

Dear Master Coach

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Dear Master Coach:

Sometimes I respect and adore my clients so much. I want to work with them just because I like them. Maybe the ethical thing is to refer them to a more detached and experienced coach. Also, I'm Facebook friends with several clients and I wonder if that is a mistake. What do you think?

Winter 2017

*Sign me,
Affectionate*

Dear Affectionate:

Let's see. There's good news, and there's bad news.

Here's what I know about you: You've got a big heart that's contagious with good will and positive ambition for yourself and others. And you want to make a habit of examining your life so that your big heart can get even deeper and stronger. You came to coaching already in possession of the stuff that's hard to teach.

And like most humans, you want to keep people happy with you. You've probably got some habits when it comes to receiving anything that feels like rejection. Maybe your empathy is a teensy bit unexamined at times. You probably also just like to advocate for more joy, respect and encouragement in the world.

How am I doing? I can be that way too—like that dog in the cartoon.

So, through the years, I've learned to adjust my enthusiasm in the interest of the first Core Competency. In my ethical behavior as a coach, I ask myself, "Does my exuberant affection in any way diminish my effectiveness and faithfulness to my coachee?" My job is to freely and wisely support and to challenge, and then to let go of the outcome.

A few years ago, I was talking with a former Olympic athlete whose days of competition were ending. She was bummed and a little bit lost, and she'd hired me to help her find her way. I confess to having been a little star-struck. I wanted her to like me. But she had lots of people who liked her and she wasn't paying them. So, after a few sessions of processing her sadness about the glory days in her rear-view mirror, I took a deep breath and said, "Carol. Are you sure you're really ready to talk about the future?" She glared back at me. Was I about to be fired? Or was something useful happening?

Then she leaned toward me and with all of her Olympic presence, affirmed quietly, "Well, that's why I'm here." Then I asked a bunch of questions to which she had to answer yes:

- Do you know how to be a good team member?
- Do you know how to rest and recover physically and mentally?
- Do you know how to work your butt off?
- Do you know how to win?

And she began to smile again.

Ethical behavior as a coach means that even as you express vast affection in your work, and as you enjoy it immensely, you cultivate your most mutual relationships with family, friends and colleagues. You can't require that level of mutuality from your coachees. You can't let your desire for their interest in your own life and performance to stop you from speaking both grace and truth.

The paradox is that if you can nurture that ethical and relational boundary, great coachees will adore you for helping them to change their lives.

As for social media, it all depends on what you decide to post. And how. And why. And for whom. Do you seek to inspire? To post powerful questions and resources? To let people know a bit more about you? Pragmatically, if you are a passionate advocate (or opponent) of something (or someone) politically or philosophically, and social media is your stage, expect to be followed and hired by like-minded people. Coachable people and organizations who see things differently will likely head elsewhere. Set your privacy settings accordingly.

PEB, MC

Listen to Patty's "Dear Master Coach" quarterly 3-4 minute answers at:

<http://www.seattlecoach.com/dear-master-coach-blog>