

SELF-TRUST • THE POWER OF CHOICE • TRUST AT WORK • NEUROSCIENCE OF TRUST

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TRUST.

WHY IS IT INTRINSIC TO COACHING?

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We know that trust is fundamental to coaching, but why? What exactly is trust? How does it work? How can we increase trust with our clients? What is the neuroscience of trust? How can we help ourselves and others build trust? How do we build the competency of trust? What are the nuances of trust? Join us as we explore why trust is so vital to coaching.



THE POWER OF CHOICE

A coach's guide to strengthening trust

By Marlee Carlos, ACC

They told me to trust the coaching process. They told me to trust the client. They told me to trust myself. They didn't tell me that in learning to trust I would be asked to let go of the crutches that gave me a sense of stability in my coaching and professional and personal relationships.

The International Coaching Federation places trust at the heart of the core competencies. It is named in the title of competency four: "Cultivates Trust and Safety." Every coaching program emphasizes the importance of creating a safe environment with clients that allows openness and vulnerability. Coaches think about cultivating trust with our clients almost intuitively.

But how often do we think about our own challenges with trust? *The Thin Book of Trust: An Essential Primer for Building Trust at Work*, by Charles Feltman, defines trust as "choosing to risk making something you value vulnerable to another person's actions."¹ Coaching for meaningful, lasting change requires choice, risk and vulnerability – for the client AND the coach.

Choice implies a deliberate decision. We do not accidentally choose to trust another person. In choosing to trust, we recognize the possibility that the conversation may not end up the way we had hoped, planned or would have prescribed.

Choice puts the onus on the coach to intentionally trust the client. It requires surrendering the desire for control in exchange for the belief in the client's capability to build their own bridge and cross it when ready. Choice is required in every single coaching session.

Risk is calculated. It considers the alternatives. It places greater value on one choice over another. In coaching from a place of trust, we risk feeling stuck in a conversation. We risk faltering to find the "right" question. We risk the clear feeling of adding value. We risk our own sense of worth in placing greater value on our client's potential and development process. Coaching is a risky business.

Choosing to risk anything of value requires vulnerability. Vulnerable coaches need to enter into that exposed space with their clients saying, "I don't know the answer either, but I am right here with you." It takes a lot of bravery to coach from a place of uncertainty.

Of all the things they said, they never said coaching was easy.

3 CRUTCHES THAT REDUCE TRUST

Crutches are useful – ask anyone recovering from a sprained ankle. These wooden or metal devices increase our mobility. They carry our weight. They help us engage with the wider world when we were once confined to a chair. Crutches serve an important purpose. But anyone who has ever used them will tell you that when it's time to transition to walking independently again, crutches become a hindrance. They are the wrong tool for the job.

Coaches often lean on one or more crutches, such as expertise, experience and control, when working with their clients. These crutches meet a personal need, but they reduce trust and lessen the impact of vulnerable coaching.

CRUTCH #1

We know it – When coaches pitch our services to organizations, we often highlight our past experience in the workforce. We led teams and projects. We managed and cultivated emerging leaders. In addition to stellar coaching credentials, we bring expertise in people development and complex organizations.

Coaching for meaningful, lasting change requires choice, risk and vulnerability – for the client AND the coach.

CRUTCH #2

We've been there – Coaches come from diverse backgrounds and bring a wealth of experience that helps us understand and empathize with our clients. We have been in their shoes and borne the weight they now carry. And we learned a lot of helpful strategies in the process. We are ready to share our great insights to save them from heartache. Sound familiar?

CRUTCH #3

We've got it – When talking to clients, how often do coaches say that we can help them develop the self-awareness, behaviors and skills needed to achieve their personal and professional goals? We know that coaching puts clients in the driver's seat, but we are really effective navigators. Trust us. It's all under control.

These crutches have served us in the past. In our professional lives, the perceived "winners" show up with answers. They tap into their experience, networks, degrees and training in order to stand out. If being the best is not already built into our wiring, social conditioning will push us in that direction. We have learned to trust ... but in our own answers and perspectives.

Exerting control over the people, activities and events around us creates certainty – we don't need to trust others because we will make sure the work is done correctly,

the client is happy, and the "right" decision is made. If we ascribe to the "trust, but verify" mindset, we lean towards verifying more often than not. Again, this need for control has served us well in the past. It has protected us and helped us get where we are today.

But what if we are leaning on these crutches when they no longer serve us?

How do we drop them and start to trust our own legs and the walking process again?

5 STEPS TO GREATER TRUST

We often speak of trust as a blanket feeling. We trust or we don't. However, trust is complex. Feltman names four dimensions of trust – care, sincerity, reliability and competence – that help pinpoint where trust exists and where it does not. I may trust that you care about me, but I may not trust that you will do the thing you said you will do.

Similarly, when we work to develop trust in our clients, in the coaching process, and in ourselves as coaches, we also need to begin by naming the part that we doubt – the part that leaves us holding on to our crutch, and our own motivations for hanging on to that doubt. Michael Bungay Stanier talks about this as "prizes" in his book, *The Advice Trap: Be Humble, Stay Curious & Change the Way You Lead Forever*.²

Noticing and understanding our own motivations to show up as the expert, experienced leader or boss doesn't eliminate them. It does so much more! It empowers us with a choice. Do we want to risk our image, certainty and sense of self to show up vulnerably? Are we willing to take a chance and trust?

The movement towards greater trust in coaching is incremental and transformative. Here are five steps to guide the start of your journey to greater trust.

STEP 1

Pay attention – Notice when you are using a crutch and which crutch you are using. Reflect on how that crutch makes you feel. What do you sense in yourself and in your client when you steer the conversation in a certain direction or when you add in your two cents? This isn't the time to judge, but to notice and be curious.

STEP 2

Name one opportunity – Behavioral change is incremental. We often learn through lived experience, so identify just one opportunity where you could have trusted the client, yourself as coach, and the coaching process.

STEP 3

Set the vision – Paint a mental picture of what trust would look like in that situa-

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tion. What would you have asked? What would you have released? How would you feel?

STEP 4

Test it out – Take that first step without your crutch. Notice any change in you and in the client. It's a data point, that's all. This new data empowers you to make your next choice and the one after that, to keep building your trust.

STEP 5

Refine and build – You likely learned a few things about yourself, the coaching process and your coaching style when you tried to trust just a little bit more.

Name that, adjust where needed, and keep going. What's your next opportunity?

Learning to trust ourselves as coaches is risky. So is learning to trust our clients and learning to trust the coaching process. The cost is real, but the reward is great. Unlearning old habits takes time, grace for ourselves, and intentional practice. You've got this. Trust me. •

NOTES

- 1 C. Feltman, *The Thin Book of Trust: An Essential Primer for Building Trust at Work* (2nd ed.). Thin Book Publishing Co., 2021.
- 2 M. Bungay Stanier, *The Advice Trap: Be Humble, Stay Curious & Change the Way You Lead Forever*. Box of Crayons Press, 2020.



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VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

We are currently looking for coaches to join us in our mission to bring coaching to the executive leadership teams of nonprofit organizations globally.

ARE YOU:

- Looking for a way to give back
- A Certified Coach
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