

# PROVOCATIVE COACHING

Humor, Love and Challenge

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**WE ALL HAVE  
AN ENDLESS  
SOURCE OF  
LAUGHTER,  
SIMPLY  
WITHIN  
OURSELVES.**

**ADÉLKA VENDL**



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**This e-book is based on literature  
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# TEN FAST WAYS TO PROVOCATIVE COACHING

Provocative coaching lovingly caricatures the client's world view. It is an exciting and stimulating method to rapidly empower the client through humor, warmth and challenge.



1. Fall in love with the client's world view. Strengthen and admire this mindset.



6. Talk about taboo subjects with the client, negative thoughts and things which scare the client.



2. Quickly interrupt the client and make absurd statements, ask provoking questions and use storytelling.



7. Exaggerate the client's thought process and get right in there



3. Go straight for what is most obvious, such as "No wonder you are exhausted with working hard".



8. Give absurd advice.



4. Pretend to be stupid and ignorant. Deliberately misinterpret the client.



9. Behave 'unusually' for a coach. For example, greatly express your approval, infantilize, criminalize, moralize.



5. Speak in stereotypes and generalisations



10. Tell wise tales, whether truth or fiction, and therefore show that you are on the client's side.

# A BIRD'S EYE VIEW OF THE PROVOCATIVE STYLE

A bird's eye view of provocative coaching is described as follows: provocative coaching is 'action learning', working on your behavior in the coaching room.

The goal of provocative coaching is to provoke counterbalance, which is then steered in the right direction, so that the client becomes empowered to address or accept the problem himself.

All this comes from involvement, with a warm heart and a great deal of humor.

On the following pages you will find practical ways to get started with provocative coaching.

# A BIRD'S EYE VIEW OF THE PROVOCATIVE STYLE

## How do you do that?

- ✧ **Have a good relationship and love for your participant**
  - Use statements instead of questions
  - Use humor
  - Do not mince your words
  - Abandon the role of distant and professional care-giver
  - Make striking comparisons
  - Be close to the heart of the matter
  - Step into your client's world; speak, think and act like him.

# A BIRD'S EYE VIEW OF THE PROVOCATIVE STYLE

- ✧ Making fun of something
  - Exaggerate
  - Use metaphors
  - Recognise stereotypical realities
  - Grab the emotions, what should not happen here?
  - Working on other reflections with the client
  
- ✧ Unexpected viewpoints can contribute to
  - Taking the lead by speaking out
  - Working with pictures and stories
  - Going with the first impulse
  - Association and creativity
  - Providing absurd solutions or advice

# A BIRD'S EYE VIEW OF THE PROVOCATIVE STYLE

## \* **Playing devil's advocate**

- You can see the 'bad' side of the problem
- Tolerate resistance
- Encourage the participant to do more of the same
- Guide resistance in the desired direction  
(advice arouses resistance)

## \* **No missionary urge**

- Allow all opinions, both destructive and contrary
- Accept that the problem is good
- offer no solution
- Negative publicity is the best publicity  
(that is not for you . . .)



# PROVOCATIVE COACHING

## START-POINTS

**You create a loving caricature of the other person's world view.**

**\* Your conditions are to:**

- Have a positive grounding
- Recognize absurd life situations
- Impartial observations
- Dare to make mistakes
- Remain at eye-level; it is not always necessary to work from a professional attitude
- Have the courage to proceed with something
- Be honest with your feelings
- The art of failure; if you are brave or honest, you might make mistakes which you must accept
- Be in the here and now

# PROVOCATIVE COACHING START-POINTS

- ✧ **Provocative interventions are never:**
  - Abusive
  - Saying what you think to get even
  - Extremely confrontational
  - Sarcastic

# WHAT IS PROVOCATIVE COACHING?

Laughter is the best medicine. This powerful expression is at the heart of provocative coaching. Strength arises from the liberation of laughing. Laughing helps you see how you sabotage yourself and the absurdity of this. Anyone who can laugh at himself is halfway to solving his problems.

Humor and its challenges open new doors to solutions. It allows you to view your problems from a distance and to get to work creatively; not because others tell you to, but because you feel it is right.

And that is something completely different from what care workers think . . .

# WHAT IS PROVOCATIVE COACHING?

This coaching method seems to mock certain assumptions in normal coaching, such as:

- You must listen more than speak.
- You must not laugh.
- Problems are always serious.
- You must make a diagnosis before you can begin.
- You keep your distance.
- You remain objective.
- You must not interrupt the other person.
- You protect the structure and the objective.

