

And still idiots as far as the eye can see...

In the article «Surrounded by idiots», I wrote about our difficulty with diversity. Time and again, I observe that coachees get upset about the shortcomings of others and at the same time do not recognise their own strengths as such. This not only leads to disrespect for others, but above all for themselves.

Peter Näf

A customer was annoyed with her line manager, with whom it was not possible to have a constructive dialogue. She accused him of being ignorant of the realities of the market and of expressing himself in an obtuse and theoretical manner. My client was a product manager in a technical field. She maintained close contact with her customers and knew where their pain was. She was often criticised by her line manager for lacking the ability to think strategically.

Individual case view versus strategic view

I often encounter such communication problems in coaching. This can be due to the different career paths of those involved: My client had completed an apprenticeship and learnt her trade from the bottom up. She has continued her education at universities of applied sciences, both technically and in business administration.

Her line manager had an academic background with a university degree and years of experience in consulting. I knew from my client's success stories that she had a good eye for the individual case, perceived customer problems individually and responded to them in a customised way.

I therefore had a lot of understanding for her

point of view and a little less for that of her line manager until I experienced with my client what is called a parallel process in coaching.

Recognising your own limits

I use Schulz von Thun's value square to analyse my coachee's personality. This allows me to visualise strengths, weaknesses, and areas for personal development. Every time I pointed out a connection, my client gave a specific example that she wanted to have noted in the analysis. However, the model requires us to go to the meta-level. Because it is only from a distance that coachees recognise that their idiosyncrasies are not individual events but personal patterns.

I became impatient and suddenly saw myself in the position of her boss, who was trying to get her away from the individual case to look at things on a higher level of abstraction. We used our conflict to analyse what her conflict with her superior consisted of.

She recognised that her manager had a good overall view, and the strategic skills required in his role. Above all, however, she was able to recognise her own view of the individual case as a personal strength, something she had previously taken for granted.

The next time you are annoyed by someone else's inadequacy, pat yourself on the back instead. Rejoice in your strength instead of being annoyed that the other person doesn't have it.

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