

## The Case of the Recalcitrant Office Manager

People are curious about the essential nature of coaching, so here's a summary of an actual coaching session. As a coach we are often like a detective, working to discover the essential issue. This is a two-person interchange between the person being coached (PBC) and the person coaching (PC).

PC: So what's the issue?

PBC: My office manager won't keep records of cash box transactions, and she also won't stay until 6 PM – she leaves at 5 PM.

PC: What's the problem?

PBC: Well I want her to keep records and stay till 6 PM.

PC: Why do you have a problem with her?

PBC: She won't do what I tell her to do.

PC: So, who has the problem?

PBC: Well, she does. She keeps making excuses as to why she won't do what I ask of her.

PC: How long has she worked for you?

PBC: 7 years.

PC: How long has this been a problem?

PBC: About 2 years.

PC: So, who has the problem?

PBC: *(somewhat exasperated)* Well, she does.

PC: Who's the boss?

PBC: I am.

*continued*

PC: Who has the problem?

PBC: *(the light goes on)* Well . . . maybe I do.

PC: Why would this be so?

PBC: Well, I'm the boss, so if she doesn't do what I request, I'd have to do something.

PC: What would that be?

PBC: I'd have to insist she comply or I'd have to fire her.

PC: What's the issue?

PBC: That I don't want to fire her and I haven't figured out how to have her comply.

**Teaching Points:** Don't confuse symptoms with an accurate description of the problem. If your description of the problem doesn't lead to some alternative action, you haven't described the real problem.

PC: Why do you think you are in this dilemma?

PBC: I don't want to fire her.

PC: Why not?

PBC: She's loyal, good with customers, and I trust her. I can leave the office and feel secure.

PC: Why do you want her to stay to 6?

PBC: So we can do more business – we would generate a lot of revenue if we stayed open till 6.  
*(By the way - he's an optometrist.)*

PC: What's the problem?

PBC: If I fire her – and I don't want to – it'll be hard to replace her.

PC: How much do you want the extra revenue?

PBC: It's important because my income has gone down in the last 2 years.

*continued*

PC: What's most important to you?

PBC: Increasing revenue.

PC: What cost does that entail?

PBC: If I fired her, finding a good person is difficult, and I'd have to work more. It wouldn't necessarily work and then I'd have a big problem.

PC: What will you do?

PBC: I'll have to work with her. I'll let her know of the newly enforced standards (because she never did what he asked before now) and give her a deadline. I may then have to make a change.

***Teaching Points:*** Clarity of purpose is critical. Until the PBC clarified his purpose, he was not willing to make the hard decision to risk losing a valued, long-term employee. Also, we need to acknowledge that change can bring good things, but the change is not without a price. I often use this aphorism to provide some perspective:

*Short Term Pain = Long Term Gain*

or

*Short Term Gain = Long Term Pain*

As a coach, my purpose is to help the PBC develop skills to deal with their own problems. My motto is: "I can't do it for you, but I can help you do it for yourself."

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