

Tool for Coaching Couples: How to Get Your Clients Out of the Story

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When coaching a couple, sooner or later you're bound to experience a client who just can't get past their story. This will be a client who continually replays events, retells the same story, feels stuck, angry, or tired of having the same old arguments. As the coach, you might also notice this story is very dynamic, which is a nice way of saying an endless amount of coaching topics are being presented to you.

What do you do, coach, when your client says they are ready to move forward and focus on the solution, but they can't see around their story? There's an organized approach that you can use to help a client find their own solution and discover what internal blocks have been getting in their way. This tool is the **Circle Chart** and I encourage you to form your own relationship with it.

The Circle Chart works great for couples coaching. It's natural for clients to be triggered by their significant other and to create a story around that trigger. Reactions to the trigger can become unhealthy when your client is caught in a negative feedback loop of living out those reactions on repeat. This tool can help your client break the cycle and consciously respond to the trigger. This tool can help the client discover and heal internal blocks, see choices they couldn't see while stuck in their story, and ultimately connect with the ability to create a powerful solution to live an authentic and fulfilling life.

If you're having a virtual session or an actual in-person session, you might consider describing everything for your client while they externally process to find their answers. Otherwise, if you're coaching over the phone, I encourage both you and your client to do the following:

Draw a circle on a sheet of paper and label that circle **"Stories I tell myself about the thing that happened."**

Around the outside of the circle, ask your client to list all their **thoughts, feelings, emotions, reactions, fears, beliefs**, and **whatever else** is coming up for them around **the thing that**

happened. For example, your client's mother-in-law frequently drops by her house unannounced, which bothers your client. She's upset with her husband because he has yet to confront his mother with this issue, even though it happens often. This has created a lot of friction in the couple's relationship, which the wife can't get past. So, on the outside of the circle, she might write "disrespect," explaining that her husband puts his mother first, and his mother drops by unannounced to find reasons to criticize her and judge her for being less outgoing than her other daughter-in-law.

She says this makes her feel like an outcast, like she's not good enough, and like her husband doesn't care about her feelings. She may even question her decision to marry a man who is still attached to his mother at the hip.

On the next page, **draw a second circle** and label it **"The thing that actually happened."** Around the outside of this circle, you're going to challenge your client to clarify what actually happened, without the stories listed around the first circle. In the case of our example, let's say **the thing that actually happened** is that her mother-in-law stopped by unannounced yesterday afternoon and also mentioned that her other daughter-in-law had invited her over for breakfast that morning.

Now you have a visual reference of "the trigger" (the actual event/situation/scenario) in the second circle and your client's stories in the first circle, which will also contain her GAILs (Gremlins, Assumptions, Interpretations, and Limiting Beliefs). This is like a shortcut to discovering those GAILs and from here, you have countless coaching possibilities.

The client now **draws a third circle**. This is where the client steps into her power and moves beyond her story. You label this circle **"What I want to do about the thing that actually happened."** Around this circle, your client outlines her choices for responding to **the thing that actually happened**.

So, what might she decide to do in response to her mother-in-law stopping by unannounced and making the comment about breakfast? She might choose to have her husband help her engage in a respectful conversation to establish and honor her boundaries. She might add that she also wants to explore how she and her husband can improve their satisfaction within the area of mutual support. She might say she wants to consider a win/win situation for her husband and her, so he can honor his relationships with both her and his mother, and she can honor her

own boundaries as well. She might brainstorm and say she'll consider having a designated day each week that her mother-in-law is scheduled to come over for dinner.

The goal for the third circle is to empower your client to see opportunities and potential solutions once she detaches from her story and GAILs. Things to avoid in this third circle: your client going back into their story and unconsciously giving away their power by blaming someone else or making someone else solely responsible for finding their solution.

Credit: The concepts inherent in this article are the author's interpretation of materials issued by iPEC®.