

SIGNS THAT YOUR CAREER COACHING CLIENT MAY NEED THERAPY

Sandra Lim, CPRW, CCM
A Better Impression, Toronto, Canada
newcareer@abetterimpression.com
www.abetterimpression.com

Does your client seem unmotivated, despite your best coaching efforts? Is it hard to hold him or her accountable for goals you've mutually decided upon? Does he regularly miss appointments with you? Does he seem to have difficulty functioning in his personal life? These could be possibly attributed to symptoms of depression – some of which are fatigue, inability to concentrate, insomnia or sleeping too much – all of which could contribute to your client's stalled progress.

We all have our ups and downs, occasionally get the "blues," and sometimes depression is situational – due to mourning the death of a loved one, the breakup of a marriage, etc. There has been much written about the difference between coaching and counseling. But would you know when to refer your client to a therapist?

I participated in a teleclass on this topic through CoachVille (www.coachville.com) facilitated by Dr. Timothy Dey of The Dey Group, Inc. This particular topic was of interest to me because early in my career counseling practice, I worked with a client that had a psychological condition I did not recognize at the time, which caused a lack of progress on her part and considerable frustration on my part.

According to Dr. Dey, "As the overall volume of coaching clients in a practice increases over time, uncommon client issues will become more common. It makes sense for coaches to be prepared in advance by educating themselves when possible and practical... Trying to coach a client who is in need of professional care for deep-seated or biochemical disorders is of limited value at best, and harmful at worst. Knowing when to step out while not abandoning the client is a key skill for a coach to have in their toolbox."

With statistics showing that depression affects nearly 17 million Americans – and the increasing awareness of depression in the workplace – it would not be unlikely that one of your clients could be silently suffering. It seems that career coaching and career counseling programs do not touch on this as a training topic, unless you decide to supplement your studies with psychology or counseling courses.

How do you know what signs to look for? If it appears to be a passing thing during the course of working together, it is probably situational depression, but if you have noticed your client's low mood lasting for over two weeks, then it could be a sign of depression.

Although this article utilizes depression as an example, there is a wide range of psychological conditions – varying in severity from mild to disabling – therefore, your focus should not be on attempting to form an amateur diagnosis. Instead, be prepared with knowledge of available resources. If your client is employed by a company that has an EAP, it can be less intimidating to suggest exploring these services first. An EAP professional can provide appropriate referrals. Alternatively, prepare yourself by researching community services that your client can reach out to for help.

So, how can you delicately broach the subject with your client without offending him? First, show your concern for your client, and remove the shame society often mistakenly associates with mental health issues by being compassionate. Let your client know that you are not "letting him go" – provide him with options: depending on the situation, a coach can continue to work with a client while in therapy, or together you may choose to put aside your work for a certain time period.

In the case of my former client, I later found out that she suffered from an anxiety disorder; in hindsight, this explained her erratic behavior. So, the next time you are faced with an "unmotivated" client, be open to the possibility that there may be something else going on underneath the surface.

The Dey Group's website is www.deygroup.com. Dr. Dey frequently lectures to coaches and other professionals on the role that potential mental health issues can have on slowing or arresting the coaching process in clients.