

# Dear Master Coach

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Dear Master Coach:

I'm a very social extrovert with a spotty history of tolerating silences in conversation. (The word on the street is that you are too.) We both know that silence can do a lot in a great coaching conversation. How have you learned to "wait for it?"

Signed,  
Effusive

Hi Effusive!

I just looked up "quotes about silence" and scanned through the first page of self-help images. Interestingly, most of them intoned wisdom about silence being used as a means of correction, punishment, self-defense, withdrawal, disapproval, and general unhappiness. Along the lines of, "I don't get mad, I get silent." If you're like me, you've experienced that kind of silence somewhere along the line. (Bad girl.)

Sheesh. And then you stroll into a coach-training course and your mentor coaches say, au contraire! silence doesn't have to be dangerous. In fact, it can be respectful, creative and generative. That's when your visceral preparedness for the other shoe to drop when someone gets quiet comes up for review.

Imagine this scenario: You're sitting with someone you've coached for two months. He's in his first one hundred days in a challenging new role—and he has a hunch that this will be a big chapter in his life. His big agenda is, "To do a good job of being the new guy." As you sit down together, he looks at you and says quietly, "Today is day #50." Then he stops talking and looks at you inscrutably. You're tempted to:

- a. Start making things up about the silence
- b. Wonder if you're adding value
- c. Wonder if you're in trouble
- d. Pop off with one of your tried-and-true pieces of advice/encouragement

But luckily, your mentor coaches also talked about coaching presence: About knowing your own judgments and triggers and ways—along with how to use your voice, breath, mood and posture to stay calm enough to allow silence to do its work. You've gotten more patient. So you take a risk and do some things that coaches know how to do. You wait for it.

- a. You look back at him (and you remember now that he's a pretty resourceful person)

- b. You remember to breathe, and after a few moments,
- c. You gently ask, "What's happening?" or
- d. You smile and wonder aloud, "What should I ask you as we begin?"

And the person you're coaching takes another breath and smiles back at you. "When I come here," He says, "My conversation with myself gets such good air time. Here's what I want to work on . . ."

Being patient with silence is a big part of active listening, and as your comfort level with it grows, your talent for keeping the spotlight where it belongs will grow too.

Your fellow extrovert,

PEB, MC

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

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