

Elena Aguilar:

Hello and welcome to the Bright Morning Podcast. I'm Elena Aguilar. Hi, friends. We are in the beginning of a series of short episodes that will immediately inform your coaching practice as well as really your leadership practice. And in each of these episodes, I'm going to give you some very specific tips. I'm going to give you a challenge to try out that week, and some guidance for doing that. And each of these episodes comes from a question that was asked in an art of coaching workshop or an art of coaching teams workshop. And so, if you have been in one of those workshops, your question might be answered. And if you haven't been in one of those workshops recently, it is very likely that these questions are also relevant to the work that you do. Before we dive into this episode, I want to thank Jim S, who is a friend of the show. Jim, thank you so much for being a friend of the show.

And any listeners who might also want to be a friend of the show, check out the show notes and you'll find a link for how to do that. All right, let's jump into this episode on how to close your coaching conversations. So the question that inspired this topic is, what are some prompts for closing the coaching session? So, first I just want to say yes, good question. Really important to think about the closing, because we coaches, we are responsible for intentionally closing the session. Rather than doing what I did in my early coaching days, was noticing the ticking of the clock on the wall and saying, "Okay, our time is up for today, so have a good afternoon." Something kind of clumsy like that. I did have those kinds of closings, so this is just another skill to build. So I want to talk to you about some very specific things that you can say. I actually have four specific suggestions for you, but five tips total.

So I was thinking about a coaching client I had once, and I would end all of our sessions with an invitation for him to offer me feedback. I'd say, "What was helpful in this conversation? Was there anything I said that wasn't helpful? Is there any feedback you want to give me?" And after maybe five or six sessions where I closed like this, he sort of awkwardly said, "These questions are hard because you're asking me for feedback on your coaching, and I'm just not in that space right now. I can't switch over to that kind of thinking after this session we just had." And I was like, oh. And I said, "Thank you so much. I really appreciate that, and I won't ask these questions at the end anymore." Did say, are there some questions that you think I could ask in closing that would feel helpful to wrap up our time together?

But it was really a big aha moment for me for a couple of reasons. One was recognizing that I was ending that session, sort of centering myself and my own needs. And yes, I wanted feedback because I wanted to figure out how to better serve him or support him, but it wasn't the time and he wasn't in that mindset, and I was just so grateful that he gave me that feedback. Okay, I'm going to come back to this idea about really checking in with your client about what works for them. But before we get into these possible things that you can say, I want to just name again and emphasize beginnings and endings are really important. That could be beginning and ending of a workshop, beginning and ending of a book, beginning and ending of a coaching session. We remember beginning and endings those bookmarks more than we do the middle of an experience.

So you want to craft a beginning of a coaching session to be one in which your client feels held and supported in which relationship is perhaps at the front of your mind, and you are acting on the principle of connecting with someone else. And also a beginning and an ending that allows a client to tap into their agency, their sense of power. Perhaps that gives them some say about what's going to happen in the session. In the beginning of the session, you might want to ask something about what do you want to talk about? You might also want to think about crafting an ending that allows your client to tap into the more positive, comfortable, pleasant, emotional experiences. And that can be recognizing what they feel like they've learned, but just an opportunity in a closing to slow down and reflect and maybe feel a connection with you is a powerful emotional closing.

So that's sort of the framing for how to think about endings and beginnings. And now I want to give you five specific tips. This includes what to say. Tip number one, to close a coaching session, you can ask what are some takeaways for you from this conversation? This question is simply an opportunity to give your client a moment, to pause, to reflect on the conversation. This is a really important part of learning, the thinking back, the reflection, the making meaning of it for yourself, the synthesizing of the learning. That's a critical moment in a learning process. So keep it simple. What are a few things you're taking away from this conversation? Great way to close.

Tip number two. You can ask, what did you learn about yourself in this conversation? Now you can leave that as general as what I just said, or you can say, what did you learn about yourself as a teacher in this conversation? What did you learn about yourself as a leader in this conversation? You can name the specific role that the person is in or leave it general. When we, human beings, can identify something that we've learned, it allows us to feel more connected to our sense of urgency, our sense of power, and our capacity to learn is connected to our resilience. We are learning every single day. We can learn in every conversation. And so prompting someone to note their growth, and that could just be like an insight that they had about themselves that cultivates resilience.

All of us human beings, we want to feel like we are growing, like we're changing, developing. And so closing a conversation in this way gives us that moment to connect with our capacity to grow.

All right. Tip number three. How to close a coaching conversation? You could ask, was there a question I asked you today that felt particularly helpful, a question I asked you that you might want to continue thinking about?

