



Article

Do you make yourself vulnerable enough

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Do you make yourself vulnerable enough

One of the most frequent causes of anxiety amongst coaches is whether they are living up to the client's expectations. Our need to be valued and feel we have done a good job pushes us towards the role of coaching expert – it's important to us that we exhibit the competence and the confidence we believe the client expects of us. And clients unwittingly collude in this role stereotyping, by putting their trust in our expertise.

In coach supervision, imposter syndrome (the unspoken belief that you are not really as good as other people assume you to be) turns out to be a remarkably common issue. Some examples include: *How can I coach a chief executive, when I don't have experience of being in a high level executive roles? Or I have to spend ages reading my notes about the client, so I won't be caught out without a suitable question to ask.* And of course these anxieties reduce the effectiveness of our coaching, because we put energy into making sure that we are safe and invulnerable. And yet all the time we are trying to help the client work with their own vulnerabilities.

We can attend to the client much more fully, if we can dispense with these worries. And we can do that by questioning our need to be invulnerable.

If we can't be vulnerable, how can we expect our clients to expose their vulnerabilities for exploration?

A good starting point is to ask ourselves the following questions:

- What are the areas where I feel the need to be invulnerable?
- Those where I allow myself to be vulnerable?
- How comfortable am I with being vulnerable?

For each area, where we could grow our capacity to be vulnerable ...

- What fears do I have about letting down my defences on this issue?
- Where do these fears come from?
- What would the benefit be to me of letting go this fear?
- What would be the benefit to my clients?
- What parts of those fears *can* I let go of?
- What parts do I *want* to let go of?
- What parts *will* I let go of?

It's OK to decide not to become vulnerable about certain things or in certain circumstances. But at least we can recognise when we raise the drawbridge and the effect that has on ourselves and the conversation with the client. Over time, most of us can learn not only to be comfortable with being vulnerable, but to appreciate it as useful resource for supporting the client in working with difficult issues.