

CASE IN POINT

December 2009/January 2010

Coordinating Care, Changing Lives

Cancer Care Update 2010

Inside:
2010 Product
& Resource
Guide

**RACs Are
Coming**

**Updated
Guidelines
on HAIs**

**Creating Return
to Work Bliss**



EXPERT PERSPECTIVE

MANAGEMENT FOCUS

BEST PRACTICE

MANAGEMENT FOCUS



Coaching as Coaxing

ASK THE RIGHT QUESTIONS,
LISTEN CAREFULLY, AND
EMPOWER CLIENTS TO CHOOSE

BY VERGIL METTS, PH.D.

Last issue, I cited 10-time NBA championship coach Phil Jackson to illustrate how mediocre players sometimes turn out to be fantastic managers.

At the peril of turning this into a sports column, Jackson's transformation is worth pursuing when considering the coaching role case managers assume in their daily work—specifically, in the challenges you often face among people wanting you to make decisions that they alone can make for themselves.

As coach, Phil Jackson can't shoot the ball. But he's proven legendary at creating an environment for his players to succeed, where their natural talent can flourish and create positive outcomes.

Patients and families under duress, in pressing need to make choices, often turn into players who need to shoot but keep passing the ball back to you. Why? Because stress and uncharted waters can easily short circuit almost anyone's decision-making apparatus. Through my coaching work I have witnessed famously take-charge executives lose their compass when unexpected events intervene, running in circles instead of reasoning out solutions.

As a case manager, you can present treatment options or offer a list of providers well equipped to treat a disease. You can explain available financial resources. But what you can't do is check the box and sign on the line.

So how can you be the best coach of a player, or maybe an entire team, that never asked to be in the game?

It starts with asking the right questions, and asking many of them. Questioning, a central element of the coaching process, relies on the belief that the client has the answer within herself. It hinges on the conviction that the necessary resources are present, though the client may not have access to them.

After providing clear and thorough information, often the most simple questions are most effective:

- What are your options?
- What are your *other* options?
- Do you fully understand them?
- Who might have the answer?
- Who among you will ultimately decide (if more than one person has such power)?
- What other resources are available to you?
- What would be the consequences (of a given choice)?
- What would be a good outcome? Or, given the situation, what would be a successful outcome? If that's not possible, what might some acceptable outcomes be? Conversely, what potential outcomes can you see that are worth your effort to avoid?

Asking effective follow-up questions is key to shepherding your clients to a decision, systematically narrowing down options until the ultimate choice feels

PROFESSIONAL PERSPECTIVE

entirely logical and absolutely correct. While you can enter a client discussion with a prepared list of questions, posing effective follow-up questions is both art and science, chiefly borne of good listening.

PUTTING LISTENING TO WORK

The renowned executive coach Jon Warner defines effective listening as, “giv(ing) people whom you are seeing to coach your full and sincere time and attention. Focus(ing) on their needs, and listen(ing) for as long as possible with minimal interruption. Play(ing) back what you hear from time to time to demonstrate that you have heard.”

There are different kinds of listening, each with an important role. **Listening to** is the most common—a one-way communication dynamic where one talks and the other hears. **Listening to**, which is ideal for learning pure facts and data, is best accomplished at the start of a client engagement. While this is a less active form of listening than others, take care to stay focused. Keep aware of your mindset to minimize drifting and restlessness, and you’ll get the most from **listening to**.

A second type, **listening for**, requires a certain type of filtering. It is a more active form of listening where you’re seeking certain cues that can help guide the rest of your work with someone. Here you’ll go beyond hearing just the words themselves to gain insight into openness to feedback, level of self-awareness, and whether someone’s orientation is more “problem” or “solution.” Mastering this kind of listening is of great benefit to tailoring your approach to a client and the manner in which questions and counsel are best posed.

Generous listening goes a step further, giving our entire self to the other person and being fully present in a given moment with him. It requires freeing yourself of any personal agendas, especially any judgments you may hold of a person or group. You will hear not only a client’s words. You will hear tone, tempo and emotion—the music of their message that deeply informs your dialogue, en route to helping your client reach her own decisions.

At the core, anyone in a coaching role must establish a solid foundation of trust. You enter into a relationship every time you engage with a new client. This is someone putting themselves in your hands, often feeling quite vulnerable. Good, empathic listening and question-asking will help you establish that essential trust even as you make progress, helping your client understand that he is heard, understood and honored. What’s more, that you are competent, professional, knowledgeable and experienced.

When it ultimately comes time for a client to choose, you

may find framing options in personal terms a good aid. For example, “I’m not sure what the right approach is for you and your family, but here are some things I’ve seen others do in this situation.” Or, “When I’ve found myself in a similar situation, I’ve usually done one of three things: X, Y, or Z. I’m not positive these would be helpful to you, but they have been helpful to me.”

Making decisions for them is not what clients seek from their professional counselors; it is leadership to reach their own conclusions. Your clients desire to own their decisions because doing so leads to deeper commitment and solid action to create the positive outcomes they want and deserve. [CIP](#)

Dr. Vergil Metts, president and CEO of Impact Associates, holds a doctorate degree in industrial and organizational psychology from the University of Tennessee. Dr. Metts has extensive experience working for and consulting with public and private organizations.

(vmetts@impactassociates.org)

Rehabilitation for the
WHOLE PERSON

mind ————— body

spirit ————— heart

special tree
THE SCIENCE OF CARING SINCE 1974

Brain Injury & Spinal Cord Injury Rehabilitation
www.specialtree.com | 800-848-8885
Over 28 Michigan Locations

The advertisement features a central circular image of a man in a wheelchair being assisted by a woman in a clinical setting. The text is arranged around this image, with 'mind' and 'body' at the top, 'spirit' and 'heart' at the bottom, and the 'special tree' logo and contact information at the bottom.