



# BUT, IS IT COACHING? OPINIONS FROM THE EDGE

Introducing a new column by coach and supervisor [Marie Faire](#) where she plans to challenge, if not slay, a few of the 'sacred cows' of the coaching world. (Apologies to all vegans!)

In his fabulous new book *Think Again*, Adam Grant implores us not to define our identity by our opinions and to have a 'challenge network' (not just a support network.) I hope that the thoughts I share in this column will be part of your challenge network.

## IN DEFENCE OF DEPENDENCY

Many years ago, when I first applied for my accreditation with the AC, I asked one of my long-term clients for a reference (of course choosing one who I knew rated me highly!). She didn't disappoint. And then I read what she had written under 'any other comments': 'I have been working with Marie for over 14 years and, with each new role I have taken on, it had been a condition of my acceptance of the offer that my coach come with me. I would not make a significant decision without speaking with her first.'

I felt the raised eyebrows and tut-tuts of imaginary assessors in my head: dependence!

I do understand why dependence may, at face value, not necessarily always be a good thing in coaching. I would, however, like to challenge the idea that it is always a bad thing. I'm not a fan of absolutes. It depends...

Unhealthy dependency. This is to be avoided and it is our role as a coach (with the help of our supervisor) to carefully address signs of dependency in our clients, as well as ensure that we are not actually the one that is dependent. We might become dependent on our client for many reasons, from reliance on their fees to a need in us to be needed. Not useful for anyone.

On the other hand, let's explore a couple of counter examples, and make a case for what we might call 'healthy dependency'.

## SOMETIMES DEPENDENCY IS JUST PART OF THE PROCESS

If we are working with someone on a difficult issue, they may, on their journey to not needing us anymore, become dependent (and express dependence) on us. Some individuals are more prone to this, depending on their own attachment issues. If, however, we are compassionate and hold the boundaries, we can recognise that it is nothing more, nothing less than part of the process. Not something

to throw up our hands in horror over. The only problem is when we are the problem – the one dependent on the relationship. If we continue to facilitate their process of growth and development, the dependency phase will ultimately end.

There is a growing perspective that suggests that executive coaching is more like supervision than coaching. I have a lot of sympathy with that viewpoint. Executives who I work with arrive, much as my experienced supervisees do, with their own agenda. Both tell me what they want from me. The foundation of my contracts with both are that I hold a reflective space where they can explore the impact of their behaviours and stop and think (again!). A sign of maturity in a coachee or supervisee is when they have resolved issues by having a productive conversation with me in their own heads – showing the growth of their 'internal supervisor' or 'internal coach'. Ongoing coaching provides rich input for those internalised conversations. Rather than dependence, this is about the power of the reflective space to meet their ongoing needs – they don't see the need or want to change their horse (supervisor or coach.) At regular reviews, we check that what we are doing continues to serve them, that what they are getting from continuing to work with me is more advantageous than switching to someone new and different.

Many of my supervisees, who have worked with me for years, are 'dependent' on the reflective process, rather than dependent on me. By my reckoning there are far worse things to be dependent on.

Maybe next time you have any concern about dependence you could just check in with yourself: is it unhealthy or healthy? About me or about them?

*If you have an idea and would like to be a guest writer for this column in the future, please do get in touch with Marie at [marie@thebeyondpartnership.co.uk](mailto:marie@thebeyondpartnership.co.uk)*

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Marie is an AC-accredited master executive coach and coaching supervisor, and co-founder of the Beyond Partnership. She is running a webinar series on 'Speaking Truth to Power' for the AC in June 2021.

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