Conflict coaching is a fast emerging technique in the field of ADR. As a specialized process for helping individuals effectively engage in conflict, coaches assist individuals to determine what will best enable them to reach their objectives, when it comes to how they manage a specific dispute, or conflict in general. To provide coaching in a way that is client-centered and transformative, it is important that coaches develop the capacity to be mindful.

“Mindfulness” may be defined in many ways and refers to the ability to remain fully aware of what we are sensing from people with whom we are communicating. Similarly, it is about opening ourselves up to hearing what the other person is meaning, without our perspective informing what is being conveyed. This means also being aware of what is going on for us. It is suggested that a significant aspect of mindfulness in coaching is the ability to be “present”.

Being “Present”
Being “present” means, among other things:

- total concentration on the client and what s/he is conveying
- adhering to the client’s goal and not what the coach perceives as the appropriate direction
- hearing and understanding the client’s words and meaning
- acknowledging what is being said and what is not being said
- paying close attention to and acknowledging body language, facial expressions, tears, “ahas”
- creating and sustaining the space and energy where clients feel safe to vent and share
- leaving our assumptions, needs, expectations and hopes out of the process

To stress the latter point, it is suggested that being present as a coach, requires us to remove ourselves from making coaching about us. It is common for many of us in the service professions to want to help people along the path of their self-discovery. For many, helping translates into guiding people to where we think they ‘should’ be. This may for instance, be in the form of advice or opinion. Although our advice and opinions come from a well-meaning place in us, they are not necessarily meaningful to the recipient. More often than not, the root of advice comes from our own values, beliefs and the outcomes we want for the client. However, that which originates from our lens and frame of reference, is not necessarily helpful for our clients and their growth. Nor, is it empowering or transformative.

In conflict coaching models that are premised on empowerment and transformation, the practitioner refrains from giving advice. Rather, coaches recognize that a shift in thinking, responding and feeling, evolves from our clients’ self-awareness. To honour and facilitate this, it is necessary to remain mindful of our clients’ goals and refrain from putting ourselves into the client’s journey, other than to help clear the path through being present. The art of powerful questioning also helps facilitate our clients’ self-awareness.

Powerful Questions
Powerful questions are one of the tools of the coaching trade. The thoughtfulness that goes into our efforts to promote self-discovery, are aimed at promoting awareness that yields new insights and perspectives.

Powerful questions are open-ended, intentional and relevant to the client’s goal. They not only help clients uncover their hopes, needs, values, expectations. Powerful questions also help clients unbundle the complexities of the conflicts they present, by facilitating self-reflection; by motivating; by planting seeds; by transforming perceptions; and by uncovering different perspectives.
The answers to well thought out questions come from within the individual and emanate from other than superficial and even, conscious places. Examples of some powerful questions that may be used in coaching (and mediation, too) include:

- What is most important to you about this conflict? What part of the conflict are you willing to let go of? What would it take to do so? Of the other part, what is it about that remains important to you?
- When you leave here today, how do you want to feel (or think) about yourself (and/or the situation) that you don’t feel right now? How do you want to feel about the other person that you don’t feel right now? What may you do to make this become a reality?
- What is missing for you that will facilitate your efforts to reach your goal?
- What do you want to understand about the other person that will help you reach your goal?
- What do you want the other person to understand about you, that may facilitate resolving matters for him/her? How may that help him/her?
- What may you say or do, to put this conflict behind you and move ahead? What keeps you from saying/doing this?

These types of questions have the capacity to stimulate thinking and feeling, in ways that facilitate increased awareness. This in turn, helps people consider different perspectives and come unstuck from their conflict and their habitual way of perceiving and experiencing conflict.

Summary
Masterful coaching skills, like those of ADR professionals, require us as practitioners, to continually develop our own skills, to be able to assist others. It is also important to be mindful of who we are and how we “show up” in our efforts to do so. Remaining mindful and present and being intentional about how we facilitate others’ self-discovery, are gifts we give people whom we assist. Developing our skills to be able to do so in transformative ways and with our clients’ interests and objectives as the force, is a gift we give them and also, ourselves.

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