisdom?
- Whatever you teach, include the context that gives it meaning.

## **Mistake 38**

### ***Ignoring/missing the client's clues.***

- Clients will tell you everything you need to know about them and what's most important to them, if you will learn to listen for this instead of coaching so much.
- Clues to listen for:



- Flip comments - the truth resides behind these.
- Euphemisms - the truth is the opposite of what's said.
- Silence - the truth is there; waiting to be articulated.
- Dissonance - the truth is either one or the other.
- When in doubt, ask the client to keep talking until something gets clear.

### **Mistake 39**

#### ***Accepting euphemisms as truth.***

- Clients sometimes put a positive spin on stuff they may not want to get into with their coach, but it's the coach's job to pick up on this spin and ask the client about it.
- Remember, coaches are in the truth business; anything less, and the value of coaching diminishes.
- If you don't get what your client is saying, speak up and ask them to be speak more clearly. Often, they want you to point this out and bring it out.

### **Mistake 40**

#### ***Using a patronizing/parental tone.***

- Some coaches' tone isn't clear and clean. It carries a charge or weight to it, which gets in the way of clean communication.
- Sometimes, a coach takes a patronizing tone, speaking to clients like children or idiots.
- Is this you? You won't know unless you ask 5 clients and 5 colleagues the question "Is there any trace of patronization or parenting in my tone?"

### **Mistake 41**

#### ***Using email to discuss touchy subjects.***

- Email is good for routine client service and even for creative discussions.
- But when the client is struggling with something, it's better to pick up the phone and reach out for a real-time talk. Works wonders.

## **Mistake 42**

### ***Missing client appointments.***

- It happens, about 1-2% of the time, maximum.
- Any more than that and take it as sign to do something drastic about your schedule, system, self or clients.

#### **Tips:**

- Schedule clients in back-to-back banks of calls.
- Have client call you if you don't call them on time.
- Set up a reminder system do you don't forget.
- Use an alarm clock.

## **Mistake 43**

### ***Being blunt/direct without warmth.***

- Clients are paying for truth, but not for cruelty.
- The truth can hurt, so be sensitive and caring.
- When communicating touchy stuff, keep your tone "charge neutral" (clean, without gooey-ness or criticism).
- Feelings matter: truth without compassion is needlessly harsh and is unprofessional.

## **Mistake 44**

### ***Interrupting the client's sharing flow.***

- Many clients create as they speak; let them.

- Even if the client sounds unclear, give them room to talk it through and make sense of it themselves.
- Don't pepper with questions or comments; be there in mind and spirit, but don't interrupt. Be quiet even when client reaches lull/takes a breath; the good stuff is just about to surface.
- Don't let your penchant for clarity cause you to interrupt your clients thinking/sharing process.

## **Mistake 45**

### ***Peppering the client with questions.***

- Asking questions is an important part of the coaching process.
- You ask questions for two reasons:
  - To get information from the client
  - To help the client to clarify a goal, value, problem, strategy, need, idea, situation, or priority.
- The mistake is to ask many different questions without 'hearing' what the client has said and responding to that. Peppering is annoying.

## **Mistake 46**

### ***Not having the client feel heard.***

- In a quest to coach well, sometimes coaches don't make sure the client feels heard. They don't realize that when the client feels heard and gotten, that something new opens for the client, which is a key part of the coaching process.
- Remember, you are hearing the client and the client feeling heard are two very different things.

- Find ways to let your client know you both hear their words, feelings, ideas, concerns, and dreams - all of it, not just the words.

## **Mistake 47**

### ***Correcting the client's language.***

- In an attempt to helping a client, improve what they are trying to say, some coaches force clients to speak the way the coach does and eradicate:
  - Any "negative-sounding" words or terms.
  - Feelings that are not 'productive and positive.'
  - Attitudes that aren't picture perfect.
  - Humanness.
- These coaches are afraid of experiencing the full range of emotions and restrict their client's freedom to feel the way they do. Unfortunate.

## **Mistake 48**

### ***Thinking you should have the answers.***

- Sometimes you'll have answers to the client's needs/problems/questions, other times, you won't.
- Don't feel pressure to have the answers unless the client has hired you as an expert in that area.
- If the client is pressuring you inappropriately, ask them to stop, and work with them to find their own answers or refer to someone who does.

## **Mistake 49**

### ***Letting clients follow advice blindly.***

- Don't let clients follow your advice unless you're sure they've filtered and adapted it to fit for them and their situation.

- Clients follow advice blindly because:
- They want to please you.
- They don't want to or cannot think for themselves.
- They want someone available to blame if they fail.
- They are stuck in a child/client role.
- If occurring, stop giving advice and ask client to generate their own solutions and strategies.

## **Mistake 50**

### ***Being too directive with clients.***

- Some coaches are directive; others are non-directive - it's your choice, as a coach where you want to coach along the directive-ness spectrum.
- Best to choose, based on each client's needs.
- You know you are being too directive if:
- You are doing most of the talking during the session.
- The client depends on you for marching orders.
- You feel like you are managing the client's life.
- You are not bringing out the wisdom of the client.

The biggest  
mistake you  
could ever make  
is being too  
afraid to make  
one.