

The Importance of Intruding

Because most coaching sessions are brief, intruding on the client's report or storytelling may be necessary to get to the heart of the matter. As a coach, you use your Level III awareness to decide when to do that. Rather than wait for a socially polite break in the conversation, you interrupt and redirect the conversation or ask a question. Often, your intuition urges you to intrude. Note that it isn't necessary to be rude. However, some may perceive your interruption as impolite or disrespectful, especially in parts of the world where such behavior is considered a faux pas. Remember, too, that clients usually know when they're droning on and on.



If you don't redirect this type of rambling, clients begin to think of the coaching session as a place to tell stories, and before long, they're dissatisfied and ready to abandon the coaching relationship. Clients do not want to spend all their time in a coaching session with "and then I ..." or "and she said ...". Some clients will also keep talking until you say something. In their desire to be good clients or to be thorough, they keep pressing on, hoping you will step in and save them or get the conversation back on track.

Preparing Clients for Interruptions

It's essential to set expectations at the beginning of the coaching relationship. Let clients know that interruptions may occur during sessions and that this is a natural part of the coaching process. This helps create understanding and prevents the client from feeling disrespected. By explaining that the coaching conversation is different from casual chatting, you gain the permission you need to guide the conversation effectively.

Intruding on the Story, Not the Client

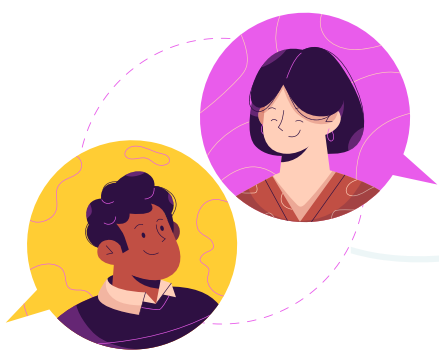
Coaches may hesitate to interrupt, fearing it's not in line with their personal style. However, the goal is to intrude on the story that prevents the client from focusing on the deeper issues, not on the client themselves. Coaches need to decide whether they prefer to be polite or to interrupt for the sake of the client's growth and clarity.

Trusting Your Experience and Intuition

While it's essential to leave your own agenda out of the conversation, there are times when taking charge is necessary. Your training and experience give you the authority to make strong requests, pose challenges, or tell hard truths. Trusting your intuition helps you determine the right moment to intervene and move the conversation forward.

When More Information is Not Necessary

Sometimes, coaches hesitate to intrude because they believe they need more context before asking a coaching question. While it's important to hear the client's story to provide context and build rapport, it's equally important to recognize when the story is becoming a smoke screen. Interrupting at the right time accelerates the process, helping the client focus on learning and action.



Sample Dialogues of Interrupting

The following dialogues are between a manager and the manager's direct report.

Example A: Poor Use of the Skill

Coachee: It's Mary again. She is so unbelievably contrary. If I say I think we should go east, she says no, we should head west. If I say the only way to meet the deadline is to hire outside help, she says no, it's up to us. It just means we need better teamwork. Teamwork! What could be more hypocritical? Over and over, I've asked her to be a more involved member of the team. And it's always, "I don't have the time" or "This is your team to run." You know, excuse after excuse. She's the one who's constantly undermining the team.

COACH: It's got to be frustrating trying to work with someone like that.

Coachee: Well, yeah. Did I tell you her latest?

COACH: More of the same, I'm sure.

Coachee: Of course. It doesn't end ... blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah...



Example B: Good Use of the Skill

Coachee: It's Mary again. She is so unbelievably contrary. If I say I think we should go east, she says no, we should head west. If I say the only way to meet the deadline is to hire outside help, she says no, it's up to us...

COACH: Sounds like an endless battle of wills.

Coachee: I'll say.

COACH: What will change the game?

Coachee: Excuse me? I'm not sure what you mean.

COACH: What will it take to break the cycle? What are the strengths you bring to this situation?

Coachee: Well, that's interesting ... Compassion comes to mind. It's a huge value of mine.

COACH: How will being compassionate help break up this battle?

Excerpt from:

Kimsey-House, Henry. *Co-Active Coaching: Changing Business, Transforming Lives*. Quercus. Kindle Edition.