

From wimpy to edgy

By Thomas Leonard

The most common requests are for “strong” coaches.

And not just experienced or skilled coaches, but coaches with either a strong personality or what I call having “the Edge.”

And, I’ve never met a very successful coach who didn’t/doesn’t have this Edge.

And as you develop this Edge, you will begin to attract more clients and keep the clients you have, longer. For whatever reason, the Edge works. And the marketplace will either dub you a ‘nice person/nice coach’ or a coach who can make something happen, because they have the Edge.

What, exactly, is the Edge?

The Edge is several things...

1. The Edge is a no-nonsense component in the tone of your voice.

In other words, you have something more important to do than coddle your clients. Or be bored by their lack of commitment. Or impatient with their success cycle. You’ve gotten to a certain place in your life, not just in your coaching, where you’re just not that interested in the excuses, stories and wavering that clients tend to come with.

This is not to say that you’re rude, pushy, obnoxious or insensitive to the realities that your clients are facing, especially as they make significant changes in their lives. In fact, most of the coaches with the Edge are fairly quiet in tone, but there is this underlying note that the client hears which the client responds to and respects. The benefit of having the Edge is that clients don’t play games or do a number on you.

I think it’s really important to realize that many clients are experiencing more than a twinge of fear around the goals they’ve set for themselves with your help. And, being human, when we’re scared, we’ll look for a way out, even to the point of distracting our coach or changing goals or being flaky. But when the coach has the Edge, the client just doesn’t go there. Which saves everyone a lot of time.

2. The Edge means having a very sensitive b.s. detector.

I am NOT one to call the client on their b.s. It’s my view that that approach is a power trip and not professional. However, I can/do detect inconsistencies in what the client is saying (and/or how they are saying it) and I do point those out, gently, simply, easily, fearlessly and in what’s called a ‘charge neutral’ tone, meaning there’s no ‘charge’ to my voice. It’s a clean communication. And it’s part of what the client is paying me for.

Because most clients don’t even know when they are b.s.’ing and they APPRECIATE your asking for a clarification. As a coach gains experience, they hear the subtle inconsistencies or things that just don’t ring true. And, the coach who has the Edge brings this up within sixty seconds of hearing it. Not as a confrontational challenge (unsophisticated, unseemly, amateurish) but rather as a simple, shared observation or question. Just doing this will advance the relationship you have with your client, which leads to more honest communication and faster results.

3. The Edge means having an opinion and sharing it.

Some coaches receive training from schools where they are taught that the client has all of the answers and that the coach should suppress the coach’s opinion so as to not get in the way of the client’s process. This approach works for about 10% of the clients out there which means

most of these coaches don't have very full practices and I think this is a shame. It's my view that a key part of why clients hire a coach is to hear the coach's opinion about the client's goals, situation, problem, dynamic or lifestyle. Even unsolicited opinions, if you have established that type of relationship/permission with your client, are immensely valuable and can forward the clients dramatically. We coaches provide so much to our clients: Support, wisdom, structure, questions, understanding, strategies, ideas, synergy and yes, opinions.

Like it or not, the edgier, stronger coaches are the most financially successful.

Let me be clear. I am not saying that we should be intolerant of our clients humanness...
...and be intolerant of excuses, explanations, delays, confusion, fear, reality, kids, obligations and the various things that life dishes out....

What I am saying is that when clients view us as a strong person, they'll straighten up and perform at levels that surprise themselves.

Indulge me for a second with a story about my dog, Fringe. That's Fringe at 2 months (he's a Maltese). He was just about as nervous and scared as a little ball of fluff could be. He wouldn't/couldn't walk up the 2 flights of stairs to my condo in Montreal. He couldn't walk on the sidewalk; he was too scared. He would freeze up if we put him outside on the balcony. He was sweet and scared to death and was like this wind up toy. With a timid heart of gold. But his personality was stunted because of his fears. (No, this is not autobiographical.)

So, we brought in a doggie coach for 3 sessions. The moment that dog trainer walked in the room and spoke (with an edge in his voice) to Fringe, Fringe stood up straight and paid attention. And took risks. And paid more attention. And pretty soon was running up and down the stairs ahead of us and barking until we made it up ourselves. He had found his confidence; thanks to the doggie coach. For whatever reason, he woke up. And rose to the occasion. Or, to the new environment created by the doggie coach.

A jargon term for this process is called 'showing up.'

I'm not sure which of the personal development courses/genres popularized that term, but it's an apt description of the inner change that people can make and how this internal shift evidences itself so that others see the difference as well.

So, how to be edgy/strong without being intolerant?

Personally, I'd warn/educate your clients before they start with you that you just don't have the time for excuses, complaining, whining, waiting, resisting, hoping, over thinking, etc. Just tell them that is just not how you work.

(You CAN say this very cleanly, without a tinge of arrogance, criticism, patronization. And, fyi, if you wait too long to say something along this line, you'll probably say something cuz you're frustrated with a client. Actually, you're frustrated with yourself for not speaking up sooner, but that's another course...)

If it's true for you that you're not interested in excuses, then you can say so in a matter of fact of way. I'm at the place in my life and practice where I don't have much interest in hand holding. Remember, coaching is a partnership as much as it is a professional service.

Educate your clients how to be a great partner and many will respond accordingly.

Why is it difficult for coaches to develop the Edge?

The short answer is that the coach is afraid of losing the client so they don't press enough. The single, proven solution is to rearrange your finances so that you have 50% more revenue coming from coaching clients than you need to live on. Which might mean you'll need to keep a day job, or simplify your lifestyle significantly. This 50% reserve factor will give you the freedom to be honest with your clients, and while sensitive to their needs, not afraid of swinging out. If you cannot afford financially to lose your clients, you WILL be a mouse. Guaranteed. Again, the

simple solution is money. Don't put yourself in a position where paying your mortgage is more important than your being an honest coach to your clients.

When does the Edge turn into a weapon?

There's a pretty fine line between having the Edge and using the Edge. The best coaches have the Edge and they don't have to use it. The coach learning about the edge and developing it for themselves, tends to use the Edge as if it's a tool. And in some cases, a weapon. You know the Edge is a weapon when you're feeling frustrated or having another emotional reaction to the client and you put an Edge into your voice that isn't natural or you say something with an emotional charge to it. At that point, you're simply venting. Which is not the Edge.

Ironically, the reason that coaches get frustrated isn't because the client isn't making progress, but rather because the coach has put up with it for too long and then by the time they do speak up, they are upset.

How will developing the Edge help me get more clients?

As you develop the Edge, you'll build self confidence. And self confidence is something that potential clients can feel and they tend to hire coaches who have this self confidence. You'll also find that clients are getting more results because of your Edge; that leads to more referrals and longer terms with current clients. And, you'll simply be a better coach because you're openly communicating at all times with your client, instead of holding back and trying to "be supportive." Most clients want/need more than support. Most client orient to coaches with the Edge.

I hope this is useful.

Best,
Thomas