



Active listening and nonviolent communication are two key skills for establishing an effective and benevolent coaching relationship. They allow to create a safe space for dialogue, where the coachee feels deeply heard and respected in his/her experience.

Active listening is a way of listening and responding that promotes mutual understanding. It is a listening completely focused on the other, without judgement, without prior assumptions and without preparing what one will say next. The coach practices active listening by being fully present, attentive to verbal and non-verbal communication, using minimal encouragements (nods, "uh huh" ...) to show his/her attention. It is about leaving room for the coachee to express his/her thoughts, without interrupting or directing the conversation.

Active listening also involves paraphrasing. The coach gives back to the coachee what he/she understood from his/her message, with his/her own words, to verify that he/she has grasped the meaning and underlying emotions. This allows the coachee to feel understood and to clarify his/her thoughts. For example: "If I understand correctly, this situation makes you angry and you are afraid of losing control, is that right?". Paraphrasing acts as a kindly mirror that deepens self-awareness.

Nonviolent communication (NVC), developed by Marshall Rosenberg, is an approach that aims to create a quality of connection and mutual understanding. It is based on empathetic communication, which allows accepting what is happening within oneself and within the other with kindness. NVC is broken down into 4 steps:

1. Observation: Describing the facts objectively, without judgement. "When I see / hear..."
2. Feeling: Expressing the emotions triggered by this situation, by taking responsibility. "I

feel..."

3. Need: Identifying the needs or values underlying these emotions. "Because I need..."

4. Request: formulating a concrete and achievable request that would contribute to fulfilling this need. "Would you agree to...?"

For example: "When I see delays repeatedly occurring in your deliverables (observation), I feel frustrated and worried (feeling), because I need to be able to rely on you to meet our customer commitments (need). Would you agree to discuss your priorities and deadlines at the beginning of each week together? (request)".

In coaching, NVC is useful in many ways. It allows the coach to clarify his/her own reactions and share them in an authentic and responsible way if it is useful for the coachee. It also provides a frame of reference to decode what is at stake behind the coachee's words and help him/her become aware of his/her deep needs. The coach can also model NVC so that the coachee can incorporate it and use it in his/her relationships.

Active listening and NVC are therefore complementary in creating an empathetic and constructive coaching relationship. An anecdote to illustrate their impact: a manager comes to coaching because he/she is having repeated conflicts with his/her team. By actively listening to him/her, the coach perceives much unspoken and underlying emotional tensions. He/she helps to clarify his/her feelings ("I feel betrayed", "I am afraid of losing control") and his/her needs ("I need recognition", "I need cooperation"). This allows the manager to move from a defensive posture and open up to other ways of communicating. By experimenting with NVC, he/she manages to express his/her needs assertively and make clear requests to his/her team, rather than reproaches. Listening and dialogue improve, everyone feels respected and involved.

In summary, active listening and NVC are fundamentals of the coaching posture. They support a benevolent and effective coaching relationship, allowing the coachee to feel confident to explore his/her experience and find his/her own solutions. By practicing them in an integrated way, the coach develops a true relational intelligence in service of the coachee's objectives.

Takeaways:

- Active listening and nonviolent communication (NVC) are two key skills to establish a benevolent and effective coaching relationship.
- Active listening is a listening completely focused on the other, without judgement or prior assumptions. It involves attentive presence, minimal encouragements and paraphrasing.
- Paraphrasing acts as a kindly mirror deepening the self-awareness of the coachee.

- NVC is based on an empathetic communication process in 4 steps - objective observation, expression of feelings, identification of needs and formulation of a concrete request.
- In coaching, NVC allows the coach to clarify his/her own reactions, decode what is at stake for the coachee and model responsible communication.
- Active listening and NVC complement each other in creating an empathetic and constructive coaching relationship, based on mutual trust and respect.
- By practicing them in an integrated way, the coach develops relational intelligence that serves the coachee's objectives.