Episode 120 What To Do When a ...oesn't Have a Goal in Coaching

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**SPEAKERS**

Jo Wheatley, Zoe Hawkins

**Jo Wheatley** 00:03

The Coaching Crowd podcast is for compassionate courageous leaders, HR professionals and high achievers,

**Zoe Hawkins** 00:09

people who are passionate about helping others to find alignment in their lives through coaching, and do a thinking of training and developing as a coach. Hello, and welcome to the coaching crowd podcast with me, Zoe Hawkins and my friend and co host, Jo Wheatley.

**Jo Wheatley** 00:28

Welcome everybody. Today, we're talking about what to do when a client doesn't have a goal in coaching. And the reason that we're talking about this as it happens more often than people might like to admit either clients or coaches. So we're going to explore the reason that that might or the reasons that that might happen, and look at some of the practicalities of what you can do in that situation. Yeah. And

**Zoe Hawkins** 00:52

I think probably the first place to start is just a reminder around the importance of goals. So it can be really easy when a client turns up, and they don't have a goal for the coach to get hooked on, oh, well, we're here. Now I need to do some coaching. So let's just try and work this out. And what happens is the coach ends up putting in all the effort they are bringing to the table or the coaching activities they are bringing to the table the energy of like, right, let's do this, and that can become very draining and very tiring. And it's becomes a due to process rather than to do with process. So when a client is coming to coaching, and they don't have a clear goal, it's really important to spend time together in that front end, trying to work with that as a presenting problem. In the first instance, if of course, there's willingness. So just wanted to clarify at the front end, how important it is that both coach and coachee or client have that contract that that alignment around what what we are here to do, what we are here to create and what we are here to work on together, so that you aren't in a do to process with your clients.

**Jo Wheatley** 02:01

I think another important aspect of that is that goals, guide the conversation, the time that you are together. But also they are a way for the client to reflect on Have I got value from this conversation? Because if you know what the intention is of the conversation, you can reflect on how much progress have I made against that, and therefore how valuable was that for me? Yeah, so

**Zoe Hawkins** 02:26

the goal is for the client, first and foremost, but it serves a great purpose for the coach as well, because the coach needs to know what they're there for. So when you're making decisions, within coaching conversations, and there are many, many decision points within a coaching conversation, you're being able to make those decisions in service of your client, rather than perhaps in service of yourself and where you may need to go to feel like you're getting value from the conversation or that you're doing a good job of your coaching. The danger when you have a client coming to a coaching conversation without a clear goal is that you can feel that your coaching is inadequate. But the fact is, you just don't have a clear contract. So when things start to get a bit wonky in coaching, it often comes back to the front end of the coaching. So that's why, you know, we're starting here with emphasising the importance of doing that contracting and that goal work up front.

**Jo Wheatley** 03:21

So there's a few different reasons that clients might not have a goal when they come to coaching. And an obvious one is the client might have been sent to coaching, because somebody else thinks that it could be useful for them. And what that can lead to is a discomfort in the client with the coaching process. So against not necessarily what the coach has done or how the coaches showed up, but more about their entry into a coaching relationship. But lack of rapport can also be a reason why a client might not bring a goal, or they might have a goal, but they don't share it or there's a resistance inside them to share it because there might be a lack of psychological safety. And some people we know it takes longer for them to build that feeling of safety in the relationship to be able to then either share the goal or really make contact internally with with the goal what it is that they want to get out of the conversation. Yeah,

**Zoe Hawkins** 04:20

and I think in that situation where somebody's been sent to coaching, they may not fully understand what coaching is, you know, often in the corporate world perhaps you're coaching people who are on a leadership development programme or or something else. There may not have been the same process followed as when you're coaching private clients. So typically with private clients, you'd have a chemistry conversation, a discovery call, the person reaching out is often reaching out because they have a clear need, like they know what they want to achieve. And so you have the chemistry conversation and then you you start agreeing those goals in and that stage but sometimes working in the corporate space. Those processes aren't necessarily the same, there may be decisions made around people who are coming to coaching. And so you don't necessarily have that. That inroad of doing a discovery call and setting those goals. So that that that first meeting with that client may be the first coaching session. It's not necessarily how we'd recommend it. But that can happen. And so there may be some education that needs to take place around what coaching is, and what the expectations are of coaching coachee. And, and almost re contracting and starting the process again, so that both parties know what to expect, I guess of the relationship. And that helps to build that psychological safety that you were referring to there, Jo? Yeah, sometimes

**Jo Wheatley** 05:41

the reason the client might not have a goal is because they fear failure. And if they share a goal, and they don't have the confidence, maybe because they feel they don't have the ability, or they don't have the energy or whatever it is, they may not want to share a goal because they don't want to experience that, that feeling of failure. And another emotion that can show up when it comes to identifying or sharing goals is if you've got a client that's feeling overwhelmed, because there are lots of things going on in their life, and they kind of I don't need, I need to work on all of it. You know, I can't, it's hard for me to prioritise and pick one over another because I just want, I just want a magic wand. So that feeling of overwhelm can get in the way.

