



# Using intuition and trusting one's inner knowing

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Are you sceptical about expressing your intuitive feelings during a coaching session? Don't be. Developing a little intuitive muscle will help clients with their learning.

## What is intuition?

Have you ever had an experience in which you have called someone – a friend or relative, perhaps – because you had a feeling that something wasn't quite right? Or perhaps you have had a major decision to make with several options that logically stacked up, but you had a particularly 'good feel' about one of them. You may even have been chatting to a colleague at work and sensed that they had a concern about something.

All these are examples of our intuitive sense in action – our non-analytical response to a particular situation or question about what the best course of action is. Whom should we involve? Is this a good decision? What's going on with someone? And so on. Intuition is one of those things that we do, but we don't know how it happens. Some people trust their intuition and act on it, whilst others deny it and dismiss it as irrational.

*The Oxford English Dictionary* describes intuition as 'immediate

insight or understanding without conscious reasoning'. It is quite simply an inner knowing that something is right or not right, and it is invaluable in a coaching context.

## Why is intuition useful in coaching?

For a coach, being able to use intuition is an extremely powerful and effective way of working with clients. It is equally as important as skilled and deep listening and questioning. Accessing and articulating our intuitive sense about something that is going on with the client can lead to much deeper levels of insight and understanding; it adds another dimension to our usual logical and rational perspectives. Yet, some coaches may feel a little reluctant to articulate their intuition, precisely because it doesn't seem logical or rational, or perhaps because it doesn't conform to their way of thinking about the world. We shall explore how to overcome this later.

A useful approach to take when coaching clients is to encourage them to tap into their intuitive sense about situations and issues that they are discussing – to check out their 'gut feel' about what is going on. But be careful. People experience intuition in many different ways, and taking time to identify where this experience occurs for the client is also important. It may be a 'gut feel', but it could equally be a sensation in the chest or in the personal space that surrounds them. The insights gained, though, whatever the experience, may lead to some enlightening perspectives on issues and problems.

### Key learning points

- ◆ Intuition and self-awareness are prerequisites for effective coaching.
- ◆ Intuition is like a muscle; it needs regular exercise to maintain effectiveness.
- ◆ Developing your ability to be relaxed and aware, present and non-judgmental will serve you well as a coach.
- ◆ Coaches need to be role models for their clients.
- ◆ It's OK if you interrupt the client to describe your intuition, because it helps with their learning.

## Interpreting intuitive feelings

How do we know when we are being intuitive?

Intuition isn't a logical process. It is often unusual or even unreasonable, and it takes courage and confidence to trust the effect that it can have. Think of your intuition as something that is readily available to tap into, rather than something that has to be developed or created. Notice it and say what is on your mind. If you start analysing it, then you will be back 'inside your head' and will come out with a completely different interpretation.

For example, as I was writing this module, on a bright and blustery morning, I looked out of the window. As the wind blew, it rustled the branches on the tree in my garden and it struck me (intuitively) that the movement of the branch was a symbol of intuition. It comes and goes in an instant and needs to be expressed just as seen, heard or felt in that moment.

Interpreting intuition means recognising your own intuitive 'hot buttons'. Do you get a sensation in your head, gut or some other part of your body? Do you notice sounds or see shapes, or do words spring to mind? Start by noticing where your intuition comes from and use it to support your client in the coaching process.

## Articulating your intuition

How do we tell clients when we intuit something?

This is often the most difficult part for the coach. Intuition may be very intangible – which is a great reason to explore it.

*'Imagine yourself as an empty vessel with no ego, no agenda and no baggage.'*

The easiest way for a coach to articulate their intuition to the client is to start like this:

*My intuition is telling me that ...*

Simply wait for a response from the client.

Other examples include these:

*I am sensing that ...*

*I would like to check something out with you, if I may.*

*I am wondering if ...*

*I have noticed that ...*

*I am not sure how to describe this, but ...*

*May I share what my gut instinct is telling me?*

The key to all these approaches is that you are asking permission. The client can refuse, but in all likelihood they will encourage you to tell them more. As their coach,

you are responsible for sharing all the information available to you with them, so that they are encouraged to become even more self-aware.

Some coaches are reluctant to interrupt a client who is in full vocal flow. However, interruption often helps the client to get quickly to the point of their story and move on. If a coach procrastinates too much about how they are going to describe their intuition, then the moment is lost. Bumbling (as I often call it) – trying to express yourself, but not quite getting it right – demonstrates that you are human, and also means that as a coach you will be operating with authenticity.

## Summary

Intuition and inner knowing are powerful tools in a coaching relationship. The development of these less tangible skills and competencies is just as important as the development of some of the more tangible coaching skills, such as questioning and listening. Being able to share your intuition as a coach encourages your client to do the same; it helps to build the client's self-awareness, leading to those 'Aha' moments of great insight and sustainable change. It is a crucial part of a caring and sensitive communication process between coach and client, and because of this it is a competence worth developing.

