

*by Kim Ades*



# WHAT'S YOUR COACHING STRATEGY?

As professional coaches, we rely on knowledge, intuition, techniques and tools to serve our clients and help them achieve their goals. But that's not all we require. We require data to accurately understand how they think, what they believe and how they behave in a variety of circumstances. This data is crucial for really understanding what it is that interferes with their ability to reach their goals and live their ideal lives.



Based on the premise that results are really a function of a person's thinking and beliefs over time, coaches need to find a way to consistently access and tap into this stream of thinking in order for a transformational effect to take place rather than a short-term change for a short-term result. The more that clients can partner with you to identify the beliefs that sabotage their success, the more powerful the coaching and the more awesome the coaching results can be.

I personally insist that my clients write daily in an online journal to express their thoughts, feelings and perspectives in between

coaching sessions. I supply them with journaling prompts every few days so that they have a starting point in their journaling. It not only keeps my clients focused and invested in the process, but also provides me with invaluable insights that enable me to dig in and really identify the core beliefs that both help and hinder my clients. With this information, I am able to help my clients make monumental and transformational changes that are sustainable well into the future. I have made journaling the cornerstone of the Frame of Mind Coaching process equipping me to deliver outstanding results to my clients every time.

Many people ask me if this approach works for executives and whether or not I experience resistance from them about journaling. At this point, my coaching niche is very well defined. I coach highly driven, highly successful, high profile, public-facing individuals who tend to have a fair bit of exposure in the media. I will NOT coach them unless they have agreed to journal on a daily basis and this is something we address even before they engage me as their coach. I make it clear that they come to me for results and this is the process I use to deliver results that will consistently knock their socks off. I don't give them an option, rather I

make it a condition of working together.

Each month, I run a training class for coaches in how to read and respond to journals. I supply a series of journals and use them as case studies to examine and play with the art of coaching through the use of this data. The discussion is fascinating and really provides tremendous learning for all the participants. In this article, I will provide you with the same kind of experience – I will select a real-life journal to use as a case study and the basis for this discussion. The goal is to demonstrate the value of the data that is collected from client journals and provide some guidance in how to respond to these journal entries.

The following journal entry was written by a client who is in week seven of a 10 week coaching program with Frame of Mind Coaching. She is the Vice President of Marketing for a major retail brand. She came to me for coaching after her team filed a complaint about her to Human Resources. During the coaching process, she has put aside her anger

and frustration and has worked diligently to rebuild her team. She has taken full responsibility for her contribution to the turmoil she has experienced in her job, and continues to work on her own personal development. In this journal, she hit a bit of a set-back in her work environment. Here's what she wrote:



*This morning my sister sent me a text message saying that Sheila (a close friend of the family) had died. Sheila was my step-mother's best friend. She always offered me unconditional acceptance even when my step-mother and I were not getting along. Sheila and her husband both have a special place in my heart. When I got to work, I had a meeting with the 'ecom' group and my boss. I did not have a lot of patience in the meeting, and I snapped. After the meeting, I sent an apology email to my boss and the girls I was short with. I wrote, "I am sorry I was off this morning, but I just found out a close friend of the family died. She meant a lot to me and I am struggling this morning." My boss then called me into his office and reprimanded me for*

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*my behavior and told me I cannot take out my feelings on others. I was shocked with his lack of compassion, as I had acknowledged my behavior, apologized, and even expressed a bit of vulnerability in my experience. I now feel like this will always come up for my boss and me. I feel that I will always be in the wrong in his eyes and I will always be the "emotional" one. As soon as the morning meeting was over I went for a walk, called a friend, and found myself*

*sobbing. I am surprised that this has hit me so deeply. It hurts and I am angry that my boss kicked me when I was down. I think I have learned everything I need to learn from this boss and I do not think he has anything else to teach me personally or professionally. This death brings back the loss I feel of my step-mother and the feeling of despair associated with the fact that another person on the planet who 'got me' is gone.*



Here is how some of the coaches in my training class responded to this journal entry:

1. I am really sorry to hear about your loss. It is a very sad and vulnerable time for you. Of course you are feeling raw. It may not have been appropriate to 'take your feelings out on your team'. With the inner strength you have developed over the past 7 weeks, how can you respond to your boss and your team?
2. So, your apology and acceptance was conditional? What have you learned from Anne? By the way, I'm sorry to hear

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about Anne. Take time to really feel your emotions over the next few weeks. How do you think you could celebrate Anne's life?

3. I am so sorry for your loss. Anne sounds like a wonderful person. I too have felt the loss of a person who 'gets' me. It sucks. I've found that one way out of the muck is to find things to be grateful for. Gratitude heals, but grieving is important. Are

you going to the funeral? Regarding your boss, I am reminded of one of the Four Agreements: Don't take anything personally. Can you put what happened with your boss on the shelf for now while you honor the passing of your friend?

