tailoring your coaching approach

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**SPEAKERS**

Zoe Hawkins, Jo Wheatley

**Zoe Hawkins**

The Coaching Crowd podcast is for compassionate courageous leaders, HR professionals and high achievers, 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. Welcome to the coaching crab podcast with me Zoe Hawkins and my friend and co host, Jo Wheatley.

**Jo Wheatley**

Hi, everybody. Thanks for joining us today. Today, the topic is tailoring your coaching approach. This is critical to be a world class and an ethical coach, because we know is that one size does not fit all, as human beings, we're all completely and utterly unique. We need to be listened to in different ways at different times. We connect with people in different ways at different times how our people show up to a coaching session varies from session to session. So it's really important that you learn how to flex that muscle of being able to tailor your coaching approach to the individual in that moment in time.

**Zoe Hawkins**

Yeah, and I think this is where the magic happens in coaching. Because I think the more you can make your coaching experience bespoke to your client and really deepen and understand the needs, obviously, the better results and the more transformation your clients will get from that experience. And it's what makes it fun. I think as a coach that no one client is ever the same. And so you can't afford to get lazy in your coaching approach and, and have a sort of well as you said there, a one size fits all process with coaching, I think it's really important that we stay on our toes, listening out for what our client's needs are, and making sure that we adapt the way that we show up in those coaching sessions. And one simple way that we say simple, it's simple when you know how but one of the ways we do that is through the language that we use. And the way we position our questions to our clients, and listening out through their language around how they experience the world. So for example, you may hear a client talking in very visual ways such as, oh, when I think about the future, it looks really bright. Or they might say things like, I can see now how that's a lot clearer, you know, so, so really listening out for visual cues in their language. And when you do that, just make a loose note in your mind. But your client may be more of a visual processor. And so when you're asking them questions, make sure that you are introducing more visual cues into your questions. And also perhaps focusing on more creative coaching activities where you can really tap into the visual elements that your clients are processing their world through.

**Jo Wheatley**

Yeah, it's a really powerful thing to be able to notice with a client and some clients will be aware of how they process the world and the language that they use to express that. And for other clients, it will be completely new for them. So when you're summarising, it's always really important that you use the client's language when you're summarising. And that we're not shortcutting, you know, assimilating it down into what makes sense to us from what they've heard. But instead that we're reflecting back using their language, it's a way for our clients to feel understood, and also enables them to relax, you know, when they feel understood, they relax into the session, it enables them to open up more and access more of their unconscious mind as well as their conscious mind. Metaphors are a great way if your client is a visual processor to be able to connect in with them. But what I would say is that it's not always about matching it. Just because your client uses a lot of visual language does not mean that there isn't real use in asking questions across the other ways that people process. So for some people, they may be more auditory. For some people, they're what's called auditory digital, which is they're often those people who are externalised thinkers, they have a very strong internal narrative happening. And there are those people that are more kinesthetic, so maybe more feeling based in the way that they process the world. So there's profiling tools, obviously, that people can use to work out what their preferences are, when you're asking questions, you can also test out because sometimes, you know if they're more evenly spread, but they focus their thoughts around a particular aspect. If you ask a question then around and what will you be hearing as you achieve that, then all of a sudden when they're able to identify that that opens up a deeper connection to the goal and really shifts something for them. So it isn't always about purely matching their particular preference?

**Zoe Hawkins**

Well, I'm one of those clients that has a very rich inner world. So usually, by the time I've come to coaching, I have spent approximately 300,000 hours thinking about the thing that I want to actually achieve. And so sometimes, you know, I'm a reflector and I have that auditory digital preference. And I don't know if then from coaching, what I actually need is more reflection, and more time to process what I actually need is more challenge, and introducing perhaps different ways of processing. What it is I'm thinking about. So actually bring the creativity bring the visual activities give me a different lens through which that I can start to experience my world because I've probably bored myself to tears by the time I come to coaching, with the ways that I think, and I think that's what you're talking about there. And you're around matching and mismatching contracting with your client at the start of any conversation around what is it that you need from me as your coach? Yes, we can use those clues from their language, be it visual, auditory, kinesthetic, or their learning style. You may have heard of like reflectors, and activists, and pragmatists and theorists. But actually, what does your client need in that moment on that day for that coaching session and for your relationship, and making sure that that's just not a part of your process, but you genuinely listen and respond, and you ask questions. So if the client says, what I need from you, is to challenge me, great. What does challenge look like? Sound like, feel like to you? How will you know when I'm challenging you? How will I as your coach know, when I'm bringing enough challenge to the conversation? You know, how can we review the level of challenge together? So, you know, that sort of element of being bespoken, your coaching isn't just about the coaching experience, but it's also about building trust and confidence in you, as a practitioner, that you have your clients back, and you are there for them and their experience alone.

