



4-PILLARS OF THE COACH- CLIENT RELATIONSHIP

With Rhiannon Bush

INTRO

“Do I need a life coach?” You’re listening to Episode 4, with Rhiannon Bush

Welcome to the Do I need a life coach? Podcast. We’re here to discuss the ins- and outs- of the life coaching industry and give you tools to use, to see for yourself. I’m your host, Rhiannon Bush. Mother, management consultant and a passionate, certified life coach.



Today we're talking about the four pillars of a coach-client relationship.

I believe these to be the four things that are mandatory in all coach-client relationships, yes, ALL coach-client relationships. These are also applicable as a leader in a business, as a consultant on client sites, or as anybody in a position of greater power in a relationship where there's a vested interest in the outcome.

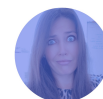
So, if you're a coach, therapist, leader, manager, confidant, etc. These pillars lay the foundation for a personal code of ethics and wonderful communication.



These pillars are so important because the client's success is not only determined by the quality of coaching they receive from the coach, but also the amount the client is willing to divulge. The coach-client relationship a collaborative one and the amount a client is willing to divulge, how vulnerable and forthcoming a client is willing to be, is determined by these four pillars.

The comfort they have not to be judged by their coach, the psychological safety they feel and knowing that what they say, how they act and what transpires in the space of a coaching session will be kept confidential, in that space and time.

So why would we need all four-pillars? These four pillars are all inextricably linked. They all impact each other but are equally as important in isolation. Today we're going to break each pillar down so we can grasp a really clear understanding of each individual pillar, and therefore comprehend the differences between them and why each are so important to the cohesion and success of a coach-client relationship. Let's get started.



The four pillars are psychological safety, trust, confidentiality and a judgement-free environment. The pillars are listed in this order because psychological safety is all-encompassing. Trust, confidentiality and a judgement-free environment all feed into the client feeling psychologically safe.

We'll cover them in the order of simplicity and what I mean by this, is that the coach-client relationship can recover more easily from a breakdown in the simpler pillars – versus the more subconscious, all-encompassing and more complex pillars.

For example, if a coach accidentally slips up and asks a 'why' based question (which often come across as triggering and patronizing) or offers their opinion, then they can pause and redirect by asking a better question without it having a seriously adverse impact on the relationship. If a coach somehow breaks psychological safety or trust, it is, in most instances, a long road back from there for the client, and often takes a lot more time than is granted in a coach-client relationship.

Every individual will be different, and you will know for yourself which ones are more important to you. From my experience this is the order I would place the four pillars in is Psychological safety, Trust, Confidentiality; and a Judgement-free environment.



I'm going to start with the simplest first: Creating a judgement-free environment gives the client the gift of honesty. And not only with you, but with themselves. I've seen clients have light-bulb moments by just being quiet. Coaching is not about interjecting. If anything, it's about providing silence, holding space and keeping a straight face. Possibly raising an eyebrow here or there in a gesture of "tell me more".

A coach's best tool is stoicism and not, unlike many people believe early in their coaching journey, empathy. A coach needs to keep their opinion and their feelings out of it and if instead, a coach is empathetic, they will often express their emotions which doesn't allow that space for the client to explore how they and they alone, feel. Another problem for an overly empathetic coach, is that when they hear of extreme trauma somebody may have experienced, even if they don't express it but they feel it, they need to spend time post-session processing that emotion. It's almost as if traumatic feelings are transferrable, and as such, coaches and I'd also say therapists, need to find time regularly to process and move through emotions that they experience others' experiencing, or that they experience within themselves.

It's part of healthy mind management and I know with some of the things I've heard clients say, I've needed to take time myself to continue to be an effective coach for them and for others.



If you're a coach listening to this, please let me say that I know not only for myself, but for the many many coaches I helped to start their coaching qualification, that the main reason you're drawn to be a coach is because you care. You care immensely about the wellbeing of others and while this is a beautiful quality to have, it's also one that you need to be highly aware of. This is so you don't burn out yourself, or accidentally fall into the hole with your client, and also so you're able to climb out of your own hole as you progress.

Coaches are human too and we're all a work-in-progress. I'd love to say that as a coach, I've got everything figured out, but I'd be outright lying. Especially when you're feeling ambitious and chasing big goals and dreams, growing and expanding into places you've not been in before... it can all become overwhelming.



Maintain awareness of your emotional state and save your empathy for friends and loved ones, even colleagues. Not for your coaching clients because if you truly want to serve your clients, you need to be emotionally fit to hold space, not empathise and take on the negative emotions that they're experiencing yourself.

