Directive or Non-Directive?

Coaching as an organizational culture and effective leadership style, through a change management process, to ensure sustained impact over time, now has a growing body of evidence in internationally refereed journals as a way to increase efficiency, bottom line and employee engagement, amongst other things. However, there are so many people saying that they are coaches or that they use coaching styles and methodologies in their leadership, consulting and training. What we question is competency levels, experience and opportunities for reflective practice to ensure that professionals are benchmarked and members of international professional bodies so that they are not giving coaching a bad name.
We need clarity around the definition and understanding of ‘directive’. When we say that we are directive in our coaching we are talking about times that we steer the process, or encourage my client to consider some aspect of their thinking. We class this as directive and a necessary part of coaching. So when we talk about being non-directive we are referring to the fact that we do not want to tell clients what to do or point them towards particular solutions. Note the distinction here between steering the process and not dictating the outcome. The problem is that we have often been in similar situations to our clients, so solutions can regularly pop into my head. What if we helped them and shared my experiences to possibly save them time and money and headaches too? Well, that’s not coaching, it is mentoring. It is not ok for a coach to judge and self-management and reflection bring awareness around. I have, in the past, felt I have judged clients, what they say, how they deal with others, what I think about their solutions, their behavior and attitude, their time scale for action or their thinking. This was in the early days where, and I am being vulnerable and human here, self-management was a development area during coach training. When a client is brainstorming ideas I might think “I wouldn’t do that” or “fantastic idea”. Some judgments are obvious, however, our beliefs, religion, values, culture and experiences all influence our judgment and so judgments may be made unconsciously. This highlights the need for peer-to-peer awareness sessions that we call ‘explosions of the truth’ as well as supervision/mentoring as coaches AND coaches being coached on their coaching. In a coach mentoring session I became aware that I had judged a client decision to stay in their job that they hated. Had this influenced the coaching? Possibly, if there was no awareness in the moment of it happening. How can this become a positive – blurtting - ‘I seem to have an agenda on this decision’. Let the client know. Both scenarios still happen despite years of continuous professional and personal development, and they happen less often than they once did. If you are using coaching as a leadership style, in teams or on-on-one, accept that directive and judgmental thinking will happen. The aim is to build your awareness of it and then to reduce the negative influence on your coaching and to use the awareness positively, consciously and deliberately.

**NON-DIRECTIVE COACHING**

This method allows your coach or your team to lead the way, forming his/her or their own conclusions. The benefits of this coaching competence is long lasting. When managers tell an employee something, research shows that only 10% of people are likely to recall it correctly after 3 months. If they provide non-directive coaching, that number goes up to 95%! (The Power of Non-Directive Coaching, Lauren Buys, Human Capital Review). The impact of training is also increased three fold when followed-up with coaching.

**WHAT’S THE POINT HERE?**

With this method, the client comes to a solution that fits their individual needs, and is therefore more likely to act on it. Also, the coach doesn’t have to be an expert on the client’s specific issue in order to be successful. The coach simply needs to remain open-minded, non-judgmental, and listen. The only drawback of this coaching competence is that it can take much longer to come to a conclusion. And it is also fine to stay processing things and not come to a conclusion. To illustrate the above, I am going to focus on presence in the light of reflective practice.

**PRESENCE**

What works for many coaches is to prepare yourself for a coaching session by moving into a calm, quiet and reflective state inwardly and outwardly. Your presence is affected by what you believe about your client, holding them creative and resourceful, as well as your role in the relationship. The BMC Coach ME Model believes in BELIEVE, MOMENTUM and CELEBRATION. In this light, everyone has their own inner wisdom, they know the answers. This wisdom provides all the answers they will ever need. I coach from a place where inner wisdom will surface in the right environment, using powerful questions. I let go of the responsibility for coming up with solutions; this is the client’s responsibility. My role is to facilitate and co-create with client to access their invisible coach so that they can find their own solutions. Why? If it comes from them, they will own it, have more momentum to action it and be able to feel the results, to celebrate in whichever way fits them best. I also have a great deal of respect for people’s stories and a love for enabling potential in others. I would also describe it as having an open heart towards the person. I try to see the person behind any behavior or thinking that I may not agree with, and this acts to take the itch out of any judgment I might make. I also journal about what I learn from clients in terms of what I can do better by asking them how their coaching was. I ask myself, ‘Am I looking for a particular answer to this question and when that question was asked, who or what purpose is it serving?’ Reflection helps us become masters at our work. It’s not about stopping the thoughts from arising. It is about taking the time to choose which to use and which to let go of in the moment.