Provocative coaching is a way of helping clients to solve their problems. But what do you actually do?

# WHAT IS PROVOCATIVE COACHING?

You clarify the problem with exaggeration and gestures to show the client what you see, and make it very obvious that you are reflecting the client.

This is because you want to clearly show the absurdity of the problem behavior and make the client laugh.

This laughing in itself gives the client back his freedom.

Because laughing and rebellion are closely aligned to intense feelings, provocative coaching works very quickly.

This happens because the heavy emotions felt by your client are directly linked to his thinking patterns and behavior. Then you as coach are assured that the clients is emotionally involved. Otherwise it remains simply cognitive behavior which changes little.

# WHAT IS PROVOCATIVE COACHING?



**The reaction to provocative treatment is direct and favorable.**

- You are 100% behind your client's experience, because you give him more equality, which he appreciates. This means that you confirm his actions. He does nothing about his problem.

# WHAT IS PROVOCATIVE COACHING?

- You continually test motivation. You want to help clients, but who says they are ready for it?  
You now get a realistic estimate of their willingness to change.
- You do not take the lead in making preparations to consider plans or solutions, you allow the client to be completely autonomous, with teasing and challenging.  
You can see the change.
- In the coachkamer you get the evidence or the client's behavior adjusts or not.  
As you teas and challenge him.  
You have an overview of the changes

# THERAPY AND COACHING

I personally do not make a particularly great distinction between therapy and coaching, because they both are about helping and influencing someone. Setting goals leads to changing behavior. The distinction in some literature is that the therapist is more the expert in therapy or care-giving. The relationship is more hierarchical and more focussed on treatment.

Coaching has more equality, and the coach sees the client as the expert in his own issues.

According to Anthony Grant, a coaching psychologist from Australia, coaching can be defined as "A result-oriented systematic process in which the coach facilitates.

The enhancement of life experience and goal-attainment in the personal and/or professional lives of normal, non-clinical clients."



# THERAPY AND COACHING

The most important thing is to be familiar with your client's subject. This has to do with your empathy. It is better to show the advantages of experienced problems. If you cannot do that, you must above all be curious about and focussed on:

- What does not ring true about what the client says?
- What must we avoid speaking about here?
- Where are there contradictions?
- Is there anything crazy about this problem?
- Why is it indeed a problem?
- Why do I get a strange feeling in my stomach?
- When should I quit?

# THE 3 BASIC ELEMENTS OF PROVOCATIVE COACHING

The three main elements of provocative coaching are humor, love and challenge. This trinity is what makes provocative coaching unique. Usually coaches have the need to support their clients' resources through positive corroborations. The provocative coach also concentrates on the strong side of the client but shows this non-verbally.



# THE 3 BASIC ELEMENTS OF PROVOCATIVE COACHING

Her intention is one of trust and kindness.

In verbal contact, however, she is challenging.

Provocation without a loving attitude becomes aggression.

Contact without provocation leads to feeble compassion.

And humor without contact becomes sarcasm.

After explaining these three elements,

I will specify some behaviors and attitudes which are

important for a provocative coach.

# THE 3 BASIC ELEMENTS OF PROVOCATIVE COACHING

## HUMOR



The provocative coach lovingly caricatures the client's world view. This means that she first steps into the client's world, looks around with him, and then experiences what is in his way.

# THE 3 BASIC ELEMENTS OF PROVOCATIVE COACHING

Where the client sabotages himself, the coach enlarges upon this with a good dose of humor. Behavior leading to him not reaching his goals, causing damage to himself or others is closely examined. The idea is not to make a caricature of the client himself, but of his non-effective behavior. The coach creates the caricature to make the client stop and laugh at his own situation. Laughing is a release. It is unbelievably liberating to laugh at things which bother us. Having a good laugh gives others the chance to look at your situation. At that moment, you are ready to change response patterns and to feel the freedom of being a fallible human being. Laughing brings everything into perspective.

# THE 3 BASIC ELEMENTS OF PROVOCATIVE COACHING

It is for this good reason that researcher Victor Raskin concludes in his work on the basis of humor that humor and playfulness are key ingredients in a liberated life.

