

## Executive Coaching: Holding the Space

One of the many challenges for the executive coaching professional is having the skills to navigate a conversation when it potentially could trigger the client to react in a defensive or aggressive manner. Only the courageous executive coaching practitioner will push the boundaries when the consequences could result in his or her contract termination. This discussion focuses on how to hold the space for these types of conversations.

Executive coaching professionals often walk a fine line. Do they dare go where no one has dared to tread before them or do they push the boundaries to get the core issues for sustainable resolution? Often the executive coaching practitioner is apprehensive to cross the line mainly due the fear of negative consequences or not having enough know-how to hold this challenging type of coaching conversation.

One the key elements in this conversation is to create and hold the space in which it is not only safe for the client to converse and emote but also that it is an honouring place that the client feels has opened up to explore deeper issues. For this to occur, the executive coaching practitioner will be required to suspend all judgements, assumptions and beliefs about what the client will say. Any hint of this will shut down the conversation for the client. Another crucial aspect is for the executive coaching professional to be as neutral as possible with his/her body language. Any obvious changes in facial expressions, posture, glances and the like will send an unspoken message.

The next key factor in holding the space is the power of silence. The natural response for the executive coaching practitioner in normal circumstances is to keep coaching conversations fluid and in rhythm and not to break the flow especially when the direction is heading toward a favourable outcome. In this situation the opposite is true. The executive coaching professional will need to become comfortable with silence and long pauses. This is a crucial aspect in holding the space for the client.

Often we feel the need to break the silence as it creates a level of discomfort. The rule here however is that the first person to break the silence is the one that has the stronger need to have their voice heard. If the executive coaching practitioner does so, he takes away the tension that is necessary for the client to finally reach the place of talking his truth. If this happens it will be very difficult to recreate the space a second time.

The payoff however is that when deeper conversations ensue, clients feel the need for change from a core place inside of them and it is this place that moves them to committed action.

As it has been illustrated holding the space is not an easy process but its rewards far outweigh the effort and risk.