



Solution-focused short-term coaching

Here: Coaching with only one conflict party

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1. Initial situation

Conflicts in the work environment with superiors and employees are basically an “evergreen“ in day-to-day coaching sessions and cannot be principally avoided. Usually only one of the conflicting parties comes into coaching, namely the one who suffers the most from the conflict or is looking for a solution.

The following dialogue is based on a real case and has been modified and reproduced accordingly while maintaining anonymity.

2. Solution-focused short-term coaching

Techniques from solution-focused short-term coaching are particularly suitable in such conflict situations. With scaling questions, the current “level of suffering“, small progress that has already been made unnoticed and wishes can be made tangible and measurable.

The focus in coaching is always to have the “goal in mind“ (from the client's point of view) in order to not get lost in details, causes and blame in connection with the conflict. The challenge for the coach is to remain neutral (or rather: “all-party“) because there is a natural tendency to empower the client in her problem. The "art" is to let all parties to the conflict have their say, i.e. even those who are not part of the coaching - they are always "virtually" present anyway. The perspective of “the other“ is often surprisingly correct from the client's perspective, since they have sometimes lived with their conflict in the workplace for years.

Coaching: „Conflict at work“





The following example illustrates how this suffering can be transformed into first solutions.

3. Coaching session: questions and answers

Ms. P. came to me for coaching through a recommendation and despite constant time pressure due to a high workload. She suffered from the poor appreciation by her manager who would not recognize her work and commitment to the company. Rather, her work would either be taken for granted or simply overlooked. Over the years, Ms. P. perceived these working conditions more and more as a conflict with her boss. This not only affected her motivation and joy in and with her work, but also her general well-being. In her private environment she became increasingly grumpy and dissatisfied, which was also shown by further conflicts with her partner and friends.

She described her goal as "once again being able on a Sunday evening to look forward to the following Monday as a working day".

The following dialogue summarizes the key scenes in the solution-focused short-term coaching, which only lasted over 2 sessions.

Person	Questions	Answers
Coach	"What would be your boldest hope as to the outcome of today's meeting?"	
Client		"That I can regain joy in and with my work."
Coach	"I understand - this is very important! You said ‚regain‘: How did you experience your work when you were still happy to be there? "	



Person	Questions	Answers
Client		<i>"Well, that was a few years ago: back then I received praise and recognition for my work, but today that is probably no longer common."</i>
Coach	<i>"You call it 'praise and appreciation': let's assume your boss would be here with us now and I would ask him what he thinks is good about your work - what do you think he would say?"</i>	
Client		<i>"Difficult to say, he would probably mention my reliability and structured way of working. Because I love to prioritize the tasks assigned to me and to tackle them in a planned manner."</i>
Coach	<i>"Wow, I can only congratulate him on an employee like you: what do you think he would say, what he wants from you, maybe something that you could do more or differently?"</i>	
Client		<i>"He would probably chop around again that, from his point of view, I paid too little attention to working with my colleagues"</i>
Coach	<i>"I see - what do you think he would want from you instead?"</i>	
Client		<i>"That I should involve my colleagues more in my work plans - but that only costs me more time, which I don't have anyway."</i>
Coach	<i>"How would he react if you - just hypothetically - accepted this additional effort and consciously paid attention to the involvement of your colleagues in your next or current project?"</i>	
Client		<i>"He would probably be less grumpy and dismissive of me."</i>
Coach	<i>"What do you think you would instead be able to observe in his behavior towards you?"</i>	
Client		<i>"He would probably smile sometimes or stop at my desk for a short small talk."</i>
Coach	<i>"If you visualize this situation at your desk: what do you think would you notice, what you would do differently, compared to nowadays?"</i>	



Person	Questions	Answers
Client		<i>"I would probably smile too, would be more balanced and kind to him."</i>
Coach	<i>"That's very interesting: would your colleagues notice your different behavior, too?"</i>	
Client		<i>"Yes, certainly, they would probably be more willing to speak to me, since they would not have to worry about disturbing me in my work."</i>
Coach	<i>„I understand: on a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 stands for 'I have no appreciation and recognition at all' and 10 for 'my work is always valued and recognized' - where do you think you are today?"</i>	
Client		<i>"Maximum at 3, if at all."</i>
Coach	<i>"Wow, what happens that you are already at a 3?"</i>	
Client		<i>"Well, that's not a lot, but at least I got an email from my boss last week in which he commented positively on the current status of my project."</i>
Coach	<i>"I'm pleased for you: and where do you think you would be on this scale when you think back to the scene you described, in which your boss stops by at your desk for a small talk?"</i>	
Client		<i>"That was just hypothetical, but that would be at least an 8."</i>
Coach	<i>"Would you be at your goal then, I mean with an 8?"</i>	
Client		<i>"Absolutely, a 7 would also be enough for me."</i>
Coach	<i>"Great - I'm glad to hear! What will you do differently in your work tomorrow so that you can see a small progress from your 3 - for example towards a 3.5?"</i>	
Client		<i>"Perhaps I could invite my colleagues to a meeting in which I would present the current status of my project and then discuss the next steps with their contributions. If we then presented this to our boss, he would definitely react positively."</i>



Person	Questions	Answers
Coach	"Congratulations: that sounds like a wonderful plan, I'm sure you are on the right path with it!"	

4. Result and conclusions

True to the motto *"The solution does not matter how the problem arose"*, the key to resolving the conflict lay with the client herself: her own behavior has led to reactions and back-reactions, which, in this case, has further aggravated the conflict over years.

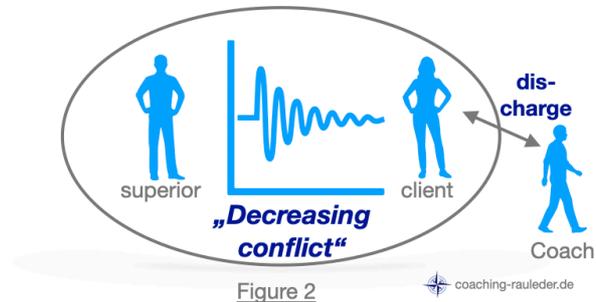
The change from one's own perspective to that of the manager is surprisingly easy in most cases and leads to a more conscious perception of one's own behavior and the reactions triggered by it. In such cases, the pattern interruption often succeeds through a so-called "miracle question", which can clarify a target state, however unrealistic it may seem to the client at the moment.

In addition, progress that has already been made (*"Wow, what happens that you are already at a 3?"*) should be recognized verbally and non-verbally in order to increase the client's awareness of her own solution competence and responsibility. There is no conflict at all times, which is why the exceptions, i.e. the conflict-free phases, should be deepened by asking targeted questions. In this way, the client's confidence in the feasibility of the task can increase step by step, in this case the resolution of the longstanding conflict situation at her workplace.

After all, it is important to draw the client's attention to observable progress in her near future, because once "the ball is rolling", progress is more or less "inevitable" Unfortunately, such progress is often overlooked due to too much attention on things that are considered to be bad.



Coaching with one conflict party: result



The coach has then achieved his real goal: to make himself and his support redundant!

5. References

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