## LIEFDE



# THE 3 BASIC ELEMENTS OF PROVOCATIVE COACHING

The loving aspect in creating the aforementioned caricature is crucially important. A colleague once said to me that the term 'loving' was actually a bit too familiar. He would have preferred 'respectful'. I'll think about this. Perhaps it scares people away? But the more I think about it, the more I know that it must be 'loving', because this aspect of proximity is a very important part of provocative coaching. The word 'respect' implies a certain distance, and belongs to the category of nice-sounding coaching language. I'll stick with the term 'loving', because a good provocative discussion is having two friends sitting on the couch, talking laughing and teasing each other. You cannot do that without love.

# THE 3 BASIC ELEMENTS OF PROVOCATIVE COACHING

The less distance there is in provocative coaching, the more you can 'cherish' someone, allow provocation and introduce challenge; and have more effect. Some research was made into the predictable factor in successful therapy. One of the results was that if the therapist and the client visibly imitate each other (like people who are loving and intimate with each other), the success factor of the therapy is significantly higher than if this is not the case. In an article by Wasylyshyn (2003) coaches think that their relationship with coaches is one of the most important success factors in coaching (8.3 out of 10).



# THE 3 BASIC ELEMENTS OF PROVOCATIVE COACHING

## UITDAGING



The word 'provocative' in provocative coaching is never used in a sadistic or abusive sense, nor to deliberately cause pain or in the context of extreme confrontation.

# THE 3 BASIC ELEMENTS OF PROVOCATIVE COACHING

It is used in the sense of unlocking, waking up and stimulating. There are two sides to the coach's challenge. She either gives too much equality to the client, or she advises him to solve the problem.

"But you're absolutely not the type to be successful"

**MAAR JIJ BENT HELEMAAL NIET  
HET TYPE OM SUCCESVOL TE ZIJN**



# DIFFERENT SORTS OF HUMOR

We all have an endless source of laughter, simply within ourselves. We can always laugh, that never dries up. If the source is well-grounded, we feel good, happy and sometimes a little uplifted. Laughing feels great, specially if it comes from the heart. But you do not only feel happiness. A healthy laugh helps other feelings to emerge, such as connection, safety, love and tenderness for yourself and others as fallible human beings. Contact with your surroundings is strengthened, and you feel less alone if the source is well-grounded. Laughing ensures that you are gently reminded of the fact that we all have our weaknesses, which is completely fine and makes us human. There is already so much humor in our daily lives, behaviour that we exhibit and solutions that we consider.

# DIFFERENT SORTS OF HUMOR

You just have to open your heart and become a nosey parker to experience this humor. People around you relax and feel at their ease if we ourselves can laugh at our (im)possibilities, and therefore clients will, too. They feel that you have compassion because of your own shortcomings, and that is safe. This approach is not new. Allen Fay had already published a book in 1979, "Making things better by making them worse." In it, he described how a therapist who exaggerates can have bad reactions for a patient's incompetence: "Nobody loves you - you have absolutely nothing to offer anybody. If patients hear about problems or complaints in an exaggerated fashion, they realise the humor of the situation.

# DIFFERENT SORTS OF HUMOR

This enables them to:

- take an emotional distance from their problems
- see the problem more objectively and
- start to cope with it

That is how it works.

# DIFFERENT SORTS OF HUMOR

Many colleagues have made a fair point that you should certainly use 'good' humor in your provocative coaching. I agree, and will try to explain below the sort and extent of humor you can use in provocative coaching. I sometimes hear around me that a lot of acting is necessary in provocative coaching. If people watch an instructional DVD for the first time, they often think that provocative coaching is somewhat artificial. But it certainly is not all about acting. There may well be some elements in provocative coaching that make you think of a play or comedy show. But if you want to be a good provocative coach, you must be able to distinguish between different sorts of humor, and know when to make use of them.

# DIFFERENT SORTS OF HUMOR

That is an art in itself. But that does not mean that you cannot learn, because the most natural and personal humor is within all of us. We were born with it. The art is just daring to use it and 'showing' yourself to people. "But wishy-washy, characterless things can be fine in their place"

