

# THE "HIDDEN" CLIENT

## INTRODUCTION

The approaches and processes by which we identify problematic substance and behaviour use in our clients' lives, how to develop a planned approach to bringing it into the coaching relationship and how to manage and work with the various outcomes that will present themselves.

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## 1. What we mean by certain terms

Before we start, I would like to clarify use of terminology.

*"Substance / behaviour Use, Using"* refers to the use of substances or behaviours of whatever their source or type. It also refers to the use of a behaviour, e.g gambling, sex, etc., all of which can become problematic for some people. Someone using a substance or behaviour does not per se have a problem with it.

*"Substance / behaviour misuse"* The excessive and usually negative impact of the use of a substance or behaviour.

*"Substance / behaviour dependence"* When a person has developed tolerance for a substance or behaviour (needing increased amounts to experience its effects) and has withdrawal symptoms either physical, psychological or both) if not using the substance or behaviour for a period of time.

*"Self-medicating"* refers to someone who is using substances and / or behaviours they are self "prescribing".

*"Addicted"* refers to the condition of using a substance or behaviour in a way which is creating negative consequences for the user and others and which the user appears to be unable to control or stop or appropriately moderate.

*"Powerless"* commonly refers to an addicted person who is unable to cease or reduce their substance use and is thus out of control of their use. It is also used to create a distinction between those events, people or issues over which we do have some control and those we do not. e.g *"John realized he was powerless over the weather but that he could fix his roof."*

## 2. Diagnosing clients

There is a difference between substance or behaviour use, misuse and full blown addiction. Knowing where this line lies, which determines the difference, is challenging, and we can all too easily label people as addicted when they are not.

For the most part, coaches are not called on to make a diagnosis unless they hold multiple professional credentials one or more of which enables them to make such a diagnosis.

We are concerned here only with coaching as a discipline in this module, and as such our position is that should our client require a diagnostic process, then we will coach them to find such a resource.

### **3. The "Hidden" client**

In this program I have set out what I call the "Hidden" client concept and approach. The Hidden client develops within a person and is allied to the clients' substance use or addiction. While similar to a saboteur or gremlin it is fundamentally different. Using this concept in coaching with our clients helps the client and you the coach interact with the most defended part of a person when it comes to dependence on the substance and behaviour and integrate it consciously into the coaching agreement and relationship.

The Hidden client can be framed as an "Uber Saboteur" or 'Inner Critic'. A saboteur that has unique and specific characteristics that are different to what we will call 'regular saboteurs'. I characterise this energy as a 'client' as, in many respects, it presents and behaves as an autonomous energy or character within the 'authentic' or 'real' client.

As you will know we characterise saboteurs as separate gremlins with their own voices and as such this concept is familiar to coaches conceptually.

Many people who have experienced addiction or have come close to it report the sense of what they often call or describe "the addict in me" or the "part of me that wants to use" as if it has a separate energy and presence. Whether this is factually true or not; in the same way that coaching identifies saboteurs in a way that allows the client to become familiar with those parts of themselves and manage them, so identifying this Hidden client allows the development of a conscious management and understanding of its presence and impact in the clients' life.

What is clear is that this concept is very helpful to the clients themselves when they grasp it. They two keys features of the Hidden client are defensiveness and its agenda

#### **a. The Hidden Client and Defensiveness**

Defences as I have said are key characteristics of the issue of substance use. What is meant then by defences? In the [Defensiveness – Client hand-out](#) (please feel free to use) I describe it as follows.

When a person is faced with a fact that is too difficult for them to accept or cope with, the person rejects it instead and may wish to insist that the fact is not true, or make an interpretation of events that are in conflict with the facts and/or other people's observations. This may even be when there is overwhelming evidence to the contrary. In other words they "defend" it.

Virtually at the outset of substance or behaviour use, people will tend to defend and minimize their use. Chronic users who are either addicted or are developing addictions will routinely and compulsively defend suggestions or requests that might, in their view, highlight or reveal that they have or are developing a problem. This phenomenon is not however confined only to the problem user themselves.

As mentioned in earlier sections people close to the person with this condition of substance or behaviour dependency or addiction, be they a spouse, relative or a co-worker, will become inclined over time to also defend the persons problems.

Furthermore, many people close to or working with people who have substance use or behavioural problems that are becoming or are addictive will actively defend that person from the consequences of the issue they are experiencing.

This may sound somewhat counter intuitive to many people, but it is a well-documented characteristic of substance or behaviour use.

This field is subject to ongoing intense research and as of yet we do not have a completely clear understanding of exactly why this phenomenon occurs. Fortunately, as coaches we do not need to know the answer to this in order to work with this aspect in our coaching.

This key defensive component is one of the most challenging aspects to manage when working with people being affected by these issues, whether they be the using person themselves or a family member friend, co-worker etc.

