

## Introverts as Clients and Coaches

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The coaching partnership is largely comprised of talking; the coach asks questions, reflects, engages in direct communication, while the client talks. Doesn't sound very introvert friendly, does it? It's a wonder introverts – at least as clients – are attracted to coaching at all! After all, introverts tend to prefer to process internally, not aloud. But as Patty reminds us in her excellent piece, coaching might include lots of talking, but it's even more about listening and our capacity for silence... two very introvert friendly things.

Six years of coaching predominately introverted clients has taught me a few things, especially about how and when to follow or break the "rules." And of course, as an introvert myself, I've noticed where my own tendencies support the coaching process or get in its way.

### ***If you're working with an introverted client...***

You might not always know if your client is an introvert. Introversion (and extroversion) is about your energy source and orientation to the world, not about your social skills. So that chatty Cathy might be an introvert, if she feels it's a safe space to voice her thoughts. Wind us up, ask a great question, tap into a place of strong emotion, and it's likely we'll bring on the verbal fireworks.

It's also likely that we'll pause... and say nothing... for what feels like a long time. One of the greatest gifts you can give your clients (especially introverts) is asking a question or making a statement and coming to a full stop. It's not our great insights that clients are paying us for; it's for us to facilitate *their* great insights. In their everyday life, introverts sometimes don't have the safe space for verbal processing, even when it would be valuable.

**Key Take-Away:** An introverted client needs intentional time in a session for both silent thinking and talking things through. In both cases, try to hold the space without interrupting. We're taught to curtail too much "story," and this is a consideration on two fronts with introverted clients: don't make up stories about the silence ("she didn't understand my question" or "that wasn't the right thing to say"), and trust that the client's verbal processing is necessary to come to the bottom line. If you do choose to interject, consider saying "What's important about this information?" or "How do you see this as connecting to the question/your

intention?” Err on the side of leaving more space for story, as long as it’s productive and on point.

***If you’re an introverted coach...***

Being an introvert and a coach is a match made in heaven (at least the actual coaching part – the business part is a separate discussion!). We get to tap into what is frequently one of our core strengths: listening. For the majority of situations, this works to our advantage. Listening is at the heart of coaching.

There is (at least) one situation when that listening super power can get in our way: when we’re working with an extroverted client, or one that is a heavy verbal processor. We leave *too much* space for the story to unfold, or we hesitate to interrupt even when we recognize things are going sideways. There are many reasons that could happen, but a basic one has to do with a difference in perception. Introverts often see interrupting as rude (“I’m finally thinking aloud, don’t step on my words!”), whereas extroverts interpret it as excitement or engagement (“You really get what I’m saying... now it’s a conversation, not a monologue.”). So you can see the potential disconnect. The extrovert will talk until stopped, and the introvert will listen until the talking stops.

***Key Take-Away:*** There’s room within the Direct Communication core competency to learn how to intuitively and strategically interrupt a client’s processing. If you’ve been working with a client for a while, you’ll start to recognize processing patterns, intuiting if the story is heading somewhere or if it’s just verbal spinning. I’ve interjected by saying “Can we take a second to hit pause?” or “Can I jump in here?” It’s an opportunity to extrovert (as a verb), to project your energy outward and shift a bit from internal to external. If it’s a regular occurrence, it’s appropriate to acknowledge and discuss the dynamic, perhaps at the opening of a call as part of the clearing process, or during the initial discovery phase of the partnership. Of course, it’s critical to be honoring of the client’s style. I practice transparency with my clients; I’ll offer that one of my growth edges as a coach is knowing when and how to reign in focus if the agenda seems to get off track, and to ask what would support them most if I intuit a need to interject. Then we’ve co-created a solution, which feels respectful to both people.

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***The Bottom-Line:*** When you put together a balanced flow of talking and listening, inquiry and reflection, the coaching partnership feels like a dance. Imagine a couple dancing, moving in a fluid rhythm. Then they pause. There’s no motion. It draws your attention, catches your breath. Creating those suspended moments can be powerful for an introverted client who needs to think, and an introverted coach who wants to bring more spaciousness to the conversation. Then you can both dance like no one is watching... you’ll have found the introvert’s happy place!