

HIDDEN TRAPS • WOMEN & MONEY • POSITIVE PROVOCATEUR • GRIEF & LOSS

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UN- speakables:

*Uncomfortable topics
we avoid that impact
coaching outcomes*

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I ABHOR MY CLIENT'S POLITICS

The Situation:

"After working together for some time, my client revealed their affinity for an abhorrent political character that opposes all of my values. I was gobsmacked and got off the call. How do I deal with this in the next coaching call, or do I ignore it?"



By Victoria Trabosh, CDC®, CEC

First, know that I sympathize with you. It's a tough job to look at someone objectively when they reveal affinities we reject or find abhorrent. Might I suggest that your dislike lies with the political character rather than your client? You may be experiencing transference. Transference occurs when these unresolved emotions and desires are projected onto someone in our present life, which reminds us of the person or situation that caused them. If that could be the case, please read on.

There are highly polarizing characters and ideologies in today's political landscape. Transference of anger is happening daily from the few to the many. You don't say where you are from, but these characters are worldwide. There are political marches, uprisings, violence, and, from many people's perspectives, ignorance and chagrin that anyone – much less someone we know – could find truth in the statements or actions of another we have identified as detestable in our eyes.

Our histories significantly affect how we see others, and the lack of boundaries and hate-filled diatribes in social media bring great distress to many of us. I have continued to speak up in

cases where I find attitudes and activities abhorrent. Doing it with grace, active listening, acknowledging my emotions, and good self-care can help keep me level and steady.

When you think about your client, can you separate this issue from the good work you've done together? As for the next call, you could ignore the topic if you have resolved the issue yourself. If it comes up again, you could state that you oppose this person and would prefer not to have political discussions. But you must both agree that the topic is off-limits, or it can lead to passive-aggressive behavior in your client.

As a coach, you deal with difficult conversations and topics. Consider ending the relationship if your values don't allow you to see your client embrace a person or ideology you would never embrace. Tensions with clients can create bad feelings and inelegant coaching, so think about this carefully. But if you choose to end the relationship, discuss why you are ending it with the client.

Understanding your emotions and maintaining clear expression will allow you to help your client and become a better coach and person.

By Craig Carr, BCC, PCC, CPCC

My first response is, “What took so long?” People don’t line up with an abhorrent political character overnight. You overrode the clues you were given. You didn’t listen, or you deemed the territory too dangerous. The clues came via value statements, beliefs, opinions, actions, language patterns, choices, perspectives, tone and attitude. It will be useful to your evolution as a coach to look back and assess what you stepped over and why.

Your question, “Do I ignore it?” reveals that you have more to learn from this encounter and are susceptible to stepping over those lessons. Start here: What’s different now, other than they said it out loud? Is it possible they told you this to challenge you because you never responded to the clues? What if this wasn’t meant to aggravate you but was an awkward strategy to get closer to you? I won’t lament the general level of current political discourse, but – in the spirit of this issue’s theme of “going to the hard place” – I urge you to aspire to be a coach who never finds yourself in this situation again.

I learned an advanced coaching skill from the late, great Leslie Lupinsky that she called “Share from Self.” It’s not just about giving your opinion or stating where you stand, although that is

at least half the equation. The bigger half of the skill is speaking up with a vulnerability that says, “How do we grow from here?” and “How do we design our relationship so this won’t end it?” The subtext is, “Because that’s what I want for us.”

This is an advanced skill because it can feel risky for a coach to navigate the taboo in the room. To be open to handling whatever happens next – to figuratively not know whether you’ll live or die – is the essence of the adventure of coaching. If you stay in this coaching relationship, understand that there is only one way to persuade your client to shift their place on the political spectrum: If they tell you that their politics is wrecking their life and they want to change!

So, on the next call, I can recommend one of three options: 1. Ask, “What’s important about bringing this up now?” as a way to find out if you were being tested (as if they were asking, “Will you still accept me?” or “Can I trust you?”). 2. Share from self – be open and direct that you went into reaction mode and have reasons. Raise the stakes in finding out if this person wants to keep working with you or if they were trying to bail out of coaching by offending you. Or 3. Pretend it didn’t happen and do the easy thing – ignore and override.

By Suzi Pomerantz, MT, MCC

As humans, we often find ourselves triggered in conversation by a topic that makes us uncomfortable because it challenges our worldview, or opposes values we hold dear. That’s normal. Part of being a professional coach is that you can use your coaching tools and strategies to bring your own awareness into consciousness so you can best choose how to manage your humanity in the face of a client’s beliefs that may offend you.

“You always have the power of choice,” as my friend (and publisher of this magazine) Garry Schleifer always says. You get to choose what will serve the client, you, the coaching relationship and the situation best. You get to weigh the factors involved and determine the most beneficial solution.

Here’s how:

1. Analyze the purpose of this coaching engagement. What are you and the client contracted to achieve together? Does this newfound information about your client’s values or beliefs have any impact on the work you’ve agreed to do in this agreement? Would addressing the issue advance the goals or negatively impact the objective of the coaching?

2. Analyze your relationship with the client. Is your relationship personal as well as professional? How boundaried have you been with this client? Can you set aside your discomfort and still serve the client’s agenda? If you’ve worked together for some time, you may have sufficient relatedness to let the client know you had a reaction and take responsibility for your reaction.

3. Analyze your discomfort and triggers with your own coach. It’s great that you noticed in real time that you were experiencing a disconnect between your values and the conversation with the client. I wonder what caused that experience for you? What assumptions or beliefs contributed to your discomfort? Who do you want to be for your client? Is there anything you need to say to your client to address this or is it best left unspoken? Can your coach help you identify blind spots?

4. Analyze the situation. In this case, you are in this relationship for the purpose of being of service as a coach to the client. So, does their affinity for a politician matter at all in this context? How much or how little does this new knowledge of your client impact your ability to create a safe space for them to get the results they want to achieve? Does the political landscape matter in the context of their goals?

You get to manage you and choose whether and how you address it with your client. Once you’ve had a chance to analyze these factors, use that clarity to determine what action (if any) you’ll take on the next call. Good luck! •

Are you grappling with a sticky situation?

You don’t have to go it alone. Let our senior coaches give you some different perspectives to consider. Email your situation to submissions@choice-online.com and put “sticky situations” in the subject line.