The Hidden client then seems to develop in intensity as the clients' substance or behaviour use shifts into becoming problematic, and defensiveness is usually present from the start. As the behaviour develops, it begins to present both the client and those around them with some difficulties. They may relate to work performance, intimacy at home, choices of recreational activities, economic impact, health, risk of arrest and so on.

There can then develop a conspiracy of silence or minimizing around these developing issues. If your client is the one with the issue they may keep it hidden from you altogether or they may also try to make light of it as if it is of no consequence. Alternatively, your client may be living with someone who is in this situation and they may start to defend and minimize these issues as well. In my practice clients have often never mentioned that their partner had an alcohol or drug or

behaviour problem that was down grading or ruining their lives! This is partly due to social concepts, stigmatisation.

This tendency to defend then is part of the expression of the “Hidden” client and it tends to obscure and hide the substance or behaviour use.

### **b. The Hidden Client and its Agenda**

This separate character is like another energy or persona and it drives a ***primary agenda of concealment***. It uses mental and emotional strategies to justify and ***keep defensiveness directly and indirectly established*** and its primary objective is to ***protect the substance or behaviour use behaviour***.

It is revealed through the display of different sets of values and thinking patterns that are at odds with the “authentic” person in which it is present. For example: A client might have a value of honesty. They feel comfortable with it and usually tell the truth about their lives; however this client also has a drinking problem. It is becoming out of control in some ways and they are beginning to find it hard to get to work during the week due to being hung over from excessive drinking the night before. Their partner has been roped in to call into work to tell them that their spouse is sick. A common enough scenario.

One day in particular the client gets to work and the Hidden client makes up a story for work and tells a lie about why they are late, concealing the real reason. As the Hidden client does this, the authentic client watches from the side-lines so to speak and sees themselves telling a lie which runs in direct opposition to their value of honesty. Feelings of guilt and shame may arise in the authentic client as this incongruence occurs. These feelings may be concealed with anger, extreme defensiveness and touchiness.

Coming to light in the coaching session, the Hidden client may come to the fore when the non-alignment with the value of honesty is noticed and made conscious. The Hidden client then uses a justification to present a new value for the client. This may be along the lines that it is all right to tell a lie if you can justify it. The justification usually involves making the lied to party, in this case the work place, wrong or bad in some way. e.g. *“They (the company) don’t treat/pay/respect me well enough, they owe me some time off”* and so on.

The Hidden client is trying to hold up or migrate to a different value in the face of the clients’ actual one. Not surprisingly, this will create a lot of dissonance for the client, although the Hidden client may also attempt to justify this as well.

The Hidden client may also attempt to interfere with the authentic clients linking of the substance or behaviour use to the event of being late. The Hidden client never supports the idea that using may be the problem but always presents arguments in mitigation of such blame. Again, on a mild level, the Hidden client will blame the bad fish or being fatigued rather than the half bottle of scotch the person drank or the line of cocaine snorted or the hashish smoked. At the chronic end, addicted people will often blame the quality of the drugs themselves or the supplier in some way seeking always to deflect the real source of the using problem.

Eventually, when the addiction is chronic, the Hidden client often becomes increasingly unable to maintain a façade of justification or value readjustment that is credible to the outside world. By this time, a person in this condition is in need of a comprehensive intervention.

There are parallels between this Hidden client concept and other concepts of archetypes and shadows. It could be said that the Hidden client is a shadow archetype, however whichever way we frame this it is not as important as understanding how its apparent presence can impact our clients and the coaching and how we can recognize it.

It can be extremely useful to characterize this hidden client in this way as it allows the coach and client to include it in the coaching space in a specific and tangible way. It also allows the client and the coach to deploy tools to circumnavigate the defensiveness that the Hidden client brings to the issue of substance use.

I have no specific preference for how you the coach do this, but it is best done by asking the client to identify the Hidden client, which we will cover in more detail below.

So whether we call the Hidden client the Uber Saboteur, as I do, or some other name, the key is to get this concept of a separate hidden part of the client that is allied to the substance use consciously into the frame of the coaching. Whether you are successful in coaching your client to see it this exact way or not will not stop you working with these separate aspects out as you work with a client. If you can bring it into the coaching and involve your client directly to find this part of themselves and start working with it, then you will be well on your way to helping the client create more room and possibilities of how to handle their substance or behaviour use issues.

#### **4. Finding the "Hidden" client - Identifying substance or behaviour use/misuse/addiction in your clients**

Clients usually want change. All my clients want something to be different. It can be themselves, their actions or their feelings, or it can be something outside themselves that they wish to change or be different, part of their life work, a project in the world.

In our experience, personal individual change is, paradoxically, extremely simple and at the same time bafflingly hard. This is doubly so for a person who has substance or behaviour use issues..

They come, like all of us, to a place in their lives where they wish to change something in their lives, in themselves or both. Of course they have all the usual resistances and challenges and so on that most people have, but they come with the agenda of the Hidden client **as well**.

