

Focusing on the positive

Teachers are very good at sharing the successes of their students with them and others but are far likely to share or celebrate their own successes. Could this be because they haven't felt sufficiently listened to in the past and look for an external locus of control, lessening their sense of personal responsibility? If this is the case, it would suggest that many teachers need some coaching.

When we feel successful we are far more likely to feel motivated. A good coach will encourage coachees to focus on solutions and to take an internal locus of control. They will engage in an open, honest, curious and sincere dialogue, examining and challenging any assumptions they both might hold.

The language of possibility

Coaches use the language of possibility, breaking through the coachee's limiting beliefs and language of certainty and absolutes. They encourage their coachees, guiding them on a journey from how it has been, to how it is now and leading eventually to how it could be. Many coaches begin the journey using limiting language like 'can't', 'never', 'have to', 'must', 'should' and 'ought to'. Coaches can challenge this mindset of negativity and encourage the language of what is possible: 'can', 'could', 'might', 'maybe', 'might', 'perhaps' and 'possible', as shown below

Language of impossibility

I can't do.....
I ought to.....
I should do.....
I have to.... It's compulsory
I have never....
I'm absolutely sure
He/she always makes me feel....
It's traditional to....
That's just how it is....
I have never done that....?
We have always....?

Language of possibility

What if you could.....?
How could you.....?
How about....?
Why not.....?
How could this be an opportunity for you to...?
Who else could support you to....?
Is there ever a time when you do not feel...?
How could you use your imagination here to...?
I'm curious, according to whom...?
What if you did....?
Can you try...?

From 'The Perfect Teacher Coach' (Beere and Broughton)

Note that the language of possibility is couched in the form of questions. The conversation is non-directive and encourages the coachee to come up with their own solutions to problems – always using the language of possibility and in a curious tone, demonstrating interest.

'If you think you can or think you can't you are right' (Henry Ford)

Habitually using negative patterns of thinking will not support the resolution of issues and can become a self-fulfilling prophecy. The language of possibility uses questions to try to inculcate a feeling of having an internal locus of control, which opens paths to self-awareness, creativity and –yes- possibility.

Good questioning

The language of possibility contains many questions. Coaches use non-directive questions to draw out possibilities and solutions to problems from the coachees themselves – which is vital in engaging the coachee.

From 'The Perfect Teacher Coach' (Beere and Broughton)

Activity:

Helping the coachee change from negative to positive language

What responses could you use to help a coachee reframe their language?

Are there any other examples of language of impossibility' you have come across that you could help a coachee change to possibility?

Language of impossibility	Language of possibility
I can't do... I ought to... I should do... I have to... I have never... I am absolutely sure... He always makes me feel... It's traditional to... That's just how it is... We have always... Other examples?	

Negative language indicators

I can't	Is it really true that the coachees cannot or is it that they do not want to? Possibly they have not tried yet. Or maybe they are afraid to.
I failed	<p>This type of self-programming is extremely negative. If people see situations as pass or fail, good or bad, it will hinder their future attempts.</p> <p>They need to see handling situations as experience/learning that can help in the future. Remember, we can always repeat something until we succeed. It is only ourselves who put a time limit on success or failure.</p>
I never	When people generalise, they often have a flawed perception of a situation. It is highly unlikely that something truly 'never' happens and you need to explore where this perception has come from.
I always	Same as above. If someone uses this language frequently, they could be casting themselves in the role of victim, which is a highly negative thought process.
I'll try	Telling the brain to try is providing a very useful 'get out' clause – and we are really setting ourselves up to fail: 'if I don't succeed I won't feel too bad as I only said I would try'
I'm hopeless/awful/not bad with/at	The brain instructs us to be what we tell it to be. Therefore, if I tell it I am hopeless or clumsy it will manifest itself in external behaviour
He/she makes me angry/nervous/frustrated(etc)	Thinking that someone else is responsible for your emotions can be very damaging. We can only feel a certain way if we give ourselves permission. The other person has created the climate for us to feel that way, but can choose to change our reaction.
I should/must/ought	Often when people say these words they are imposing forced deadlines on themselves, which they then start to believe are forced on them by external forces.

In each of the above situations, think of ways to challenge coachees to consider how they can be in control of their own destiny.