Okay, so this question or these questions do open up the opportunity for you to get feedback on your coaching. But perhaps more importantly, these questions invite the client to again, reflect on the conversation and identify their own important moments of insight. And when you ask this question, it reinforces those moments. It allows them to think back to sense into what were those key aha moments. And some of your clients will appreciate the opportunity to give you feedback. And I have to just throw this in here. Even if you don't ask these questions, you should always be alert to the questions that you ask that seem to land really powerfully for your client. And you'll know which questions those are if you're paying attention. So sometimes when I ask a really good question, I know that because my client says, "Oh, that's a really good question."

Another way of knowing when you've asked a good question is that your client will exhale or they'll sigh. That's a good cue that you've asked something that's creating a response that's worth noting. Or maybe they just pause. So when you ask questions that you see get some kind of positive response, note the question down. Just remember that all the time you are listening on multiple levels to what your client says. You're paying attention to their body language, the pace, the pitch, the tone of speaking, because you are looking for cues and clues to understand what works for your client. So pay attention. Okay, that's tip number three. Asking, was there a question I ask that felt particularly helpful or a question you want to keep thinking about? Sometimes I do bundle questions like that because it gets a different entry point into that question. But do be careful about asking too many questions heaped on top of each other. Ideally, no more than two. Any more than two questions bundle together and your client's going to be starting to spin a little bit.

Okay, tip number four, ask. What's one thing you want to do before we meet next? Simple, what do you want to do? So some clients love this kind of question. They want you to ask it. They think you should ask it, because clearly it's about determining next steps and actions and creating little accountability for taking those actions. And so of course, here's another coaching opportunity to help someone determine and perhaps prioritize their next steps. There's some coaching opportunities for you to help them figure out what might be most helpful. So if you use this question and they answer, and they determine their

next steps, it's really important for you to jot those down as well. And then in your next session, be sure to check in on what they said they were going to do.

If you don't do that, some clients may feel like, ah, you weren't listening. You didn't remember. You're not providing that gentle accountability they might want. And therefore, what happens is that the trust that you are building can be put at risk. And so if you ask people what they want to do, what they're going to do, be sure to check in on it. You might even just ask them, just kind of clarify like, okay, I'm going to check in with you next week about whether you got these things done. Does that sound good? Okay. You might get a little bit of permission, but most people, if they like this question and they're responsive for it, they actually do want you to check in. Okay, that was tip number four.

And tip number five. This is not a specific stem. This is rather an invitation for you to figure out these closing routines with your client. Invite your client into reflecting on how they experience a meaningful, powerful closure. Each of the previous four tips I gave you, or those sentence stems, address a different aspect of who we are, what we need. Some people get more out of reflecting on themselves as learners. Some people feel good about identifying the takeaways. So just try different things with them and then invite them into a brief reflection on what feels like a useful, meaningful closure for them. Some people are really clear. "I just want you to ask me what I'm going to do next." Other people say, "I really appreciate those five minutes to just step back and reflect on the conversation." Ideally, a coaching conversation is really full of meaning and insight and maybe some emotions and thoughts. A good 50 minute, hour long coaching conversation can be so full, and it's like those moments in the end where you're like, okay. So invite your client into figuring out what works for them in a closing.

All right. My challenge for you this week is to try a few different closing strategies. Maybe there's one that you just heard me suggest today that you haven't tried before. Try it out, see what the impact is. And then perhaps in a few weeks from now, after you've tried some different strategies with a client, ask them about what works for them in closing. Or maybe you have been trying some of the tips that I gave you, or you've been trying some different things, and maybe you're ready now this week to have the conversation about choice with your client. That was tip number five. Helping your client determine or make choices about what helps them to close up a coaching conversation. So consider doing that because I want to remind you again, at the core of transformational coaching is the belief that our clients can solve many of their own problems given the right conditions.

And you are a big part of the right conditions. Your ability to listen, to ask questions, to trust in your client's capacity to understand themselves and find the pathways towards becoming who they want to become as an educator and as a human being. Tying back to that principle of transformational coaching and the deep belief we have in our clients' capacity to change and grow and transform.

All right, folks, that's it for this episode. If you found it helpful, would you share it with somebody else who might find it helpful? Just remember that most of us get great web content, products, things, books, ideas, podcast episodes from people we know and trust. We're more likely to listen to those. We're more likely to find ones that really match what we need. So share the podcast episode if you found helpful. All right, friends. This podcast is produced by Leslie Bickford, and Stacy Goodman does the sound engineering. Take care everyone, and be well.