As we have seen earlier, the key characteristic of this agenda is defensiveness designed to conceal both the facts from others but also from the client themselves. The sooner we can get a sense of this Hidden part, the better.

You may have already sensed or detected this hidden client in some of your clients. This undisclosed client or voice may not of course always be rooted in an addiction or substance use issue. There are other triggers for the creation or presence of a concealed identity in a person, PTSD for instance; however, for the purposes of our work here, when we refer to the "Hidden" client, we are referring specifically to a voice or concealed identity that is rooted in either substance / behaviour use and / or addiction.

So, finding the Hidden client is a process which starts in a whole person approach. But before we step into that, I want you to consider the following;

#### **a. What about you?**

Working with anyone who may be on the substance / behaviour use and dependency road can and is challenging. Mostly this is because we have all been exposed to a wide variety of cultural and familial conditionings about the subject and we carry these beliefs around with us. We may have our own family history that has shaped this conditioning or attitudes. We may have been influenced by ideas of morality or ethics or religious belief.

To be of real service to anyone who has these issues, it is best to be as clear as possible within ourselves about what we may be carrying into the coaching situation. It may be a senior manager in a business who has developed a drinking problem and it is affecting his work. You may be that persons coach. It may be a young person looking for their way and finding themselves drawn into experimentation. It can be a client who is being subtly misused at home by their using partner who won't get out of the situation.



Whatever the scenario, the questions still apply. What are you taking into the coaching session that might get in the way?

How do you feel about these issues and what judgements have you unconsciously made or held about people who suffer from these types of issues? Perhaps you see it as a weakness or a moral issue. Perhaps you were taught that alcoholics and drug addicts are 'bad', or that they are sinners.

What is your life experience regarding substance use? Have you ever approached that place where you wanted to feel different and used a substance, person or behaviour to make that change? Is that wrong in your own eyes? Do you have an idea of where the line between so called normal using ends and problem using starts? Do you have a two-tier approach to legal drugs such as alcohol and prescription medications and illegal ones such as cocaine, heroin etc.?

The value of being coaches to these clients is precisely because we are that, coaches. And because too we hold a very clear position of NOT offering them a fix or a treatment, but rather we partner with them through our coaching alliance to coach them to the life they want to create which includes their substance / behaviour use or life with a substance user.

This demands from us a deep ability to stay in the empathetic and open hearted place while accepting all the outcomes that the client creates and experiences in his or her journey to that life, whatever that may be and however it differs from our own view of what they could be doing.

### **b. If you are in recovery yourself**

If you are in a recovery process yourself or have experienced substance or behaviour misuse and/or addiction, then you may be drawn to coaching people with these issues. You may wish to give back and offer what you have learned to others. Great!

This personal experience you have will stand you in great stead with these clients and this work. It can also be your Achilles heel when holding a coaching stance with a client. In many other professional relationships with people with these issues, there is a kind of license to offer a fix, be that rehab or other treatment. Despite what you know, this will not be your job as their coach. Your Achilles heel may be that you will have to work so much harder to stay clear and separate from your clients' journey, particularly if it's a bumpy one. I recommend that you arrange to have good support for this as you coach these clients.

In this module section you will see a document called “**You & Substance or Behaviour Use, Addiction**”. This is a list of questions designed to assist you in clearly seeing what your own views

and ideas are about substance use and addictions and co dependence. You can refer to the above mentioned list whenever you want to in the process of this course. As previously mentioned, finding the Hidden client is best undertaken in a whole system approach. As coaches you will be watching and listening and using your intuition.

So, what are we listening/watching for?

Here are some of the items that you should be paying attention to or that you may notice:

**Preoccupation** with a place, a person, an event or resentment

**Anomalies:**

2 and 2 equals 5. The wheel of life

**Inconsistency:**

Peaks and troughs with unclear causes

**Cycles and repetition**

Of similar events, client as hero or victim of these cyclical scenarios

**Justification:**

Building a case that supports them being “right”

**State of self esteem:**

Typically present with addiction and co-dependency

**Anxiety/euphoria:**

May point to an underlying issue; such as depression. Be curious about unwarranted / unexplainable depressions and high levels of excitement suddenly appearing.

**Belligerence:**

A defence against calamity

**Manipulation:**

No illness for idiots

**Powerlessness:**

Client seems unable to act effectively

**Over / under stating:**

Telling untruths

**Minimizing / maximizing:**

Letting big things pass without comment, making the little large and overblown

**Misdirecting:**

Placing undue emphasise on an issue as an outlet for powerful emotions

**Defended/collapsing:**

Switching between the two

All these items may be directed by or employed by the Hidden client as denial in service of the Hidden clients' agenda.

It is suggested that over time you practice noticing these different aspects as you coach your clients. It is of course most likely that you are noticing these types of things already and indeed you may have your own list from which you work. These modules are about a very specific topic, you are encouraged to pay attention to as many as you can.