**Zoe Hawkins** 06:27

I think there's also an obvious one that some people just don't know what they want, you know, which, which is the premise of coaching, isn't it like to know what you want, so that you can move forward and achieve it? Well, the initial gap, or the initial goal might be actually working out what you want. And so what do you do when a client comes to coaching, you know, in these situations where they don't have a clear goal, for whatever reason, and I think the starting point is really about deep listening, you know, it's about really making sure that you are following with your client, you're not getting ahead of yourself in the coaching conversation starting to think about all well, why have you turned up with no goal? Like, what's my, what's my role here, you need to sit back in curiosity, and start thinking around really hearing what the client is saying, and also what they're not saying, checking in on that report and making sure that you do, do we have psychological safety here, have we built rapport as my client have what they need to be able to feel safe in this relationship. So really taking time at that front end to establish the relationship and that safety. With

**Jo Wheatley** 07:34

listening deeply also involves holding silence, holding silence can be really powerful for the other person, because they'll often they'll hold, they might hold out where there's that resistance, but ultimately, they are likely to fill it. And in filling it, sometimes it kind of takes away the second guessing that might be going on internally, and they'll just start to share something. And what we're listening for. And what we're asking questions about is to help the client get clarity on where they are now. Because sometimes that struggle with the goal is because they don't really fully understand or haven't taken the time to work out. Where am I right now in my life. So once you've got clarity on with the client around where they are now, then you can start to help them kind of look out to where do they want to get to it. And that sometimes requires reassurance that coaching isn't about, oh, there's a massive problem in my life. It's not a remedial thing. It's positive, and it's future focused. And so that reassurance might be around, coaching is about like Good to Great, like what's good in your life, but you'd like it to be even better. And that might be using a tool like the wheel of life, helping them to look at their life and break it down into different parts so that they can be like, actually, these areas of my life again, you know, really well may not be like perfect, but they're going really well. But now that I'm looking at it at these different aspects, I can see that this area is an area I need to work on. And an obvious example of that might be careers going really well. But that that balance outside work friendships or time doing creative activities, you know, those scores are lower. And that might be actually I'd like to start there. Because there may also be an understanding that that will impact other areas. I

**Zoe Hawkins** 09:25

think there's a piece around challenge. Now for this, you obviously have to have established the relationship have contracted for the level of support and challenge in the relationship. But I I have a theory that when clients come to coaching, and they're like, I don't I don't really have anything to work on. It's because they aren't playing big enough. You know, like everything in my life is absolutely fine. And they may not be playing big enough for a number of reasons. It might be because of the fear that we've talked about before. It may be that they are they have no clarity on what's important to them in life, you know, it may be that their, their world outside of coaching or work or whatever the topic is, isn't necessarily in a place that it can support growth, there may be something that is holding them back from being able to move forward. Maybe that's a significant relationship, or it's, or it's even an environmental factor. So I think helping the client to dream can be really important, you know, helping to take them outside of the constraints of everyday life to think about well, what's what's possible, like, what would you what would you like to achieve if you know if there were were no constraints and freedoms and, and then you've got to work back. Because sometimes there are things that are immovable for the client, but then you can start to work on the emotions, perhaps that that client is experiencing so that they can enjoy what is present in their lives more fully. So there's always work you can do, but it comes back to what does the client wants to experience? What are they ready for? Sometimes your contract is around getting your client ready, or helping to build that clarity, or deepening that client's understanding of themselves so that they can more easily identify what they want. But I think the premise that it comes back to is, is the client willing? Is the client ready? Is the client able? And if they're not any of those things? And sometimes the answer is there's no coaching. You know, there's no goal, there's no coaching. If there's nothing in the clients way, then there's no coaching, it's not always appropriate to coach every client that is sent coaching, or that approaches you for coaching.

**Jo Wheatley** 11:42

Absolutely. And the challenge might also be where the client, if the client is sharing with the you know, I don't really know what I want to get from teaching, because everything's pretty good right now, in my life, it might be that you observe that they're able to rattle off all these things that are amazing, but there's no emotion, you know, displayed in sharing that feels very transactional, and almost like they're living somebody else's life. And you might ask permission, share an observation about what you're sensing, it might be that you notice something else that is pivotal or unusual, or where there's an incongruence, in what the client is saying and how they're presenting or how they're responding to the questions. And sometimes it might be about starting with a micro goal. So if the client is a bit unsure about coaching, or doesn't want to open up a big huge thing that or something they feel is big and huge, they just want to get going, they just kind of want to get a little bit of trust in the process. So it might be just working with the client to, to start sit on something little. What we do, as part of our process is share a pre coaching questionnaire with our clients. So after the initial chemistry conversation, so you've established at that point, that there is something that the client would like to work on. And we've got podcasts on the chemistry conversation that we did a few moons ago. So maybe check that one out. But after if there isn't an alignment between coach and client at that point, we would send them a pre kitchen questionnaire and that ask them questions to help them reflect on different aspects of their life. But also the purpose is to help them hone in more on to their specific goals from coaching. Now, what we tend to find is that the goals that are listed in the pre coaching questionnaire, which provide a further starting point for the first coaching conversation are often not what we would call well, well formed. So they may be very vague, or they or they might be very, very specific, and missing the out. And so we then move into exploring and refining that in that first session to set the the rest of the coaching sessions up for success. So if you find that lots of clients come to your sessions without a goal, and you don't have a pre kitchen questionnaire that might be useful, practical thing to incorporate into your process of

