



The Big Blue Box Ltd

Contracting and Engagement

A coachee and I reflected on the impact and effectiveness of the coaching series we had recently completed.

During the initial 'contracting' conversation with the stakeholders – the employer, project sponsor and the coachee, I had suggested, as I normally do, that we pre-book all the coaching sessions and also include a spare date, just as a contingency. I suggested that we consider the 'pace' for the project by setting a regular interval between the sessions. This should strike a balance between the needs of planning and managing diaries, retaining focus and concentration between sessions whilst allowing time for practice, reflection and experimentation but without unduly disrupting the coachee's business.

We arranged a series of four sessions but my coachee, T, had been somewhat reluctant to commit to all the dates in advance preferring to arrange the sessions on a more ad hoc basis, dependent upon his 'workload'. Looking back now I can see that this was not a good indicator. In almost every project I undertake my coachees are looking for pace, impact and immediate results.

As we got into the series so, we found ourselves repeatedly fixing, postponing and then rescheduling the session dates only to be postponed again at short notice. I had begun to feel disconnected from my coachee.

During one of these extending intervals between the now infrequent and irregular sessions, I learned that T had reported himself ill and was to be 'signed off' work for the next four months.

Upon his return to work, after several months' absence T and I met to catch up, to review our coaching project and decide what to do next. In our discussions several key learning points were identified.

T had had a 'nervous breakdown', the possible causes were discussed but we then reflected upon the indicators that could have been noticed at an earlier stage, I was particularly interested to explore the factors that as a coach I could have noted, reflected and fed back or responded to in a different way that might have been helpful.

T suggested that perhaps the only thing that he felt I could have done differently was to 'insist' and assert that we should stick to the pre-arranged dates and to resist the rearrangement.

By rearranging and cancelling sessions L was clearly disengaging as his condition developed and I can recall feeling that this was very unusual. I can understand, and even plan for one session to be postponed but in this case several sessions were repeatedly rearranged.

I feel I have learned to be clearer about holding the coachee to their part of the contract- their commitment and engagement is a prerequisite of success, and if it reduces then, as the coach, I should consider a response.

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