It is also suggested you continue this observation outside of your coaching clients and observe people in general. Next time you are at a social event or in a public situation, see what pops out at you about the way some people are showing up.

**c. The 5 realms**

Below are 5 realms in which we need to listen for and where the "Hidden" client and clues to substance or behaviour misuse will be found.

But be careful. Many of these following aspects of human life can be prentst for other reasons. Be curious and manage your own judgement. these issues are part of the fundamental human condition, and to an extent we all carry them within us.

This is why It is important to note that a one-time occurrence of the events or patterns below should not be used too presumptuously in forming an idea that a client is dependant or addicted or using substances in a way detrimental to his/her health or wellbeing. Looking for patterns and repetition of patterns is preferred rather than moving too quickly to a conclusion.

#### **i. The Physical realm.**

Substance and behaviour abuse and use will eventually show up physically. Often this physical appearance is subtle and hard to detect and sometimes it is obvious. A bad hangover is hard to obscure and some substances for instance alcohol are hard to mask. Some drugs produce unusual variations in the pupils of the eyes, and then there are signs like nervousness that is consistent or unusual. We are not doctors, and I am not suggesting that we try to be, but please use your intuition.

Coaches are, like many other helping professions, good at tuning into people's physical presence, so if you are feeling there is something odd about their behaviour in a physical way, then you are most likely right.

So tune in to your client at the physical level and really observe them. Listen to their speech, not what they say but how they are saying it, is it rather slow or too fast? Is it varying from session to session in a way that doesn't seem explained by the topics and coaching itself.

Physical signs are hard to hide and fairly easy to spot but on their own, unless severe they are not necessarily conclusive.

#### **ii. The Cognitive realm.**

This is about coherence or incoherence, lack of concentration, disassociation, obsession, switching. Anything that is not logical. It is not the case that our clients have to be logical. If you start to notice that sometimes in their world 2 plus 2 is making something other than 4, this might be a sign that something is affecting the way that they are functioning mentally at the level of logic and structural and analytical thinking.

#### **iii. The Emotional realm.**

Look for apparent absence of emotion, over supply of emotion, lack of ability to manage emotions, out of control.

Clients will sometimes fall into deep emotional states such as maudlin, euphoria, irrational anger. Again coaches are usually very emotionally intelligent. Use your intuition and ask yourself is this making sense to your feelings?

Another aspect of the emotional realm to watch for is the sense you may be getting drawn into the clients' emotional world in a way that is affecting your emotions in a disproportionate way.

Somewhat unfairly in my view, this is sometimes described as emotional vampirism, although it is not a bad way to describe the feeling that you are being drawn into a whirlpool of emotion that seems far deeper than is apparent and which is drawing somehow on your own energy.

Another sign is emotions that are far too strong for the event or person that they are seemingly attached to. Often there are deep feelings generated within the Hidden client zone. They may not be able to be expressed directly as the Hidden client is protecting them and so they become attached to another issue.

Too much anger for instance at an event signals that there is much anger around for the client that may have nothing to do with the event they are talking about, the anger is displaced.

#### **iv. The Attitude realm.**

What attitudes are the clients holding to themselves, their world in the areas of work, relationships and friendships? Do these attitudes add up? Do they switch fast and easily from say very pro to very anti? When you get curious about these switches, how easy is it for the client to reveal their reasoning and rationale?

Look for anomalies within the client's world. I ask clients that I think may have some of the issues we are talking about to fill out a wheel of life. (see doc) This can be quite revealing. For instance, a client may score their work very low in satisfaction but spend a lot of time in the coaching not wanting to take a look at changing it, or resisting attempts with no apparent reason why not. They might even flip flop and say they like it. Often there will be gain for the Hidden client in a situation. In the case of the job, they may be getting free or cheap drugs, alcohol, or sex at work. There may a fellow substance user there who they use or hang out with. When you see these types of things appear, ask yourself what the pay offs might be.

#### **v. The Intuitive realm**

In this realm, we are not really putting our attention on anything specific. It's the space of the client, the energy and the small pieces of information that come from many sources. It is the sublime and the unconscious, the fleeting and the subtle. It is a brush with the soul, a whisper from the universe, it is all that your mind cannot know and yet that you recognise and understand.

## **5. Preparing to bring the issue of substance use or addiction into the coaching relationship**

Let's assume you have a client who you have observed for a while in your coaching sessions with them and, because of this observation, and perhaps due to some things the client has said, you are feeling fairly certain that there may be some issue at play in the client's life around substance or behaviour misuse. You have spotted the Hidden client or Uber Saboteur and you have decided to bring it into the coaching at the next planned session.

What you have found and seen is like the proverbial "tip of the iceberg". The rest is under the surface, linked to the unconscious, knitted into this client's very nature and emotional world.