**Jo Wheatley**

There. I'm also coaching client who I might might think I need one thing at the start of a coaching programme. But then as I start to work with my coach, I might discover that I need something a bit different. So when the coach says, you know, let's say in session two, how are we doing? Last session, you said, you know, this is the thing that we're working on. And we started off by doing this, we said we might work on this today, is that still relevant? I might, then it gives me an opportunity as the client to say, you know, that was helpful. But I've my reflections are that actually maybe I need a bit more of this or a bit less of that. And whereas if the coach doesn't ask and inquire as to what are my needs now, then, it's hard for me as the client to say, Can we do something different today, you know, some clients would feel confident enough to do that, and some clients won't. So it's important to be aware of that, and also prepared to pivot as, as a coach, at any point if the client needs that.

**Zoe Hawkins**

And of course, all of this requires you as the coach to have flexibility and dexterity in your approach. So if you are somebody who, you know, perhaps you're very much a kinesthetic person, so you're all about the feelings and you find yourself asking a lot of feelings based questions, it may not come as easily to you to flip into some of the other senses, you know, and, and it's important that you make sure you can be as dominant in each of those senses, as you are in the one that you find the easiest to access. So I would encourage all coaches, when they are looking at the kind of their toolbox and their approach, have you got lots of creative activities in there, you know, for your visual thinkers? Have you got, you know, a number of different activities, which gets your client up out of their seat, you know, experiencing some movement, some embodiment, perhaps using the outdoors? Have you got approaches that you can tap into the kinesthetic? Do you have, you know, auditory based activities where you're really tapping into the sense of hearing, and that internal dialogue, you know, how versatile Are you as a practitioner, where might your gaps be as well as your strengths, because that's really important that you, you have that self awareness to know where your strengths are. And that's obviously one of the core competencies with the emcc is understanding self and the other coaching bodies have a similar one, but really know your strengths, and potentially where those gaps are, as you continue to look at how am I going to use my strengths to build into the areas where I'm not as strong or what further CPD might you want to do to bring those development areas up so you you have a balance in the way that you approach your clients.

**Jo Wheatley**

I think boundaries are also important. And when we talk about tailoring our coaching approach, I was thinking about clients that I've worked with, so we might work start off. So after the chemistry conversation, we've talked about the client's needs, we've talked about the different programmes and formats that are available. And the client makes a decision, you know, from the discussion that we've had around what they think is the best fit for them. So let's say for example, the client is said, Yep, oh, I'd like to have monthly coaching sessions that are an hour and a half each. And I'd like to do that for six months or 12 months. And we start off, and then what we discover is, maybe the client has changed their job, a couple of sessions in and actually in the new role, an hour and a half is really difficult to fit into their diary, or they're finding that they are exhausted after the coaching sessions, or they just don't have the space to kind of do the reflections that they want. And so they might want to read contract says we check in how is how is this working for you, because really, it's just your best guess, from the chemistry conversation as to what's going to work for them. And then, you know, sometimes clients will say, actually, either I would like to have longer sessions, so we can dive deeper, or I'd like to have shorter sessions, but more often. And so I have done that with clients. You know, I've tailored the approach, we together have tailored the approach, as we have learned about how we work best together, how the environment affects the potential that's created in the coaching conversations. In the same respect, I still have boundaries. So I know there are there are coaches that offer coaching via boxer different approaches like that. For me, that's not something that I want to bring into my coaching practice. So there's a boundary for me around that. And it's okay for me as a coach, to be clear, if somebody inquires and says, Hey, do you do coaching in this way for me to say no, sorry, I don't. And I can recommend somebody that I know, that will do that. Because for some clients, you know, Voxer, or those alternative ways to engage in a coaching programme can be extremely effective for them and the way that they like to learn and to connect with others.