Keep in mind that everybody, even siblings, interpret the world differently. Everybody has a different perspective, and creating the space for the client to explore their own feelings, under only the observation of a coach, is a really strange and enlightening experience. If you've never had it before, I highly recommend you give it a try. It's not something we experience in everyday life because as a society, we're conditioned to react in certain ways, to certain things. Whether it's shock, sympathy, compassion, frustration, jealousy... we're conditioned and this clouds our ability to look inwards and decipher what our intuition and inner voice is trying to tell us. It stifles our ability to identify what we truly want and how we truly feel.



The second pillar in terms of simplicity is **confidentiality**. Easy to grasp, right? Someone tells you, you keep it to yourself. You tell someone something, they keep it to themselves. Simple. Yet why is it so difficult for some people? I know it took time for me – I was not good at confidentiality and it took me becoming a coach and giving myself a serious talking to... or multiple talkings to, to be honest with myself and realise the importance of confidentiality. Not only as a coach but as a friend.

When it came to my clients, it was important to me in my practice to be credible and that meant being a vault, what comes to me stays with me, no matter what. What's shared stays within that time and space. It's not my news to tell.

I still find that so many people, particularly within corporate teams fail at it. And yes, I'd extend that to leadership teams. Confidentiality is vital when building rapport and team culture, managing performance, communicating clearly and when fostering trust.



The second pillar in terms of simplicity is **confidentiality**. Easy to grasp, right? Someone tells you, you keep it to yourself. You tell someone something, they keep it to themselves. Simple. Yet why is it so difficult for some people? I know it took time for me – I was not good at confidentiality and it took me becoming a coach and giving myself a serious talking to... or multiple talkings to, to be honest with myself and realise the importance of confidentiality. Not only as a coach but as a friend.

When it came to my clients, it was important to me in my practice to be credible and that meant being a vault, what comes to me stays with me, no matter what. What's shared stays within that time and space. It's not my news to tell.

I still find that so many people, particularly within corporate teams fail at it. And yes, I'd extend that to leadership teams. Confidentiality is vital when building rapport and team culture, managing performance, communicating clearly and when fostering trust.



I think every single one of us knows what it's like to have something we've kept a secret spread around. Or the opposite, where we've been the perpetrator – we've said something we shouldn't, to the wrong person and it's gone around and hurt someone. Or both.

I fairly recently reconnected with a girlfriend from high school, in Canberra of all places. We hadn't spoken since high school and yet I remember feeling close to her, like she was one of my good friends. I knew something had happened but I had entirely forgotten what it was. When we went out for a drink, I asked her and she said I'd made a big deal of her telling others about losing my virginity or something to my boyfriend at the time. Something so trivial but had we not seriously randomly bumped back into each other, we may never have reconnected. Isn't that crazy!



While it wasn't a big deal to me at the time we reconnected, it clearly was at the time it was spread around. So was trust broken? Yes. Can it be rebuilt and can we start again? Yes. Often broken confidentiality feels like betrayal and it takes, in my opinion, a series of events and often a lot of events to make up for that betrayal and to rebuild trust that that person won't behave like that again.

Different people will behave differently and have a different opinion. Whatever is right for you is right for you.

Think of a time when you have broken or you have had your confidentiality broken. What was your response? How do you feel about it? Can you see why it's so important in a coach-client relationship?



Maintaining confidentiality builds trust, which brings us to Pillar 3. Brene Brown says trust is built in the little moments. The moments when you could ignore it, you could keep to yourself but instead, you don't. Instead, you pay attention, you notice and instead of walking away or turning a blind eye, you engage.

For a coach, I believe this comes mostly in the way of sensory acuity. I remember, years ago, coaching a client who said something like 'oh and he didn't treat me very well' and then just kept going on with another conversation. I paused her and went back to address what was, at the time, a throw-away line, just something she said. We spoke about that the rest of the session and it ended up being a much much more significant thing for her than she'd realized.

People leave breadcrumbs, including you, and as such, it's important that the coach pays attention to those breadcrumbs and pieces things together to ask. Trust requires courage from the coach to call things out, question things they're unsure of, get very curious and also pay attention.



Because often those queues are so unconscious and so insignificant that blink and you'll miss it. It's giving the client full attention to really see what's going on not only hear what they're saying but what they're not saying and the little cues that they give in the way of their body language that may indicate that there's a lot more underlying there for them than what they actually consciously realise. That's where you add great value as a coach.

Trust to me is feeling understood. Like I don't necessarily have to say anything, there's just a lot of unconscious communication and understanding. When someone gives you trust it's incredibly powerful because there is a power-balance that shifts. In a weird way, it's almost empowering to give someone else power over you in the way of having information they can use against you.



And I don't know why but for some reason things like S&M comes up to mind right now for me, you know I've really been intrigued by the world of S&M and while it's not something I've actively practised it something that for you to relinquish control is a very very powerful thing, it's complete juxtaposition And article about women from Africa using a lot of ropes in the bedroom and that connotation with slavery and the juxtaposition of that and those women that were interviewed were talking about the empowerment of it and the sensuality of it instead of it being this this link that they had mentally to their ancestors and they passed it in the ancestors all them had experience I bet you weren't expecting this podcast to go there but open book, we're talking a vote it.