This is in a sense hallowed ground, sacred space, and to understand this is to show due respect for this clients being. A part of the client may be crying out to be able to deal with or confront or just have another person become aware of their situation, another part, the Hidden part, does not want this disclosure.

Before you decide to tread into this area and world of your client and his/her hidden self, it would be a good time to reflect again on where you stand. Take a mental, emotional and spiritual reappraisal of yourself. If you open this door with your client, are you clear on what your next steps will be? This is important for the following reason;

Your client may NEVER have disclosed or been able to disclose anything about his or her substance or behaviour misuse or addiction to anyone before. If they don't run away from you as a coach or in some other way terminate the coaching, and they stay in the chair or room with you when you bring these issues into the coaching, then this is a vital moment; full of responsibility for you the coach, and possibility for your client.

Yours may be the hand they grab as, despite the agenda of their Hidden client, they try to grapple with these issues. It won't necessarily be the first time they grappled with it in themselves, but you may be the first human being who ever got to be present with them with this secret they carry.

So before you take the next step check in with yourself. Mentally revisit again your own priming.

It is also useful to run through what you can and want to do, should your client decide to disclose to you part or all of their substance or behaviour misuse issues. Are you willing to continue coaching them or will you end the coaching? It may of course be that you are not sure at this point, which is fine. Get the questions out of the box though. You are going to have to decide at some point.

Lastly, and this is important, are you willing to be available and present for the client in the post session period before the next session you have scheduled? This will be regardless of whether you will continue coaching.

If you are one of the few people or indeed the ONLY person who has knowledge of what is happening for the client or what might happen as a result of the session, then making yourself available to them in additional ways in the post session period is critical.

If you don't think that you can or don't wish to do this or if your commitments make it impractical then you may wish to consider alternative approaches to what you see as the clients "Hidden" issues.

Opening the door is powerful and can lead to a crisis for the client. This can be in the form of extreme release of emotions, sadness, grief, anger and so on. They may feel exposed and out of control and experience feelings of shame, guilt, fear and anger.

There may also be a considerable amount of relief for the client too. It is not unusual for there to be tears about this relief as if a heavy burden is going to be or has been placed on the ground after a long haul. It will be most a likely a mixture of many different feelings and responses.

At this point, having a supervisor or colleague to talk the matter through with is helpful and advisable.

Once you have satisfied yourself in respect to the matter of support, you will be ready to move on to the next stage.

## **6. Bringing the issue of substance / behaviour use or addiction into the coaching relationship**

Here we will use a simple metaphor of opening a door.

You and your client have been together for a while in a space, the coaching relationship. This may have been a short or a long time, a matter of a day or two, a month, a year, even years. To a

degree, you will be aware of many different features of this client's life or maybe only a few. Whatever that is, you have now sensed that there is another door in this space, a door that may be partially visible or a door that you cannot see but that somehow seems to exist.

Your client lives part of his/her existence with whatever is on the other side of that door. They interact with it in their own lives in ways that are mostly secret, that they may not understand and which may alternately terrify or thrill them. They know what is behind the door. The Hidden client does not want this door disclosed nor opened.

You are about to mention this door. When you do that, there will be a number of responses from the client. Before we look at those though, let's see just how we might bring the existence and mention this door into the coaching space.

I have never met a person suffering from addiction or using substances or behaviours as a way to cope with life and themselves who wasn't to some degree living in fear. The fears are many but all fears seem to devolve to one of these three:

*Fear of discovery* (of themselves by others, themselves by themselves)

*Fear of dying and loss* (literally physically dying and the fear of the death or loss of sanity, dignity and control, of not living up to their potential, possibility and talent)

*Fear of feeling and living* (their own emotions, those of others; of living up to their potential, possibility, talents and success)

Bringing the door's existence into the coaching space and conversation will provoke a response in the client that will be rooted in one or more of these fears. This is to be expected and is not the main issue rather we are concerned lest the client be stimulated to defensiveness to a degree that may cause the breakdown or collapse of the coaching relationship.

The coaches task then is to find a way to bring the presence of the door into the session with your client in a way that be the least likely to provoke just such an intense defensive response.

Here are the recommended steps:

**a. Take them up the tube**

Start the session with a positive and upbeat assessment of why you like working with them. Talk about their "wins" , what you admire about them. In short, connect with what is special and



unique about this client and what you think is possible for them. The idea here is to bank some energy that will be useful when you bump into trust issues later. This will also serve to move you to an energetic place of positive regard for the client. Keep it real and heartfelt. Say a little sincerely rather than a lot that may be low on intensity. If you feel it, then say it.

Ask the client to review the coaching so far, what they feel has worked and is working for them; what they might like more of, what are their aspirations for where it might go. Avoid what is not working or issues unresolved. This is purely a positive framing for now.

### **b. Review your client-coach alliance**

Invite a review of the alliance you have designed with the client so far.

