

Advanced Applied Neuroscience Questions: When coaching feels stuck

Reut Schwartz-Hebron, Founder
and Certifying Partner, KCI



Top 20 Questions Experienced Coaches Tend to Ask When Coaching Feels Stuck

Reut Schwartz-Hebron · KCI (Key Change Institute) · Advanced Applied Neuroscience

As a coach, when your skill grows, you stop being challenged primarily by the basics. Greater mastery exposes more advanced challenges.

From an Advanced Applied Neuroscience perspective, coaching being stuck doesn't describe anything you or your client are doing wrong. What's keeping the process stuck is an underlying emotional layer. Learned threat-related patterns which are meant to protect your client but are blocking them instead.

Here are the top 20 questions experienced life and executive coaches tend to ask when coaching feels stuck.

Understanding what keeps the coaching stuck:

- ☐ 1. We keep coming back to the same issue. How can I tell whether we are deepening the work or simply circling?
- ☐ 2. Should we focus on solving this particular problem, or on what keeps creating similar problems for this client?
- ☐ 3. Can I understand what happens in the difficult moment or do I only get access to client's account of what happened?
- ☐ 4. Am I mistaking the client's processing or communication style for avoidance?
- ☐ 5. Several explanations fit the lack of follow-through: emotional discomfort, ambivalence, executive-function difficulties, or practical constraints. How do I work out which are relevant for this client?

Looking at goals, capacity, and context:

- ☐ 6. Is this goal genuinely the client's own, or something they believe they should want?

- ☐ 7. Does my client want the change but feels unready for what it would require? How would I recognize the difference?
- ☐ 8. A strategy worked for a while and then stopped. Has the client's commitment changed, or has the strategy stopped fitting their needs and circumstances?
- ☐ 9. My client appears highly capable. What does it cost them to perform this way, and is that cost sustainable?
- ☐ 10. How much of this difficulty is maintained by the client's responses, and how much by the environment they return to?

Choosing how to respond:

- ☐ 11. Are our accountability systems helping the client act, or adding pressure and shame around something we haven't understood yet?
- ☐ 12. Am I interpreting pauses, tangents, or detailed explanations as avoidance when they may be part of how this client processes and communicates?
- ☐ 13. Am I helping my client feel understood while inadvertently helping the pattern remain intact?
- ☐ 14. How much challenge would be useful here, and how do I judge its timing without pushing past the client's capacity?
- ☐ 15. We've reached emotionally difficult material. What can I responsibly work with in coaching, and when is another kind of support needed?

Examining the coaching relationship and my own role

- ☐ 16. The client and the people expecting them to change want different things. Whose goal is actually guiding the coaching?
- ☐ 17. Was the tension in that session part of useful work, or a rupture in the relationship that needs attention?
- ☐ 18. What am I bringing into this impasse through my own impatience, rescue impulse, or need to demonstrate value?
- ☐ 19. Is my between-session support helping the client become more independent, or making me increasingly responsible for their progress?

- ☐ 20. How do I know when to change my approach, reconsider the coaching fit, or bring in another experienced perspective?

Ask yourself:

- Which of these questions come up for you?
- What other questions would you add to this list?
- Are there other questions you are exploring when it comes to more difficult coaching challenges?

“I feel as though Reut handed me a more precise map of terrain I have been walking for years. I can now see things I could not see before, and I have greater precision in how I coach.”

— Kelly Meerbott, PCC, Executive Coach