

Coaching Style Five

When Mary's client, Jane, first contacted her, Mary was charmed by a visual clue to the Five's low profile style. Jane's e-mail inquiry for more information was written in eight-point type:

*Cogito ergo sum. I think,
therefore I am.*

Rene Descartes

What is the going rate for an expert coach such as you? What are the logistics of this?

How do I pay my money? Do you take MasterCard, or shall I drop you a check?

Fives will be particularly likely make sure of your expertise before they hire you. You'll do well to reassure them right away by speaking their language. Mary overcame her reluctance to use Jane's word, "expert," in quoting her fees and wrote, "My fees compare quite favorably to those of other experts."

Fives polarize between retreating into their heads and taking external action. You can expect these clients to know their style already or to learn it quickly. Fives have little trouble understanding their issues but they have trouble taking action. They want to be able to break free of their patterns, as Jane so capably observed: "My being an Enneagram Five has served me well in the past but I tend to overwhelm myself with book learning and not make any practical progress."

These clients will progress most when they observe how they act out their style personally. They grow when they interrupt their habitual patterns and begin to move from thought to action. As they take action, they become more confident and comfortable in social interactions.

Fives use time and space as boundaries to give themselves privacy and safety, so give them time to think things through. They like schedules. Give them advance notice when you intend to bring up issues they might find uncomfortable. Give them space also. They may prefer a desk between you and them. You might sit just a bit farther apart from Fives than you would other clients. They may learn easily by phone and even prefer phone coaching to face-to-face meetings. This medium helps them create whatever emotional space they need, to avoid what they might consider unwanted emotional invasion.

As they experiment with their fieldwork, support them with specific feedback. They value feedback as they value all information and are likely to take action only when certain they are well informed. When you give them feedback, you make them more secure.

Even though they cherish privacy, Fives can come to a level of trust where they take emotional risks. With trust established, they may even be playful. For example, Jane had been one of the most knowledgeable people in a field where advancing technology had made it impossible to know everything. But as she worked to keep up with the technology, she missed the political dimension. She didn't know about the people involved in projects—names, positions, needs—which caused problems in situations where the political dimension was important.

Mary asked Jane, “What stops you from asking questions about the players when you need that information?”

“I don't want to appear stupid for having forgotten.”

“Will you do something far out if I suggest it?”

“Yes,” Jane answered, with an act of trust.

“The next time this comes up, try really hard to appear stupid!”

Jane and Mary both laughed at Mary's suggestion. Laughter is one of those right-brain breakthrough signals.¹ During their next coaching call Jane said, “I found myself feeling stupid. I simply noticed it and said, ‘Oh, I'm feeling stupid’ and decided to make it happen more. That was great! It was empowering to actually cause it. I realized that I can't know everything all the time.”

When you coach Fives effectively, they will become less reserved and reserving, more generous, and will integrate their thinking with action.

Fears Being Overwhelmed by Others

Fives can be the most independent of all the Enneagram styles. They may seem emotionally distant and almost callous, but this attitude is a defense against emotional interactions they fear will be more than they can handle. In business, this preference for emotional distance can lead them to surround themselves with other highly capable people who need little or no emotional reinforcement. They are reluctant to share their feelings either at home or at work for fear of being emotionally inadequate.

Fives create distance—social, physical, or temporal. They think emotions may cloud their thinking, and they pride themselves on clear thought. They dislike emotional confrontation and prefer to think apart from it. Their tendency to withdraw can be emotionally distancing to others, but also allows Fives more objectivity. Regardless of the emotional turbulence of a situation, when they

Pay attention to these four habits of in-the-box Fives:

Fears being overwhelmed by others

Believes there's not enough information to take action

Fears self-revelation

Compartmentalizes people, thoughts, activities

¹ Don't be discouraged if it takes a while to be this free with your Five clients. Trust doesn't come easily for them as a rule. Jane was quite self-aware when she began her work with Mary.