4. I'm sorry for your loss. This is a new twist in life. Decide how you want to show up when circumstances aren't perfect. You recognized that you didn't show up how you wanted to in the meeting and you apologized. How do you want to show up from now on with this boss?
5. I am so sorry for your loss. Tell me more about Anne and the impact she had on your life. You deserve compassion in times like this and I'm sorry you didn't get that.
6. I sense the impact of this loss for you and can tell Anne was someone who meant a great deal to you. You have made such great strides at work. Perhaps this is another opportunity for you to flex your new muscle. Is there another

way you can look at what happened that doesn't leave you feeling in this old, familiar place?

While the coaching responses were fascinating, my interpretation of this journal is that the client did not need coaching at this point. Instead she needed a compassionate ear regarding the death of Anne and she needed validation that her hurt feelings were appropriate regarding the way her boss treated her.

In my opinion, the real thing that needed to happen was for me to remove myself from the role of coach and reach out to her personally. So, I picked up the phone and made an unscheduled call to her. You could hear the surprise in her voice when she answered to find me on the line. She was clearly happy to hear from me because from her perspective, I too am one of the few people who 'gets' her. I could almost hear the relief in her tone when she heard my voice.

A coach needs to see a person in their best light and hold a vision of them in that light constantly. That's what I did for her. I gave her space to talk about her experience, to get her emotions out in the open, and I validated her feelings of being hurt by her boss. She had a right to feel that his actions were inappropriate under the circumstances.

While my first instinct and my response was to lean in and be there for my client, I also recognized that there were



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definitely some issues in this journal entry that needed to be addressed later when her emotions weren't so raw in regard to her loss.

First, I wanted to explore with her whether or not her core values are a match to her boss's core values. What lessons does she still have yet

to learn from her relationship and interactions with her boss or has she already walked away with everything she needs to learn? There are times when we must come to realize that certain situations are not healthy for us and the best thing we can do for our own happiness is to remove ourselves from these situations and move forward. Is this one such example or is there more work to do? In the past, this client had put up with her boss's inappropriate behavior. But this time she felt it was unfair and she was standing up for herself and determined that she was ready to move on to things that are healthier for her. At a more appropriate time, as her coach, I would want to discuss the possibility of moving on in her employment and support her in removing herself from this situation if that's what she chose. As we well know, moving from one position to another is often wrought with concerns, challenges, and opportunities – all of which are perfect to work on in a coaching structure. The time to address these issues would come after the client took some time for herself to grieve her loss.

For me, as a coach, I want to have a relationship with my client that goes further than just coaching. This could cause some controversy in the coaching world, but it's exactly these kinds of relationships that build the kind of trust that leads to client openness, vulnerability, and their willingness to take major leaps forward. For me, unscheduled calls are a big part of establishing this deeper relationship with my clients.

What do I mean by an unscheduled call? An unscheduled call is an unplanned, non-billable call that you, as a coach, initiate with your clients upon reading a journal entry that you feel needs immediate attention. Your client is not expecting you to call, but feels completely supported and valued when they pick up the phone and hear your voice on the line.

There are no steadfast rules to making unscheduled client calls. For me, it depends on the client and longevity of the coaching relationship. On average, I make one unscheduled call during a 10-week coaching period with a client. While the call only



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requires 10-15 minutes of my time, the value created is tremendous and the impact is significant. The client's coaching resistance goes down, which is very important and their desire to work on themselves is increased. My ability, as a coach, to get to those deep dark places more quickly is multiplied because the client's trust and intimacy increases. As a coach, if my focus is on client results and release myself of the strict borders that normally define a 'coaching relationship', my ability to deliver an outstanding experience is cemented with each client. Their satisfaction shows with each referral they send my way. It's a win-win situation for both the client and the coach.

Coaches often wonder if there ever comes a time when

they should step out of the coaching role to simply lend a compassionate ear to their client. For me, this client clearly needed a compassionate ear and time to process her grief before we continued the coaching process related to her relationship and future with her boss. Sometimes the human instinct that drives compassion is the perfect coaching strategy.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Kim Ades** is president and founder of Frame of Mind Coaching and JournalEngine™ Software. Author, speaker, entrepreneur, coach, and mother of 5, Kim is one of North America's foremost experts on performance through thought management. By using her unique process of coaching through journaling, she works with high profile clients to unveil and switch their thought patterns to ignite significant organizational change and personal transformation. For an inside look at the journaling process she uses to coach her clients, please visit [www.journalengine.com](http://www.journalengine.com).

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