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### Developing self-awareness

Like any process that is self-referenced, the first stage is to become aware and to start noticing your intuition. Having read these first few paragraphs, you will already be identifying times when your intuition has kicked in, and perhaps you are noticing what you are intuiting about this module.

This is something that many new coaches may not be used to doing. It's like having a muscle that you only notice when you start to exercise a particular part of the body. When I was introduced to coaching many years ago, intuition was certainly something I knew about, but not something that I consciously used. I had to spend some time developing my awareness of this (using the intuitive muscle) before I felt comfortable interpreting and articulating insights to my clients.

Self-awareness, in my opinion, is a must have in a coaching relationship.

It is the responsibility of every effective coach to develop and hone this skill to the best of their ability. What this does is help them and their clients to get to the heart of the coaching issues, so that greater learning and action can follow.

Let's explore how coaches might get themselves into the most receptive state for accessing intuition.

### Exercising the intuitive muscle and developing self-awareness

- Daydream, doodle, and write down words or phrases that come to you when you are problem solving.
- Ask a colleague or partner to describe a situation. Quiet your own inner dialogue and focus your attention on an imaginary blank screen behind them. Simply receive the information that they give you.
- When out socialising, notice the non-verbal behaviour of others ... posture shifts, hand motions, tone and pace of voice. Intuitively guess how people are feeling or what they might be talking about, based on what you observe.
- Change your daily routine – the time when you do things and what you do. Notice how this makes you feel.
- Listen to your internal dialogue and pick up what you sense from this. Change the internal dialogue in some way (negative to positive or vice versa) and notice the effect this has.

### The state of 'being'

So, what is this magical state of being?

A great way of imagining yourself as a coach is as an empty vessel, with no ego, no agenda and no baggage.

There are three critical elements to the domain of being:

- 1 Being relaxed and aware.
- 2 Being present.
- 3 Being non-judgemental.

In these states, we are more alert to our own intuition and more able to build the trusting relationship that is critical to a successful coaching outcome. In my opinion, these are prerequisites for effective coaching.

Let's consider these three areas in more detail.

*Being able to use intuition is an extremely powerful and effective way of working with clients.*

### 1 Relaxed awareness – develop a calming influence

Have you ever had the experience of meeting someone who is tense, agitated or stressed? If you have, you will know that this tends to rub off. We very easily pick up whatever other people project. In a coaching situation, the last thing an overworked, stressed client wants is to be faced with a coach who is projecting a sense of over-excitement and anxiety.

Coaches need to develop techniques to calm and relax themselves before a coaching session. The simplest and most effective way I have found is to take a few minutes simply to breathe. This breathing must be from the diaphragm: deep, not shallow breathing, sending oxygen to the brain and helping us to be more alert. At the same time, it has a relaxing effect on the body.

If we are relaxed as coaches and also alert, then we will become much more aware of our own intuition and the signals that our client is giving us.

### 2 Being present – here and now – not somewhere else in your head

I recall a question I asked some years ago of one of my own coaches about being present for the client. That question was, 'How do I develop my ability just to be there for the client?' The reply I received was:

*The degree of presence you have for the client is directly proportional to the degree to which you are inside or outside your own head.*

Think about this for a moment. As a novice coach, you may be listening to your own chatter, concerned about what to ask next, where to go with the coaching process, how to deal with the issue the client has just raised. If you are doing this, then you are 'inside your own head' and consequently not present for the client.

New coaches often find themselves in this dilemma because they want to 'do it right', attempting to recall the process they have been taught and the questions they need to ask.

Like developing the intuitive muscle, what happens over time is that effective coaches become more experienced at using their own coaching process, intuitively knowing the questions to ask. The question might even be, 'I don't know what question to ask you right now. What question would you ask yourself?' Confident and experienced coaches are not afraid to ask such questions. They know they lead to greater learning and they haven't set themselves up to be experts.

So, if you want to develop your ability to be present as a coach – get out of your own head.

### 3 Judging versus Intuiting – getting rid of the coach's baggage

As human beings, we all come with our own set of beliefs, values and attitudes that influence how we respond to people and situations. Being open and non-judgemental in a coaching situation means operating with a sense of detachment.

It is important to articulate any intuitive observations or feelings you have as a coach, but to be aware that these are based on your interpretations of a situation and could quite easily be wrong. This is often the reason why intuition is not expressed. It means that the client is deprived of an opportunity to learn something about themselves and their relationships with others. If you approach the situation with a sense of detachment, then you can offer your intuition to the client. Even if it is wrong, it will provide some learning for them.

Practise these three states and notice the difference that makes to your ability to intuit. It will help you to become a role model for your client.

*Self-awareness is a must have in a coaching relationship*