Pay attention to honesty and trust. When it is your turn to talk about what you notice about their alliance, let the client know that you want to talk about something today but that you need to ask their permission to do so.

This may sound insignificant, but do not let this step go undone. By asking the client if he or she is okay and that you have their permission to bring to the coaching something you have noticed but not yet spoken of, you are offering them a preparation process.

They will, most naturally experience a slight rising of their sense of occasion, possibly a little anxiety, however a part of them will be preparing to hear something. If they do have an issue with your topic, then they will most likely intuit where you are going. If they do not give permission, then tell them you are happy to wait until they give it.

And do exactly that, wait until they give it. That may not be during this session, the next or even ever, in which case you will have to evaluate whether you want or can continue coaching this client.

If permission is denied, for the time being though, move the session away from this issue and ask the client what they would like to do in the session and coach them on that. If they do give permission then proceed to the step below.

### **c. Change the geography**

They now know you are about to bring into the space something that that has not been consciously there before. They are braced and waiting. Hopefully you are as well. At this point, I suggest you consider changing the geography.

Ask the client to stand up (if sitting) or move to a different place in wherever you are meeting, preferably a place where you have not been before. It could be as simple as sitting by a window or stepping outside. Whatever it is, the idea here is to create a new energetic space which, if the client wants to they can vacate and return to the more familiar “regular” area you inhabit with them. If you normally meet your client outside, such as a café's, on a beach etc, then for this session, if possible, set up a move to another new location.

Of course, this is not a hard and fast rule, but the idea is to keep the familiar space as safe as possible by introducing the subject of the new door outside or away from it.

#### **d. Point out the “door”**

You have the following options:

##### ***Ask the client if they know.....***

I recommend starting with asking the client if they have any idea what it is that you want to bring into the coaching relationship. You will be surprised how often they *already know*. If this happens, you can start to directly engage the client. If they say they don't have any idea, then move on.

##### ***Ask the client***

Asking your client outright is also an option, but blurting out to your client something along the lines of "*Oh John, are you an alcoholic?*" or "*Janet I think you have a drug problem, am I right?*" or "*Mary are you addicted to your sleeping pills?*" may not hold the proper degree of sensitivity or tact which I am sure is obvious. These are also questions and statements that can elicit a defensiveness straight away which will close down the space and make it tough to get it open again.

There are of course client coach relationships that are robust and capable of taking the direct approach initially, however my coaching experience has shown that there is finesses required in this moment in the coaching. It all hangs on the nature of the alliance you have established with your client. If you are not asking directly then

##### ***Make a statement***

To start this process you can make a definitive statement. Avoid yes/no questions.

I suggest something like *"There is something going on Jane and I can't quite put my finger on it"* or *"James, there are other factors at play in your life. I am not certain what they are but, I sense they are there"*

Use a feeling framework. Stick to opening sentences and statements like *"I sense that....."* *"I feel that....."* *"I am wondering if....."*

Stay away from judgements and descriptive adjectives that imply judgements, i.e. *"There is something bad going on here John, you got arrested last week for drunk driving and then hit your wife."* Or *"I think things are going badly in your life right now John, care to talk about it?"*

There may well be disasters going on for the client and you may or may not know about them. They may be explained away by the Hidden client that is avoiding the substance use connection.

#### **e. Involve the client**

Involve the client as much as possible. Ask them what they think it might be. If they don't seem to either want to offer anything or ask you to clarify then keep it non-committal.

*"I am wondering James, if you find yourself doing things you would prefer not to, if that somehow seems true for you, can you tell me about it?"* or

*"I sense that you might have other things going on in your life that no one knows about. Is that true for you and if so then what might they be?"* or

*"Perhaps you have methods of coping that are not working as well as they used to, do you feel that is near the mark and can you expand on that?"*

*"I wonder Janet, if you struggle with finding your own voice, is that something you would feel is true for you and will you tell me something about it?"*

It is impossible here to prescribe for each situation and it is sometimes absolutely right after your opening statement to just name it outright.

*"Bill, would you be willing to share some information about your relationship to drink / drug / gambling / etc?"*

As mentioned before, avoid words like problem, addiction, misuse and so on. If these words are to come into the session, let them come from the client. No matter how much you may think you can label them as substance misusers, alcoholic or addicted, it will only get in the way if you try to label them. Finding descriptions of the issues is something that it is far better to let the client do for themselves rather than you having a go. I would also avoid a 'try it for a fit' approach with various terms.

This approach may work in coaching in general but as some of the labels and words are so primed it is usually counterproductive to, for instance, ask a client if the words 'addict' 'substance misuser' etc. fits or resonates with them.

Finally, do not be drawn into an opinion or judgement. The client may ask you if you are saying they have a drinking or drug problem. You are not saying they have, so tell them that. Let them know that you are not and never will attempt to diagnose them. That is not your job as a coach.