**Zoe Hawkins**

Yeah, absolutely. I think also, the more you work with your clients, the more you get to know who they are and how they think. So I don't think it's a Yep. Okay, we've had the chemistry discussion, we had the first session, we've made the contract, right, I'm good to go. Now, that tailoring of your experience to your clients is something that takes place throughout the coaching journey. So you might be in session four and five, you know, and actually start to notice something about your client, which, at that point, you might need to tweak, adjust, check in with your client. You know, I've just noticed this particular thing. Like, how are you experiencing that right now? Would it be helpful if I did this? Or did that. And with all of this tailoring that's going on, you still need to be authentic? You know. So I think that was one of the challenges that I had in leadership was like, oh, you know, it's really important to flex your style to meet the needs of people, whilst still being an authentic leader. And I do think that's a balance like you, you still need to be who you are as a coach. And I think that's where knowing, like your identity, as a coach, as you've described there, where your boundaries are, what do you stand for? What's your style of coaching? And so yes, whilst you may tailor the approach your client, you're, you're still honouring, who you are as a coach, and the work that you do, and sometimes that might mean that you get a couple of sessions in and you're like, actually, I'm not sure this is the best fit for for us, how are you experiencing it? And they might say, yeah, actually, you know, I prefer a bit more pace and a bit more action at that point, you need to decide, Is that who you're willing to be as a coach in this relationship? Or actually, would it make more sense to refer that coach II on to somebody who definitely has that style and would be a suitable match, and that's absolutely fine. Because you're both in a win win situation, you just need to handle it gracefully, with warmth and with compassion. So yes, in all of the tailoring, make sure you are still true to yourself, your boundaries, your values, who you are as a coach.

**Jo Wheatley**

We also have to tailor our approach on our coaching training programmes, which is obviously another big part of the work that we do. And we have learners joining us on our programmes that have individual needs, and we have lots of conversations, you know, with learners around what can we do to accommodate their needs? What? Well, it all sorts of different ways, don't we?

**Zoe Hawkins**

Yeah, absolutely. And I think sometimes that is the journey that the coachee goes on. So for some people, they will find the not knowing really exciting, that's great. I'm going to be learning so much like can't wait. And for other people, they find that incredibly anxiety inducing around gosh, I thought I was good at this and now look, all this stuff that I don't know. So you have to have hold space for all of that energy because it's all legitimate. And it's all part of the, you know the experience that people have. And that will be the same for your clients at any point in their coaching journey, they might surprise you with the energy that they bring to a particular session or the things that they're finding easy verses also the things that they find challenging. So I guess what we're saying here is a practitioners, your listening skills, and obviously, we've done podcasts on on listening in the past, are really the backbone of your coaching, listening to what is said, listening to what isn't said, listening to how things are said, to be able to have a really deep understanding of your client and their needs, whilst also helping them to have a deep understanding of who they are and the needs that they have in relation to their coaching outcomes.

**Jo Wheatley**

Your clients might say to you, Oh, could you send me an email it next week to remind me of this thing that I've said that I want to do today? And you get to say yes or no? Or shall we talk about that, you know, where that need has come from? On our training programmes, we will have learners who will struggle with the written assignments, for whatever reasons. And so our role is to talk to the accrediting bodies and to identify what can we do to support the learner to be able to demonstrate that they have met the learning criteria here. And that goes with everything from needing documents on the programme in a different format, through to being able to do a viva rather than submit a full on written assignment. And so, you know, think about the other parts of your life, you know, when broader than as a coach, you know, where and how do you tailor your approach? And what impact does that have, reflect on your own experiences of when you've been in a relationship where the other person has tailored their approach for you? What impact has that had on you? What has that enabled you to do that perhaps you wouldn't have been able to do without that support?

**Zoe Hawkins**

Absolutely. So hopefully, today's just given you some thoughts, I think I read somewhere that 80% of behaviours, habit. And so if we think about that, as coaches and practitioners, what's the 80% of your practice that is left to habit? And how often do you review that 80% And make sure that you're keeping it fresh, and you're keeping it relevant, and you're igniting, you know, new, new curiosity into your work and constantly being able to build and introduce new things into that 80% And if that is something you're looking to do this year, then come and have a look at our website. It's IG company.co.uk where we list all of our coaching qualifications, as well as our CPD and emotions coaching practitioner training.

**Zoe Hawkins**

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