

Staying Out of Therapy

Excerpt from Marion Franklin (MS, MCC), [*The Heart of Laser-Focused Coaching*](#) (1993), pp. 229-232.

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Some coaches might struggle with the distinction between therapy and coaching. There are many types of therapy and some overlap with coaching. However, in coaching, we want our relationship to be collaborative in that we work in partnership with our client to find the best results. This is a distinction from the therapeutic relationship. In traditional therapy, the therapist is the expert and the client is the one who needs help. In coaching we walk the path together.

Therapy is predominantly designed to heal someone, whereas coaching is about personal and/or professional growth allowing the client to reach their potential. Coaching can be purely professionally based, addressing topics such as leadership skills and business development as well as personal challenges.

Therapy is generally a longer process. Coaching is meant to efficiently get to the heart of the matter and support forward movement. As coaches, we are often taught to scrupulously avoid going back in time. Yet, identifying the source of their challenge can be very beneficial as long as you are careful not to focus too much on emotional content and cross over into therapy.

It's a balance. Your client's feelings are important, because in the majority of coaching conversations, the goal is to see a change in their perspectives as well as the underlying emotion (fear, confusion, lack of clarity, anger, doubt, etc.). The real change, despite the words and thinking, is actually changing the emotion underlying the words. In the beginning of a coaching conversation, it's helpful to ascertain whether your client is frustrated, confused, upset, angry, etc. By the end of that conversation, hopefully they feel differently.

Therapy might be more appropriate if your client has deeply rooted trauma or:

- Consistently fails to follow through with agreements and assignments
- Mentions suicide or staying home all day and not being productive at all
- Seems extremely stuck and resistant
- Has deep-rooted, unresolved problems from their youth that are affecting their adult life
- Wants help with a diagnosed illness such as depression, anorexia, or anxiety

That said, a client with any of the above issues who comes to coaching because they are stuck in some other aspect of their life can do coaching and therapy simultaneously. All of us have issues and all of us have traumas. The difference between therapy-appropriate issues and coaching-appropriate issues is how the client is managing them in the moment and whether these are bumps in the road or are deeply embedded, preventing forward movement.