### **What if the client has already disclosed their substance use issue to the coach?**

If you have an existing client who you know uses substances, but so far it has not been an issue for them, but now you have an opinion and / or observation that it is then the process is much the same as described above. Obviously you will be able to simply open the conversation directly, but don't be tempted to skip the steps of making sure that you approach the issue in ways least likely to trigger the defensiveness and Hidden client.

Now let's go through the possible outcomes and what you can do about them.

## **7. Possible outcomes of opening the door**

### **a. Client acknowledges the door & agrees to open it**

If the client engages with you, do not try to steer the conversation anywhere.

Follow them with curiosity. You are not trying to impose anything here. The fact that you have come this far and they are talking to you means so much.

Let them say whatever seems to be okay for them. Prepare to hear many different voices at this point. It is not uncommon for there to be an initial blurt of relieved admittance, even some

powerful emotions can surface, followed by a flipping or switching to defensiveness, minimization and so on. Just be with it all.

This is to be expected and the key here is to really listen without judgment. Imagine that they are walking up to the door, tentatively opening it and peeking through it, or just putting their ear to it. They know what is on the other side but they need to be in charge of how and when this door is opened. And most likely there is a power struggle going on inside them about who is going to be in charge. Will it be the authentic client or the Hidden client? Resist the temptation to rush them, do almost the opposite, be a little restrained, this is gentle and delicate work and much hangs on these moments for this client..

When it feels right, take the next step:

The space of the coaching has shifted and now you have to decide together what to do next, but do not so in this session. Ask your client if they are okay with kicking off with this topic in the next session. You will most likely be redesigning the alliance at the next session and it's okay to tell the client this now. Use your judgement though. It may be too much and they can benefit from a slow pace and plenty of space.

#### **b. Client acknowledges the door & refuses to open it**

In this scenario the client may state that there is a door, i.e. that he or she has some issues around substance or behaviour misuse or addictive behaviour and so on. They might make it clear that they will not talk about it, that they don't see that it is relevant to the coaching and that they wish to carry on coaching but this topic will be off limits. This is of course a recipe for losing this client due to the tension of them being aware of what you know. This will most likely become too uncomfortable and they will either terminate the coaching or change their mind and start talking about it.

Your strategy is the same as in the previous section. Listen without judgment and then ask the client what they would like to do next. If they insist on leaving the issue out of future sessions, then accept that for now. These things can change and I would not be disappointed at this reaction. Knowing what we do know, it is to be expected.

Again, your strategy is to make it clear to the client that you are available. Set up a next session if they agree to it.

#### **c. Client denies there is a door**

This can happen and often does. Despite your best efforts to make the door opening as deft and non-reactive as possible, inevitably, there will be clients who will be too afraid or emotional to be able to engage with the idea of their secret world being entered, and will immediately move to deny the door; the possibility that there even is a door; that they could never have these kind of issues and so on. This is the Hidden client in ascendancy.

This may occur even in the face of clear evidence to the contrary. They may have been arrested for drunk driving, be about to lose their job due to the use of alcohol, their family may be abandoning them, but they still will hold out that there is no connection with their use of alcohol.

This is the way defensiveness is. Your strategy here is, again, simple. Accept the client at his/her word and schedule a next session. Make it clear that if he or she changes their mind, that you are available to talk more about it.

Later we will explore what the options are in the various scenarios. With a client who is in this state, it may be hard for you to continue the coaching, although it can be possible and we will discuss this further in Module 3.

## **8. What Next?**

Before we move on and finish this section, let's pause here to CELEBRATE!

Well done! The client who has acknowledged the door and has agreed to open it is being served by you in a way that speaks to the highest calling of the coaching profession. It says much about you as a coach and the trusting space that you created that they have come this far. The client has been brought to a space in which they can find and build hope.

This too applies to the client who cannot yet allow the topic into the space. The session you have had with them is profoundly important. Well done to you for going into the place with them and holding a firm, compassionate and non-judgemental space.

Lastly, the client that denies there is a door. You are powerless to make this client go somewhere they are not yet ready to go and where this session will lead you cannot know. You have expressed and acted on your compassionate integrity in bringing this issue to their attention which is all that you can do at this time

### **The Client in process**

After the session, regardless of how the client responded, he/she will most likely be alone. Over the next few days, the client may move into a process of digesting and reflecting on the session

with you as well as assimilating the content of it. This process can vary in presentation, but its driving force will be strong emotions which may be managed through reversal, rationalization, shut down and defensiveness.

If you can, make yourself additionally available to the client. This can be in the form of specifically telling them that you are available for a call with them later that day or between now and your next session, or that you would welcome them to email you, and so on. Often the opening of the door can precipitate a crisis for the client and you need to let them know that you are there for them.

This step is important and as mentioned in the earlier section, before you even approach the idea of opening up this door with the client you will need to be sure and clear with yourself that you are willing and able to offer this support.

For the client in defensiveness who is maintaining that nothing is up and who is in the grip of the Hidden client, do not underestimate the possible impact of the session.