To find a trusting relationship, is special. Personal or professional. And maybe it shouldn't be. Maybe trust should be a lot more common. But letting yourself trust is often a key to firstly, hiring a coach to help you grow and progress and secondly, to overcoming and living into a bigger vision than you could've ever imagined for yourself.



When I think of what psychological safety means to me, I think of being uncensored. Unfiltered. I can say what I truly think and feel naturally without fear of being judged, without fear of persecution, and without what I say being relayed to someone else – to someone it shouldn't be relayed too. It's the combination of all pillars.

Beyond that, I feel free to be me. I also feel this deep connection with the other person of "I've got you" which encourages me to take risks and recognize or say things that I may not ever feel "safe" to share with anybody else... ever. As a coach, it's your responsibility to create an environment of psychological safety for your client.

I remember living with a few housemates back in the day and every night I'd walk in the door I could feel the bitchiness and hear the whispering behind my back. This is called psychic attack. More common in high school than amongst young adults, you know they're talking about you maliciously and you feel psychologically unsafe. It's a horrible feeling.



In that situation my mind began to dramatize a lot of things, mainly in the name of protecting me. This is the role of our ego, we all have one, and I'll talk more about this later. But I'd begun to question where my belongings went if I couldn't find them, whether my food had been tampered with, and what they were saying until the anxiety was too much and I had to move out. It was unnecessary and unkind, I couldn't change them but I could change the circumstance so I moved.

If anyone wants to understand the impact of psychological safety in a team environment and its effects on productivity, performance and culture, research Project Aristotle by Google. A fascinating study where they get together the most skilled of skilled employees and put them in a team. They don't perform the way they thought. Same with the Brooklyn Nets building a super team (twice) and the players don't gel. Why? Psychological safety.



So all pillars are similar, feed into one another but stand alone in their importance. To put it a different way, they feel different and by strengthening one of them, you strengthen the others. By weakening one, you jeopardise the others.

When considering these pillars the foundation of a coaching relationship, as a client I don't believe they're your responsibility. As the person paying for the service with a coach, it's the coach's responsibility to create and maintain this environment. Coaches, good coaches, are trained in how to do this. With professional integrity.

I would extend this same sentiment to anyone leading staff. If you're managing or leading staff, it is your responsibility to be aware of, learn about and foster these four pillars within your team. You'll be surprised at the productivity, engagement, retention and trust that's generated between you.



If you have a boss or manager who you lack these qualities with, address which ones are missing and why. Even if you're not in the position of power, begin to improve these or take it to them to discuss in more detail at your next review.

If you decide to start researching a coach to work with trust your intuition. Your intuition is a subconscious guide to people you've experienced in the past as trustworthy or untrustworthy, or whether they're somebody who can teach you something.

Your success with a coach will depend on the strength of these pillars.



My last point on these pillars in a coach-client relationship is that your coach may, at times, ask you questions that stretch your current perception of reality. This is how we grow, we start to see new possibilities and we can change. This is why people see a life coach. Let me be clear, and I'm adamant about this point, this discomfort, change and unfamiliar territory should be facilitated by a coach ONLY when those four-pillars are there to support the client while they experience and accept the change. It's nurturing, supportive and aids in them moving forward.

I've been in coaching masterminds in the past where I've been stretched and coached willingly, but in what I would consider to be a psychologically unsafe environment. This is not ok. Ever. No matter what. Period. Never OK. Coaches are there to support their client moving forward. That is what we, as coaches, are paid for -0 to provide a sounding board, safe space and the skills to help the client see a new perspective and move forward. We facilitate that right through to where the client reaches an emotionally empowered place where they can pick up the emotional management and tasks on their own. I consider it negligent to disrupt a client emotionally, hoping they get a lesson, to just leave them to their own devices. Other coaches may disagree with me but as a coach who has experienced her coach do that, I'm passionate that that is never is ok and goes against what we, as coaches, are about.



Consider a relationship or a time in your life when you've felt psychologically unsafe – no freedom, no trust, lots of judgement and psychic attack.

Now, consider a time in your life or a relationship in which you could be completely yourself.

Notice the difference? It changes everything!

See you next week!



OUTRO

Hey! Before you go, I always find reviews really helpful when looking for new information or insights...

If you've found this podcast valuable, please take a minute to write a quick review about what you've found most beneficial for you, so other people can benefit from your insights, and listen in too. I would LOVE that!

Also, if there are any topics you'd like me to cover specifically about life coaching or the life coaching industry, visit rhiannonbush.com to contact me. Thanks for joining and I'll see you in the next episode of Do I Need A Life Coach?!





THANKS FOR LISTENING!

[SUBMIT A REVIEW](#)

