

AUTOBIOGRAPHY



Asking someone starting work in Coaching is a useful and probably essential part of the initial session. It establishes rapport and interest in the whole person, not just the work person. The “whole” person has evolved from life experience, so for both the client and the Coach, telling and hearing the life story is one way to begin to understand the client’s world.

There are a number of compelling reasons for doing it:

- For all of us relationships with authority figures and peers evolved from our relationships with our parents and parent-figures such as Teachers. This is a key aspect of relationships at work-it will have a fundamental effect on approaches to leadership and to being a follower. You need to have some glimmering of understanding about this as the client sees it
- What the client emphasises and what the client leaves out is always interesting and relevant to their view of themselves
- Most clients have never told a complete life story to anyone previously and most enjoy the experience

Some warnings

- You are not doing psychotherapy in Coaching. The whole process should rarely take longer than 30 minutes; encourage clients to complete their story in about 15 minutes, though in practice it can take longer
- If clients resist, do not press

- Explain why you are asking, using the explanation above
- Reassurance of confidentiality
- Be prepared for cathartic reactions in clients who have had a childhood trauma such as child abuse, the death of a sibling or a parent
- It is not your role to make interpretations; leave that to the client
- Do not expect the “whole truth” from this session: it is usually too early. For instance, a gay client may not tell you about his sexuality because they may not feel they can trust you at this stage
- You will want to develop different emphases depending on the expected nature of the Coaching. For instance, career Coaching clients can usefully be asked more questions about their career choices to date

A useful framework

You will not need to ask all these questions, but these are some useful ones. Pick your own and develop your own versions of them, as you see fit.

Suggest that the client tells you their life history: “it will help me and probably help you to tell me a bit about yourself- your parents, your place in the family and so on and other aspects of your early life-is that OK?”

- Where were you born?
- What was your place in the family; birth order?
- What were your parent’s occupations?
- What effect has your birth order had on you: e.g. the experience of being an only child?
- How did you feel about school?
- What were you rewarded for as a child? What were you punished for?
- If you had to point to one outstanding experience in your childhood-one that has a really major impact on you, what would that be?
- How do you get on with your siblings?
- What about early personal friendships and romantic entanglements?
- What effect has marriage/partners relationships had on your life?
- (For clients with children) what has the experience of being a parent done?
- What did the experiences of higher education do for you?
- How did you make your career choices? What helped you decide to move on from earlier jobs?
- What themes and patterns do you see emerging from the story as you have told it? What are the links to Coaching we will be doing? (not all clients see links; if so that’s fine, just move on)