

RBD Follow-up Notes from APPPC October 12, 2023

Opening conversation:

How we see strengths. Here, we focused on the importance of the perception of strengths. How does the client see a strength? How does the coach see it? How do other people see it? Exploring perceptions and their relationship to strength is a critical step in strengths coaching and ought to be done before getting to the “aiming” portion (as in “name, claim, and aim” your strengths).

We spoke a bit about personality and identity, especially in the context of identity politics. Most modern personality theories suggest that we have multiple identities based on roles (e.g., I am a father and a brother and a friend) and that there is variability even in our personality traits (e.g., I am generally extroverted but not always). People taking an identity politics point of view also acknowledge this, especially through the framework of “intersectionality” (e.g., not only am I a white woman, but I am also a deaf woman and a formally educated woman). As coaches, we can pay attention to aspects of personality, strengths, and identity that appear important to the client. Still, we can also treat them as if they are aspects of the client’s experience and not the sum total of it.

Safe spaces. All of us have been provoked by the idea that we cannot engineer safety for others. We cannot promise a sense of belonging or freedom from emotional distress. That said, we can be honest and transparent. We can promise as much sensitivity as we are capable of. We can express that we are open to feedback. It might be prudent to think of alternative phrases that more accurately describe what we are attempting to establish, such as “courageous spaces” or “respectful spaces” or “transparent spaces.”

Coaching Fishbowl:

Some brief notes:

1. *Strengths.* Traditionally, coaches think of strengths as a tool, as in “How could you use X strength to solve this problem?” What if, instead, strengths serve many other purposes.

For instance, what if strengths are core to identity, as in the question, “What does X strength tell you about yourself?” Or, what if strengths—tied so closely to values—are helpful in decision-making, as in “How might X and Y strengths help you move forward? How might they steer you one direction or another as you make this choice?”

2. *Funneling*. We spoke about the depth of coaching, highlighting the “funneling” from broad, abstract issues (e.g., principles and values) down to the human level (e.g., attitudes and emotions) down to specific examples from real life. It can be tricky to know when to head upward—toward big principles—and when to head downward into concrete examples. CVN mentioned that one technique for dealing with this is to make the choice visible to the client. As in “we could go X or Y direction. What would be most helpful for you?”
3. *Coach relationship with words*. We often attend to a client’s relationship with words. For instance, if a client says, “I feel like a prisoner,” then we can explore that through questions such as “How does that feel?” or “What would you like to be, if not a prisoner?” Perhaps less often, we focus on the coach’s relationship with the word. Does the word “prisoner,” for example, trigger a negative reaction in the coach? Does the coach automatically assume that the person should not be a prisoner or that feeling like a prisoner is a bad thing? It is a great consideration for all of us to reflect on.