

We are always the client's coach

Whether you are a nutritionist, naturopath or life coach your main goals are common and consistent: to help the client achieve a specific outcome or desired change. In his column dedicated to “the difference that makes the difference”, NLP CAM Coach **Mark Shields** examines the skills that we all need to get the best results for our clients.

We all operate in different ways depending on how we have been trained, what we have learned, and what we believe, but most CAM practitioners commonly operate a two-meeting process: an initial consultation and a follow-up several weeks later.

Part of the pre-session activity may involve gathering client data via a medical history questionnaire and starting to interpret this data before the first consultation. At the first consultation, the practitioner makes dietary suggestions along with supplement recommendations and chooses laboratory tests if appropriate. Most practitioners seem to set the follow-up appointment some six weeks later, to give the client time to implement suggestions, make dietary changes and – we hope – see some improvement.

Other practitioners operate different client facing processes with the same end in mind: “Helping the client”, but we have to question whether this approach is the best way of doing this.

Please allow yourself to be completely open-minded as you continue to read and not rule anything out. Just for the next few minutes forget your current client process and revisit this at the end of the article.

We are all coaches

I believe we are all coaches serving our clients' best interests and needs. Coaching can be defined as “a development strategy that enables people to meet their goals for improved performance in their personal growth, health, career and overall well-being”.

Whatever your main discipline, it is hard to argue that you are not your clients' coach, as surely your objectives for your client will match the coaching definition above. Admittedly there are several definitions of coaching, but all carry the same message, and coaching skills specifically help to:

- Build rapport.
- Strengthen client relationships.
- Attract quality clients.
- Retain quality clients.
- Motivate clients.
- Obtain great client results.

Successful coaches understand the



dynamics and logistics of a robust coaching model which always embraces a set of key principles.

I have found that more CAM practitioners I work with are becoming better versed in coaching skills, normally via NLP Practitioner Training or similar models. These skills combined with their existing abilities are enabling these practitioners to build better rapport, sustain longer and more meaningful relationships with their clients, and ultimately get better results. While NLP is a proven strategy for change that can be learned by practitioners and taught to their clients to help in the overall client change cycle, the important message is how the adoption of a coaching model changes the CAM practitioner's normal client process.

The differences can be seen and noted very simply:

- Client goals are recorded and focused on from the beginning of the first session.
- Greater rapport and trust is built from the outset.
- The client's bigger picture and their overall state of well-being is considered.
- A robust review process is built in to monitor progress so that changes can quickly be made if necessary.
- The focus on real, live, meaningful goals produces a highly motivated client who will stick with the protocol.
- Practitioners see greater commitment from their clients as improvement becomes more apparent and clients build momentum.

- Practitioners see clients more regularly, which increases commitment and momentum.

- Goals are flexible and can be adjusted in line with the client's progress.

- CAM practitioners move away from a two-call client process and focus on a programme to suit the client's overall needs, working closely with the client to achieve the results they desire.

- Practitioners increase their income by offering a wider set of solutions using a wider and more complete skill set.

Perhaps the most significant change – which is why I asked you to keep an open mind – is that you will NOT be sending your clients off into the void for six weeks after their initial consultations. As a coaching-orientated practitioner, you realise that while clients may not need a full-on clinical review every week or two weeks, they will benefit enormously from seeing you that often for support, encouragement and a review of progress. If necessary you can do these sessions via phone or Skype; the important thing is to maintain contact and keep building the momentum for change.

Conclusion

It's important to acknowledge that most CAM practitioners are well-trained and knowledgeable, demonstrating passion and responsibility in getting the best possible results they can with their client...

Unfortunately, despite all that, experience tells us that 75% of new practitioners fail in their first year of business – a higher first year failure rate than other industries. And we know that many practitioners do not make the kind of living they deserve. This can be changed, but for this to happen we must do things differently. CEM



About the author

Mark Shields, life coach, author, media expert and motivational speaker, is director of The Life Practice (www.lifepractice.co.uk; 01462 451473) and co-author

with CAM editor Simon Martin of the new book *The CAM Coach*. For more info on CAM coach workshops or to buy the book visit www.thecamcoach.com