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## COACHING IN CHAOS

Navigating a rapidly changing world

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# HELPING A CLIENT LEAD THROUGH CHAOTIC CHANGE

## The Situation:

“My client showed up to coaching saying they feel jittery and unsettled. Their organization is rolling out new technology, and processes they relied on are shifting daily. They’re juggling urgent demands, a stressed-out team, and a revolving door of new hires that need to be onboarded and trained. The pace of change feels relentless, and they are constantly behind. They want to advocate for themselves and their team, but they observe that senior leadership is highly distracted. How do I support them?”



By Craig Carr, PCC, CPCC

**W**hat’s happening goes beyond change fatigue. This kind of systemic overload is becoming more common in fast-moving sectors, leaving our clients feeling overwhelmed and unable to cope. They’re caught in a perfect storm driven by rapid technological changes, shifting processes, a team in disarray, and leadership that’s too distracted to offer real guidance.

Your client is caught between their team and the organization’s unstable leadership. Unconsciously created as that may be, knowing this won’t make the dynamics any less damaging if they can’t establish an emotional buffer that maintains respectful distance and a sense of agency.

It’s important to remind your client that some of the emotional and operational burdens are the responsibility of leadership – not theirs. This idea might seem counterintuitive because people are typically taught to accept and face any challenges that come their way, and how they do so is a measure of their competence and worth.

While stress may be inherent to your client’s role, recognizing what is theirs to handle — and what isn’t — is a key first step in managing a systemic crisis.

This involves managing their tasks and stress, as well as gaining psychological distance from the system dynamics unfolding around them. To improve this discernment and distance, you

can ask, “What are you carrying that may not be yours to carry?” Or go straight to the core with, “If the system could speak, what would it ask of you?”

These questions might seem unusual, but I’ve noticed they require little explanation for almost everyone. I haven’t met a person who doesn’t understand what it means to “speak for the system.” Sometimes they hesitate, but after a deep breath, a pause and some encouragement, they figure out what to do.

At the very least, this helps both of you understand what can and cannot be solved by just the two of you. When the system is swirling, anchors matter – and helping your client become more intentional about what they won’t carry alone will give them a sense of power and choice.

As a final tip, I’ve found that in situations like this, a solid metaphor can work wonders. A well-crafted metaphor can externalize the dynamic and keep your client grounded. For example, “It’s like being caught in a chaotic river that keeps changing course!” From there, foundations can be strengthened with questions like, “What values can you stand on in the midst of this?”

The biggest caveat is to guard against falling into the trap of trying to look good or sound like you know how to fix this. Trust the coaching paradigm; identity and values are far more stabilizing than chasing control.

By Victoria Trabosh, CDC, CEC

**Y**our client is navigating turbulent change and feeling uncertain about the path ahead. But the clarity they seek is already within them. Your role as a coach is not to provide answers but to create a space where they can uncover their own wisdom.

By asking thoughtful, intentional questions, you can guide them toward clarity, confidence and direction. Great coaching isn't about solving issues for another; it's about empowering others.

Start by acknowledging their experience. When someone feels truly seen and heard, the weight they carry can feel lighter. Ask questions like, "How are you feeling about everything happening right now?" or "What has been the hardest part of this for you?" These questions invite them to name their emotions and reflect on their struggles, laying the foundation for understanding and growth.

Next, help them cut through the noise and clarify their priorities. In the chaos of change, it's easy to lose sight of what matters most. Ask, "What feels most important to focus on right now?" or "What would success look like for you in this situation?" These questions encourage them to identify what's essential and align their energy with their values.

Empower them to advocate for themselves and their team. Ask, "What do you think your team needs most from leadership right now?" or "If you could speak directly to senior leadership, what would you say?" These questions help them find their voice, articulate their needs, and strategize how to communicate effectively.

Support their resilience by exploring self-care and boundaries. Questions like, "How are you taking care of yourself during this time?" or "What helps you feel grounded when things feel overwhelming?" help to remind them that their well-being is not a luxury — it's a necessity.

Finally, encourage them to leverage their support network and take actionable steps forward. Ask, "Who in your network could you lean on for advice or support?" or "What's one thing you can control or influence right now?" These questions shift their focus from feeling stuck to regaining agency.

If they respond with, "I don't know," give them the space to pause and reflect. Trust the process and their ability to find their way forward. Help them identify next steps and hold them accountable in a way that feels supportive. Great coaching is about creating clarity, fostering confidence and empowering action.

By Suzi Pomerantz, MT, MCC

**C**haos foment distraction and agitation. It makes perfect sense that your client — and their leadership — feel the overwhelm and stress you describe. This is a wonderful place for you, as the coach, to leverage your presence, co-regulate your client, and bring forth the wisdom you've integrated from your own growth through resilience to support your client in the calming of their own central nervous system. Then they, in turn, can help their team members (as well as senior leaders) to co-regulate their parasympathetic nervous systems. Here's how:

**1 BREATHE** with and for your client until they co-regulate to your calmness. Guide them to breathe consciously and deeply. Help them cultivate the ability to self-regulate at will.

**2 GROUND** your client with a simple visualization or two, to reinforce that they have the power to stay grounded when the ground beneath them feels as though it is constantly shifting. Point their attention towards noticing the feeling of the soles of their feet solidly supported by the earth, or their backside held by the chair.

**3 VALIDATE** their feelings and experience. The pace of change feels relentless because it is. Don't jump to the cognitive exercise of reflective inquiry until they've handled the somatic and emotional parts.

**4 RELEASE.** What do they need to let go of in order to navigate uncertainty when there is no roadmap? (Hint: it may be a need for control.)

Remind your client they can reclaim personal agency. Help them remember (or clarify) their values so they can make decisions that are aligned with those values. Explore with them how they might hold coherence amidst chaotic change — what will help them to feel safe? It's entirely possible that this constant chaos they are experiencing is triggering past trauma, in which case your role is to help them integrate those past experiences, claim the resilience they developed through survival, and choose wisdom-fueled action.

There is enormous opportunity — once they are grounded and processing their experience — to open the door to a conversation for possibility. As my wise colleague Pamela Richarde says, "Chaos is the raw material for a new order." What new order wants to emerge? Once your client has clarified what might be possible, you can guide them to think through what they would like to say to (or request from) senior leadership to advocate for themselves and their team. •

### 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 [submissionschoice@gmail.com](mailto:submissionschoice@gmail.com) and put "sticky situations" in the subject line.