

How do you address health and hygiene issues with a client?

STICKY SITUATIONS GIVES US A WINDOW INTO CRITICAL COACHING MOMENTS. THIS SITUATION DEALS WITH THE DELICATE ISSUE OF A CLIENT'S PERSONAL HABITS.

the situation

“I am coaching a manager who has made many very positive changes in his working relationships with others. The problem is that he is overweight, a smoker and has personal hygiene issues that have been mentioned by his co-workers. Early in the coaching relationship we had talked briefly about his health and he said he probably should “walk more.” Should I raise these health and hygiene concerns and how do I go about doing do it?”

Are you grappling with a sticky situation of your own? You don't have to go it alone. Let our senior coaches give you some different perspectives to consider. Please send your situations to: letters@choice-online.com



Craig Carr, PCC, urges: “Keep the stakes high and the action steps simple.”

Your client has made positive changes to this point, so congratulations are in order. Still, it's a beautiful thing that the real issue affecting his station in the company is now screaming for attention. Fact is, unless he is a mega-superstar in the outfit, the failure to breach a taboo area here will cause behind-the-scene machinations tending to undermine his authority, acceptance and perhaps ultimately his very employment.

Now that it's clear the stakes are indeed high, what does that say about how to go about the coaching? The first and obvious things are that your discomfort or the client's sensitivity *cannot* be made more important than what is in his path to success. If you can't get over these two things or just don't want to go there, it is imperative you get another coach on the job.

A solid approach will be to use those stakes as a context and to pace deliberately into the topic. There is also a way to downplay the problem by framing it as easily solved, yet critical enough that it cannot be ignored and requires inclusion in the agenda.

Good news: in comparison to other things he has achieved, champion that this will be a piece of cake! Basically, keep the stakes high (and let him know that), and the action steps simple. This will give you both leverage and perspective.

Finally, it's important to keep your focus. Don't be distracted by either feigned or even authentic surprise, or any other emotional response. Leverage points to engage: his job is people and relationship based; his success depends on positive social outcomes; he is being remembered for his social shortcomings rather than for his contribution (ouch!).

And the most important point: his whole life will change when he shifts this one thing.

As is often the case, the bottom line for the coach is to be truthful and straight-up with your client. If you do that knowing you've given it your best shot and not hidden behind a “nice” professional demeanor, you will enjoy the wonder of the unique way your client plays out this segment of his life journey.



Vicky Trabosh, CDC®, says: “Your success as a coach depends on your sensitivity and skill to allow the client to be led from within.”

To mangle the Star Trek opening monologue line from the 1960s TV series: Our bodies – the final frontier.

What appears to be an easy subject is in fact a difficult one. Your client has a past-mentioned “should,” but he may or may not be ready to face his most intimate issues head on.

I asked a client of mine who had been overweight when we began working together how he finally got to the point where he was willing to work on his “final frontier.” He stated that the confidence he gained through our coaching on other areas helped him to face the issue that was truly a problem for him.

You’ve experienced success with and for this client. Now on to new frontiers! But only enter with permission. A great way to engage a client’s permission to move on to a past-mentioned “should” is to have them com-

plete a new intake form with new questions. Example: You have experienced great success during the coaching process. Are there other areas you would like to tackle? Health/ Relationships/Financial Management/etc.

When a client identifies health and weight loss I send them to a fitness coach. If the client can’t afford two coaches, you may need to step aside for a while. But the client who will return to you will be fit, brimming with confidence, smell better (more confidence translates to better self care) and maybe even be a non-smoker (have you ever tried to walk the StairMaster® for 45 minutes and then inhale a cigarette?).

Believe in your client. Your success as a coach depends on your sensitivity and skill to allow the client to be led from within. Work on the issues they identify and own – and seek their permission to address the “shoulds” they mention in passing.



Carol Adrienne, PhD, cautions: “Right now, it’s more your issue than his, since he isn’t consciously aware of how his appearance or grooming impacts others, or he would have made improvements.”

I’d like to know more about your coaching with this client. For example, if you have been working a fairly long time and have handled a lot of other issues, your intuition might be telling you that he could make better career progress if he addressed his personal hygiene (because this is where he impacts co-workers).

Unless you have a very solid relationship where he has given you permission to bring up new directions on your own, I don’t advise mentioning your concerns directly, however. Right now, it’s more your issue than his, since he isn’t consciously aware of how his appearance or grooming impacts others, or he would have made improvements. Smoking and being overweight are not strictly in the domain of your business coaching, so that’s really his business. However, we all know people we’ve worked with who have

such bad body odor or bad breath that we keep our distance. Being oblivious to their impact doesn’t help them get ahead in life.

I would probably just wait and see if there is a session where he’s talking about his interactions with other people in the office. If he feels he has problems with people, maybe you can help him get some insight into his part in the interaction. I would not mention that you have heard anything about him from others, since this is likely to backfire.

If he is facing a job evaluation in the near future, you might take the opportunity to go over where he will be assessed. If he’s looking for ways to improve his chances of a raise, he might be motivated to make some personal changes. I wouldn’t hold out much hope for any changes unless he is internally motivated to take action – especially in the smoking and diet arena. Good luck! •