The power of defensiveness is secrecy. The very idea that someone sees what you believe to be hidden can be disconcerting and provocative. It is common for people with these issues to believe that no one can see that they have an issue at all and are often genuinely surprised to discover that it has been apparent to some people for a while.

A man once joined AA. After his first realization that he was an alcoholic he rushed home and called a family meeting proclaiming that he had some vital news. Gathered together, he tells them his secret, he is an alcoholic! He is crestfallen when everyone informs him that they have all known that for a while but they had been waiting for him to realize it too! Such is the way defensiveness works.

### **The "Flick Flack" or sudden reversal**

If the client has opened up to you in some way about what is really going on behind the door, they may be feeling some shame, exposure or loss of control (secrets are a really powerful form of control). They may then attempt to manage those feelings in a number of ways. The client is likely to move to a position of reversal and/or defensiveness. They may make statements such as:

*"Oh I was exaggerating, it's not that bad, I really don't have any issues or problems in that area",  
"You don't understand, I didn't really mean what I said, I was just having a bad day..."*

One way of reversing can be through anger directed at you. This can come out in cancelling the next session, being late or blaming the coach for “making them feel bad” and calling the coaching relationship itself into question.

I call this the "flick flack" and in working with people around these issues I can say that the flick flack is a common feature. It is the authentic client moving in and out of being managed by the Hidden client.

Providing the client does not suddenly terminate contact with you, the way to manage this is through patience, non-judgement and the most important of all; not arguing.

***This is one of the most important facts to remember.....***

Sudden reversal and sudden shifts of emotions, attitude and defensiveness along with defensiveness are abiding characteristics of the stages of substance or behaviour use, misuse, dependency or addiction and are to be expected.

Coaches confronted with this should be slow to react and fast to accept.

It may be possible that you will notice that there is present an illogical and irrational side to the clients' responses to tackling this issue. Bear with them; this is a part of the process that is necessary and expected and may continue for long periods of time. And if you are feeling a little turmoil, then imagine what they are feeling!

So now that you and your client have made a start on including the issue of substance or behaviour use into your coaching relationship, you are now faced with the next steps.

You have four options. They are:

**Commit to coaching further with the client**

This will involve re-designing the alliance or coaching agreement. It may also involve a break in the coaching.

**Commit to coaching further with the client alongside other professionals**



This will involve re-designing the alliance or coaching agreement and referring them to other practitioners or professionals. It may also involve a break in the coaching.

#### **End the coaching with the client and refer them**

This will involve a closure session and a optional referral process.

#### **End coaching with the client with no referral**

This will involve a closure session without a referral process.

### **9. In conclusion**

As mentioned earlier, it is often remarked that the way many of us sometimes deal with our life difficulties can involve being drawn into dependence on behaviour or substance or indeed both. And this tendency that we have to want to manage and avoid and deny some of the things we do and this is universal. What distinguishes one from the other is the degree to which these tendencies grow and dominate us. I frame then these developments of behaviours and dependencies as aspects of our common human condition and so it is my view that most, if not all, of us instinctively understand them.

This ability of humans to contain a Hidden client is in my view consistent with many states that personalities, characters and selves can contain and as such form part of a universal psychological defence mechanism.

In most of us this Hidden client tendency stays minimal, manageable and benign, giving us little trouble. For a significant proportion though, the partnering of the Hidden client with substance and behaviour use can ignite a runaway process of defensiveness and domination by the Hidden client of the person's life, both rational and emotional.

If the person cannot find ways to first of all understand what is occurring in them, develop an understanding of the likely outcomes should the process remain unaddressed and find a plan or way to recover back to their natural normal healthy equilibrium then they may develop chronic addictions.

Eventually, if it does transform to full addiction, the person's sanity, freedom and life itself is threatened along with extreme consequences for those close to them.

Modern western societies have institutionalized some of the actual drugs and their effects into our cultures. Who doesn't like a good glass of wine or a strong espresso or a bit of tobacco? Many people are regularly prescribed prescription drugs that can and do lead to addiction. Many like to gamble on the lotteries or visit casinos. Many more are assailed by the idea of sex as the panacea for their life's lack of fulfilment, or the acquisition of products, clothes, electronic goods etc.

This knitting of the currencies of our addictions into the everyday fabric of our societies makes it doubly hard for people to step away from their substance or drug and gain the perspective and understanding that such a break can bring. It is my view that a good coaching relationship can offer such a space for exploration for a person.

The issue here is complex and this complexity makes it harder for people to reach out and get help and change their lives once they have crossed the threshold from the satisfactory enjoyable recreational use to something in the darker zones of dependency and possible deep addiction.

As you consider this module in the context of your clients, you have perhaps been able to recognize some of these themes and ideas in your clients and your sessions with them. If so I hope you've been helped to deepen your understanding of what might be possible with them in the coaching space.