Five Mistakes You're Making As a Coach That Are Adversely Affecting Your Clients And... 

One BIG No-No

1. You're not setting an agreement for the coaching engagement.

_Hooray! You have a new coaching client._ So you dive right into the coaching, right? Wrong. The first step to take is to coach the client to identify the results the client wants by the end of a specific period of time. If you don't have a fixed time period for working with a client, ask the client what time period they'd like to use. Some clients might use 3 months, some 6 months, some a year.

_By setting the results the client wants to accomplish during the coaching engagement,_ you and the client now know exactly what you are working on during the coaching meetings. While life happens and other topics may pop up, related or not, you now have a framework within which to do the coaching, to check for
progress, and in which the client is aware of the results they have accomplished.

**Relevant ICF Core Competencies include:**
Establishing the Coaching Agreement, Creating Awareness, Planning and Goal Setting, and Managing Progress and Accountability.

**2. You're not setting an agreement for the coaching meeting.**

**Now you have an agreement for the coaching engagement.** So now you dive right into the coaching, right? Wrong. Now you get an agreement regarding the client's desired outcomes for the specific coaching meeting. In this way, you know what you are coaching around, can check for progress, and the client knows what they have received from the coaching meeting. (Could you give an example?)

**Relevant ICF Core Competencies include:**
Establishing the Coaching Agreement, Creating Awareness, and Managing Progress and Accountability.
3. When you do set a meeting agreement, you take the first result the client says.

**OK, now you've got it.** You set an agreement with the client for the coaching engagement. You asked the client what outcome they want by the end of the coaching meeting. And... you're off and running with the coaching! But wait - how do you know what the client said is what they really want? And if it is what they want, how do you know how important it is to the client?

**This is your time to dig in and ask some questions** of your client to help the client create awareness regarding what really matters to them.

**Let's say you ask the client what they want by the end of your 50-minute coaching meeting,** given who they are and what they've identified as wanting to accomplish during the coaching engagement. The client responds that they'd like to come up with three ways to talk with their team about the reorganization scheduled to be implemented next month. Hmm. Sounds good. Specific. Measurable. Attainable. Realistic. Timely. Checks
all the boxes, right? Well, if you're coaching at this level, you can do better for your client. How?

**The result offered above is a tactical result.**
Coaching, when practiced masterfully, delivers more for your client. Instead of taking this result at face value, your opportunity - and your client's - is to ask the client about what the client gets from accomplishing this result.

**So you ask,** "What do you get from having three ways to talk with you team about the reorg?" Your client says, "I'll feel better about the whole thing." But you're still not there. Your job is to keep asking until you get to the root of why this matters to your client.

**So you ask,** "What does feeling better about the whole thing get you?" Your client says, "I'll feel I've been fair to my team." Ok, now we're getting somewhere. Now you know your client doesn't just want 3 ways to discuss the reorg. Your client wants to feel they've been fair to their team. Fairness might even be a core value for your client.

**You can check by asking,** "What's important about fairness?" If you get the blank look, like, what do you
mean, fairness has to be! You know you've hit gold. Your next question: "What regarding fairness to your team do you want to accomplish by the end of our time together today?" Whatever your client says is now the actual meeting agreement.

**Now that you have the real desired outcome,** the second check to make is whether this result is related to the overall coaching engagement agreement. If this is the first time this topic has come up, it's up to you to ask your client how this result fits in with the client's other desired results.

**Is it a priority?** Does it take priority over other, previously identified results? Only once you both agree that this result moves the client in the direction of accomplishing their overall results, or modify those overall results to include this result, do you begin coaching around the result.

**Relevant ICF Core Competencies include:**
Establishing the Coaching Agreement, Creating Awareness, Planning and Goal Setting, and Managing Progress and Accountability.
4. You're keeping your client focused on the present or past, rather than the future.

**Alright.** Now you have the coaching engagement agreement and a coaching meeting agreement that helps your client create awareness. You begin to coach around the meeting result. You ask your client where they would like to start. They begin telling you the story of how the reorganization has been in the planning stages by leadership for the last 6 months, that line folks don't know anything about it, ....

**This is your cue to STOP your client.** Why? Story is:

A. where people get stuck and  
B. irrelevant.

**Your client has already been churning this story in their head,** and perhaps in discussions with others, for some time. If telling the story were the solution they wouldn't be bringing this to coaching.

**Your job is to shift the client out of the story and into the desired future.** When you can, record some of
your coaching meetings, with your client's permission. Write down just your questions. How many of those questions ask your client to focus on what is happening in the present or the past?

When you are coaching masterfully, the answer is "few to none." Why? For 2 reasons, which are sides of the same coin:

1. **When you ask about the present or the past,** you are keeping the client stuck in what is rather than helping the client create what is desired.
2. **When you ask about the future and what is desired,** the energy of the client draws the client forward and helps the client create that desired future.

Also note that getting stuck in the past puts you on thin ice in terms of ICF Ethical Guidelines and Professional Standards, which state that it if your "conversation is based primarily in the past, particularly the emotional past (therapeutic mode)," you would not be awarded an ICF credential.
Relevant ICF Core Competencies include:
Establishing Trust and Intimacy, Powerful Questioning, Creating Awareness, and Designing Actions.

5. You're missing out on the being.

Now you've shifted the client's perception to the future. The client starts talking about all the things they'd like to do. But doing is not where it's at. Remember, people always remember how they feel, long after they've forgotten what they have done. This is where you want to shift attention. How does the client want to feel?

How do you do this? Use these 3 keys:

• Listen for what the client is not saying,

• Ask questions to which you do not know the answer and which cause the client to pause, and

• Communicate directly with the client regarding what you are observing.
For example, if as you listen to your client you observe a disconnect between what the client is saying and how the client appears, this is a clue to you that there is something the client is not saying. This may be a time to make an observation and ask a question. For example, "I hear you saying you are excited about the reorg and I see that the muscles of your face are contracted. What is that?"

This helps your client create awareness around what is actually happening for them.

To further help your client shift out of the doing and into the Being, you might ask questions like:

- How do you want to feel about the reorganization by the time it is complete?
- How do you want to feel about the reorganization while it is happening?
- Who do you want to be during the reorganization?

Your client benefits the most when first you highlight the Being and help them have awareness around the Being, and then decide what next steps are appropriate.
Relevant ICF Core Competencies include: Creating Awareness, Active Listening, Powerful Questioning, and Direct Communication.

Shifting your coaching away from these 5 mistakes and towards masterful coaching can radically change you and your client.

But on top of these 5, there is ONE way you're selling out your client that is THE KEY INDICATOR that what you are doing is NOT coaching -

** You tell the client what to do! **

If you spend most of your time with your client telling your client what to do, you are consulting rather than coaching, and ICF says you are not meeting ICF Ethical Guidelines and Professional Standards. Look at this example that ICF gives:

"For example, if a coach almost exclusively gives advice or indicates that a particular answer chosen by the coach is what the client should do, trust and intimacy, coaching presence, powerful questioning,
creating awareness, and client generated actions and accountability will not be present and a credential at any level would be denied.

http://www.coachfederation.org/files/IndCred/ICFCOMPetenciesLevelsTable.pdf

This is not what you want for your client. This is not why you became a coach.

Coaching is a powerful gift for you and your client. Let your client access that power by using COACHING skills and competencies with your clients.

Leanne Cusumano Roque works with her coaching clients to help them meet 92% of their stated objectives.

You can reach Leanne at lcroque38@gmail.com for a complimentary session to determine if her coaching services or coaching training programs are right for you.