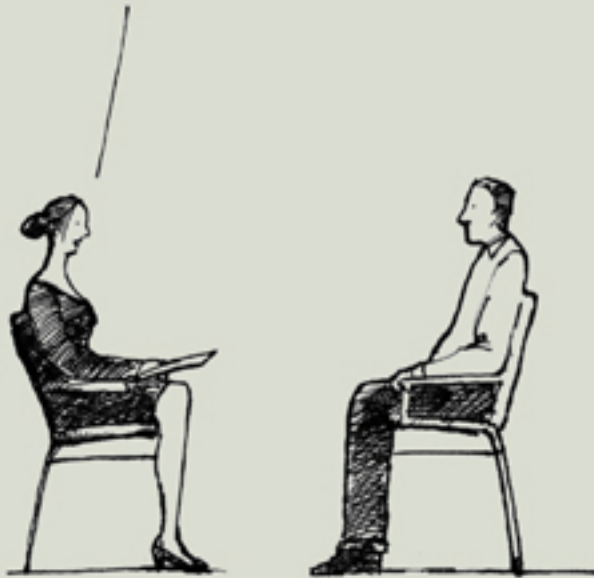
Three degrees of humor:

There are three ways to make people laugh or to evoke humor:

- With the head (cerebral humor)
- Power-oriented
- In solidarity

# DIFFERENT SORTS OF HUMOR

MAAR SLAPPE  
KARAKTERLOZE  
ZAKKEN ZIJN  
VAAK JUIST  
ERG PRETTIG  
VOOR HUN  
OMGEVING



The three degrees of humor all have a different effect on the emotional bank account which you have with your client. The emotional bank account is a metaphor for the



# DIFFERENT SORTS OF HUMOR

extent of trust in a relationship, as described by Stephen Covey. An emotional bank account works just like a normal one. You can pay in, take out, go into the red, build up savings, check it, let it grow unnoticed or liquidate it.

The three degrees of humor are discussed in detail during Adélka's training.

# IMPORTANT PROVOCATIVE PILLAR: TAKING THE LEAD

The most important aspect of taking the lead during a discussion is that you say things which would not normally come to the surface in a normal discussion. This happens amongst other things because of the manner of lead-taking in a discussion. In non-directive coaching methods, the coach follows the client discreetly. However, in provocative coaching, both parties follow the line equally. The coach may guide the client for a while, but then they change direction, sometimes even jointly. And so it is not rare for the coach to take the first step. She is therefore clearly more 'in charge'. She has more than a finger in the pie, she is controlling the influence without undue effort. The attitude here is to check that your leadership is also in connection with the other person.

# IMPORTANT PROVOCATIVE PILLAR: TAKING THE LEAD

If this is not the case, you gain authoritarian domination. At first sight, the provocative coach seems very directive. She takes the lead, and also decides the mood and tempo so she can respond with humor to surprises or stereotypical statements. Essentially, the coach allows herself to be led by the client. She still focusses on the effect of her provocations on the client. As mentioned earlier, the provocative coach does not show extreme enthusiasm and does not head away from her goal.

The provocative coach is always occupied with unspoken moods or non-verbal signals. For example, if the client indicates that he would like to work on a particular problem, but finds difficulty from the beginning,

# IMPORTANT PROVOCATIVE PILLAR: TAKING THE LEAD

the coach will then act directly. Every inconsistency in verbal and non-verbal attitude is approached.

The difference from regular coaching is that the provocative coach makes this clear in an indirect and non-confrontational manner. 'I hear that you want to change, but you are sprawled on the chair, why is that?'

The coach is quick to make use of praising the incongruous, which she notices, and she expresses her admiration for it. This helps the client to alter his behavior. The following example is part of a session with Jon, who wants to sort out his depression.

*Johan: (looks suspicious and exhausted) I'd like to get out of this state. It costs me too much energy.*

# IMPORTANT PROVOCATIVE PILLAR: TAKING THE LEAD

*Coach: (also low energy) I think it's so good that you're not getting on well with your problem. You can really estimate your strength.*

*Johan: (confused) What do you mean by that?*

*Coach: That you tackle your problem appropriately. I always think it is so unbelievable when depressed people are able to tackle their problem happily and cheerfully. I think your mood is very consistent.*

*Look, a depressed man must also show that it takes him a lot of effort. That goes with your illness. It would not be normal if you were to jump right in . . .*

*Johan: (somewhat agitated) Yes, yes, I understand. I would like to work on it, but I feel so paralyzed. (Slightly stronger) But I really want to address my problem.*

# IMPORTANT PROVOCATIVE PILLAR: TAKING THE LEAD

Adélka's training discusses all the pillars of provocative coaching.



Are you attending the  
Provocative Day  
on 24 June?



[Click here](#)



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[I'm coming to the provocative day](#)