

## Dear Master Coach

By Patricia Burgin, MA, MCC

[www.seattlecoach.com](http://www.seattlecoach.com)



Dear Master Coach:

I am up against a wall here! Every time I meet with my client and we begin our coaching session, she says "I don't know" to virtually every question. I have tried role playing, asking her to describe various events in her workplace that are related to her overall coaching goal and other tactics, but consistently hit a wall with her.

Do I need a bulldozer or is a gentle hammer better?

Thanks,  
Potential Wall Buster

Dear PWB:

I can almost guarantee you're not the first person to feel frustrated with this client. But you might be the first person who's got the skill to stay with her in her not-knowingness--and to challenge/support her to try something different.

A Door #1 and a Door #2 come to mind. Let's look behind Door #1 this time and take on Door #2 in the next DMC installment.

So. Door #1: Is this client ready for a coach? I know, I know. As coaches, we think pretty much everyone and everything is coachable. But there are exceptions: Like when the client is intent on changing someone who is not present. Or when the client is mired in an active addiction or mood disorder. Or when an old injury needs the healing attention of a good therapist. Or when your client is missing a resource and needs the active direction of another kind of professional (I'm thinking doctor, lawyer, dietician, therapist, interior decorator). I'm not without opinions about things outside of my wheelhouse, and am always happy to go on-and-on about them. So I have to be careful about my convictions about retirement planning being mistaken for expertise.

Behind Door #1, I listen to both myself and my client: Is this client able to look at her life, at what she believes is possible? Is she game to test new ideas--and to learn from what she tries? If, after some exploring, the answer is "yes" to both questions, I think you've got a coaching client. But sometimes, when I hear lots of "I don't knows", maybe the answer is "no" or "not yet".

If you've never had to gently direct a client toward a different resource, this might be your chance. Listen, trust your gut, explain both how you can help and how you see your limits. Use your coaching presence. With clear boundaries you may be able to offer coaching at the same time, but another pro might help with the missing resources and obstacles that have your client stuck.

Next month let's look behind Door #2: Your client is coachable and has a coaching agenda and she's hired you to support and challenge her to get unstuck. She's ready for you to be both direct and challenging. How can your coaching presence help her to begin to shift--and to start saying, "I have some ideas about that!"

In the meantime Potential Wall Buster, I know you'll be gentle. Until next time.

PEB, MC

Listen to Patty's "Dear Master Coach" monthly 3-minute answers at:

<http://www.seattlecoach.com/dearmastercoach.html>