

How should you respond to a client who admits to having an extramarital affair?

STICKY SITUATIONS GIVES US A WINDOW INTO CRITICAL COACHING MOMENTS. THIS SITUATION CONFRONTS THE COACH'S SENSE OF RIGHT AND WRONG.

the situation

“I am a former executive, and have been a corporate coach for almost four years. I have a senior corporate executive who has been a client for about a year. Our progress and coaching relationship have been great. My client recently revealed that he is having an affair that has been going on for about eight months. He is married and has two children. I was surprised, as this person did not strike me as someone who would do this. I told him that I personally do not condone this type of behavior. My client, however, is asking me for guidance as to what to do — stay in the affair or leave the marriage? I am in a dilemma about this and am feeling conflicted. I don't feel that this is my area of expertise or that I can coach him through this situation. Where do I go from here?”

Do you have a sticky situation that you want help with or a different perspective on? You don't have to go it alone. Let our senior coaches give you a hand. Please send your situations to: letters@choice-online.com



Craig Carr, PCC, claims, “...running away will never expand coaching skill or deepen a client's learning.”

versus someone who would not and, most relevant, 3) your expertise to coach this client, or not.

“...coaching is about consciousness evolving, and it is our job to lead the way in our own lives so our clients will take courage in theirs.”

First, I'm left wondering if you are a male or female coach (I can't tell by your writing) and in this situation it may make a big difference. In my work on *Danger, Sex and Magic*™ I directly address taboo areas that come up in coaching. They seem scary to us and we want to run away — at a core level we seem to want to save our Soul — and we imagine that if we face the danger we could die. This is core survival stuff that's in our genetic code and how it plays out can vary by gender. Be assured, however, that running away will never expand coaching skill or deepen a client's learning. In the final analysis coaching is about consciousness evolving, and it is our job to lead the way in our own lives so our clients will take courage in theirs.

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Vicki Trabosh says, “He’s a client first — your personal feelings about this issue can cloud your professional judgment.”

Where you go is straight to your definition of integrity for yourself. If your client’s infidelity is unacceptable to you, and it affects your ability to coach him, it may be time to bid him adieu.

Not everything that a client needs can be handled through coaching. Marital difficulties of this kind are best handled by a professional therapist or counselor. Your advice should be for him to take his issues to someone who is skilled, experienced, and objective. Your statement that says you’re conflicted may have to do with the fact that you’re judging him. Fair enough: but you must not believe that you have the answer for him or that it is your place to judge him. He’s a client first — your personal feelings about this issue can cloud your professional judgment. No matter what ‘opinion’ you give (especially if it’s contrary to what he wants to hear), he can say, “You’re not the boss of me!” He’s right — and you could be setting

up tension between the two of you that makes you an ineffective coach for him.

There are consequences to all of our actions. Because he shared information about the affair, he may have blurred your role and responsibility to him as his coach. Set him straight as to what you’re there to do, and get out of the drama of his affair.

If he wants to continue his affair, you then get to decide if it’s a deal breaker for you. Can you coach someone who is actively cheating on his wife? If not, end the coaching relationship. But without knowing it, you may be coaching someone *else* who’s doing the same thing. That begs the question: Would you coach someone who lies, who doesn’t treat their employees well, or who has bankrupted a company through poor management and caused great financial stress to others?

Who do we coach? We coach people with extraordinary vision, who are ordinary in their ability to be flawed. We are *them!*



Carol Adrienne, PhD, states, “Our job is to help clients think through what is in their best interest, as well as all concerned.”

As a coach, you are not a public service. You have the right to opt out if you feel so conflicted that you’ve lost your ability to coach the situation — or if you feel you lack adequate expertise and are simply operating out of judgment. That may be the wisest thing to do.

Another option is to let your client know that you prefer to work with him solely around the business issues, and encourage him to see a therapist. However, it seems you have enough trust built that, despite your admitting that you don’t condone his actions, he still wants to work with you.

A third option is to see this as a chance to apply what you *do* know about coaching — asking questions, brainstorming, clarifying, mirroring, etc. — to the discussion of his affair. This way you could expand your level of expertise, because personal matters often

do enter into business issues.

Frankly, I was a little surprised at your naiveté in saying that you didn’t think that your client was “the type to have an affair.” As a coach, it’s risky to assume that you know what people are going to do or not do.

We know that coaching is not about telling the client what to do, but about outlining and clarifying the issues that they don’t see. For example, I once coached a woman who had started a new business. After a year she was in chaos. Part of the problem was that she had hired friends, who then took her ideas and set up a competitive business. She had also hired another friend, who could not show up for work on time because of family problems. Her pattern showed that she had not learned to set good boundaries between personal and pro-

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...Carr, continued from page 18

Where you go from here in this sticky situation is: compassion, intimacy, challenging the client to get clear on values and desires, deep perspective work, being in the moment with him, possibility planning, and cultivating what he needs most right now — Self Love and Courage. What that all means is to take Heart and open up to explore deeply what must be going on in his world to create this scenario. By all means, stop judging it!

Oh, and one more thing. There are more options that some readers may have already noticed. For example: he could stay in the marriage AND leave the affair; or, he

could leave BOTH the marriage and the affair; or, he can go on keeping things the way they are. All are viable. Who are we to know what is right and best for him? Remember also the old adage that “two options is a decision, not a choice.” Create clarity on the possible outcomes he could have and deepen the fiber of Self that builds inner strength. You’ll notice that in due time one of the options will become obvious. Trust the process and the coaching.

...Adrienne, continued from page 19

professional issues. She put others’ priorities before her own needs.

In the midst of this, she began an affair with a married man —

justifying the guilt she felt by saying she valued his mentoring. We began to look at all her patterns, in order to illuminate her choices. While she wasn’t ready to let the man go yet, she did make progress in hiring non-friends, and clarifying their job descriptions and her expectations so that she was back in charge. My role was to support her in seeing her vulnerability, and to let her review pros and cons.

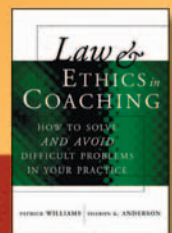
Our job is to help clients think through what is in their best interest, as well as all concerned. If I were coaching you, I’d ask: “What makes you feel so out of your depth?” And, “Is there a way you could treat all this client’s issues with detachment and creativity?” •



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