**Zoe Hawkins** 14:10

coaching. Yeah, and think there are practical activities that you can do with clients to help them to build clarity, but at this stage, you're also starting to notice that then the goal is about helping the client to discover what they want, or the goal is about helping the client to get the clarity. So you do have a goal at this point when you start to move forward. So you may introduce activities like values, elicitation, or the wheel of life, or various other things that you can bring forward to help the client to discover. But by that point, you have a goal. Now it may not be to achieve x by y. Goals don't always look like that, like goals can be less less tangible. I think what's another useful thing to do when the client doesn't have a goal is to look at the systemic lens. Like what is happening in Clients world that is perhaps leading them to that lack of clarity. So for example, if the client is working in an organisation that has a culture around not making decisions, or you know, a lack of clarity around the direction of the business or not having a long term vision, it may be really hard for that person to set goals within work, because there's no alignment to, to where they may need to go. So. So that may be then about helping that client to understand how do they get the clarity that they need to be able to set their own goals. And that might be about having critical conversations in the workplace, whatever ideas the client comes up with. So there's lots of different ways that you can support the client. And ultimately, it starts with that alignment around. Okay, so what what do you want? And if you don't know what you want, do you want to find out, you know, I think ultimately is where, and where we, where we land with that.

**Jo Wheatley** 15:59

You can incorporate other things as well, you're talking about the role of the environment. And if you're coaching somebody in the same, you know, it's safe, it's virtual, and they sit and take all their meetings in the same seat, it may be hard for them to get out of that role based persona that they might have curated for work and to step into the more personal exploration that coaching requires or demands of them. So I think it's really important just to check that out with your client, like, where are they going to be able to tap into this most and for some people, it might be simply moving to the safer. So for the coaching conversations, they sat on the sofa, or they sat in a different room? Maybe they it's better for them if they are out walking in nature, when they're having a coaching conversation. If you're in person, you know, are you going to the client's office to coach them? Or could you meet somewhere else to coach them where they space where maybe they've never been before? And think about how that relates to coaching, like coaching kind of requires or invites the client go somewhere they've never been before? Yeah, if they're experiencing coaching from somewhere they spent the last 20 years, you can start to see how that could potentially for some clients create a little bit of a barrier for them. You might incorporate some visit guided visualisations into your coaching to help as another way to help them step out of their sort of their current reality and into an environment or a state where they are able to explore new possibilities without feeling that sense of needing to commit to something like in a guided visualisation, they aren't necessarily having having a conversation with you. So they're not having to be witnessed to that they can have more of that internal freedom to explore, and then they might come back and share some new things. And maybe it's shifted their state. So I think really connecting into tapping into and exploring with the client that their state of mind as well as that fiscal environment can sometimes help to the client to get clarity on what it is that they want from the coaching.

**Zoe Hawkins** 18:12

Yeah, it's an invitation to be creative, isn't it. But I think the caveat to that is making sure that you aren't doing all of the work, your client still needs to bring their, their thoughts, their challenges to the table, and and ultimately, to decide what they want to spend that time on. You as the coach may be making suggestions about different activities that you can do, because you are in a place where you know, the sorts of things that will be helpful, but they're always invitations, ultimately, the client needs to own that journey, so that they own the results that they get from the experience. And

**Jo Wheatley** 18:51

that might be a case of you as the coach when the client says, you know, we asked them, what do you what do you want to get out of a conversation today and the clients like? I don't know, it might be a case of simply just sitting in that inviting the client to sit in that let's start there or tell me more about that. And that might just be enough for them to almost stream of consciousness to get to the point of actually, that would be something that would be useful for me to focus on today. So remit as you say so remembering that it's an adult to adult relationship and and checking in on your own energy and how hard you're working. Sometimes less is more.

**Zoe Hawkins** 19:33

Yeah. So if you have enjoyed our podcast today and you're interested to learn more about coaching, we have a quiz which is which coaching course is right for me that helps you to decide if coaching training is a good place to to start to embellish your skills. So come and take a look at that@www.my coaching course.com Thank you for listening to the coaching crowd podcast with Zoe Hawkins and Jo Wheatley we'd love for you to join our inclusive community to learn and grow in the coaching space go over

**Jo Wheatley** 20:05

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