

Breaking Up Is Hard To Do

How to let go when it's time

By **Melanie DewBerry-Jones**

Just as I was finishing this article, a client called to end our coaching relationship. My first reaction was: What the heck is the world coming to? But who am I kidding? I'm no stranger to being fired. I have been fired from nearly every corporate job I've had. Being fired is never fun. It feels like the love of your life is breaking up with you — and no matter how often you hear the line, “Really, it's me, not you,” you feel as though it probably *is* you. I would rather go to the proctologist than deal with being fired. Breaking up, no matter the conditions, is so deeply personal that it can undermine our self-worth, experience and wisdom. But it doesn't have to. We can take the sting out of ending relationships. We might even learn a thing or two along the way.

Ending any relationship is tough, especially when you know that ending is the right thing to do. And what about those clients who leave after years of being coached, even when you know it's time for them to move on? As the break-up begins, I hear myself searching inside: “What? Now — I've fallen in love with them, watched from the sidelines while they had children, retired, divorced, married, came out of the closet, built

their first business, etc.” What's that you say? This isn't about me? Right! It *is* a relationship, and while it can feel very personable, while it may be true that you adore your clients (or just really like them), they are not our friends — that is why we call them clients.

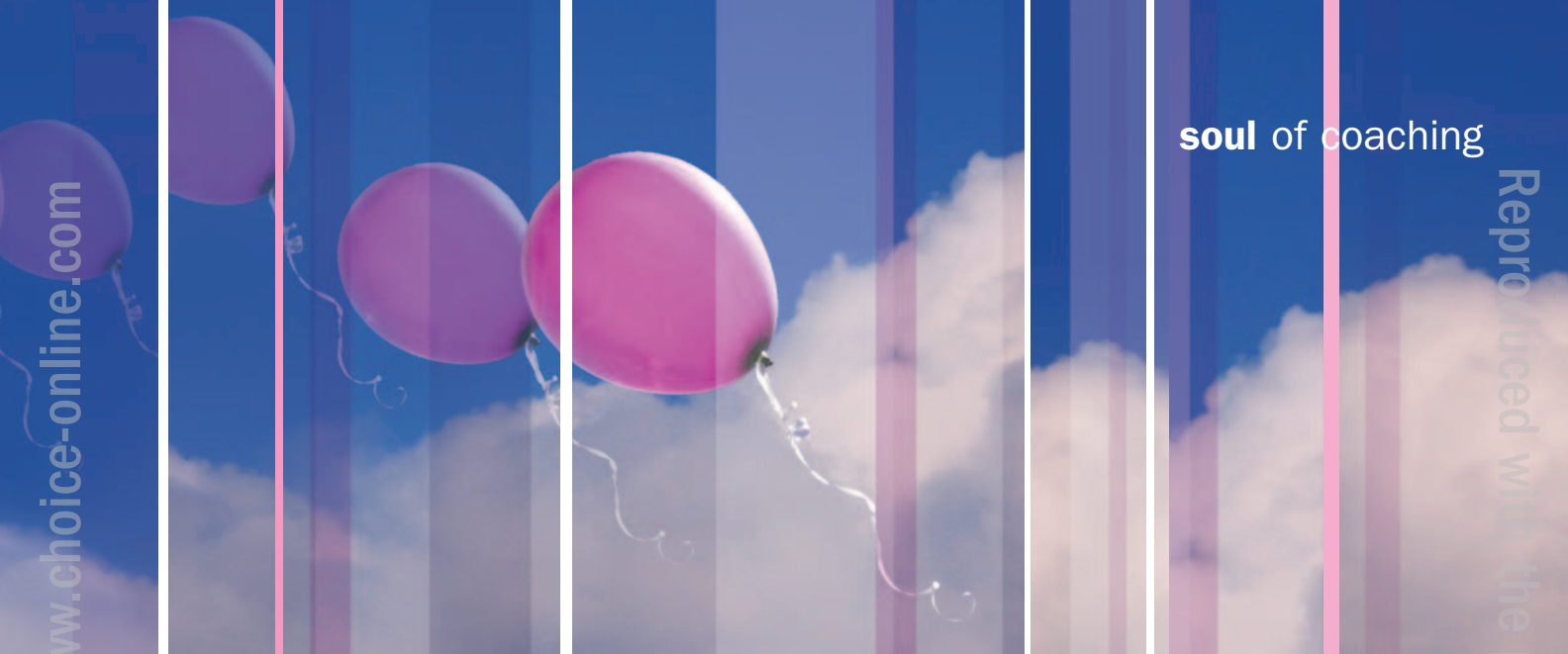
Moving on or kicking out — it's all in the intention

The difference between firing someone and letting them go is the intention behind the action. One is liberating, the other punishing. When it is time to let a client go, are you helping them move on — or kicking them out? How do you decide when it's time to let a client go? See chart below for some ideas.

Going our separate ways

Face it — as a culture we don't do completion well. Most of us avoid it. I saw a “Sex in the City” television episode in which the main character is dumped by her boyfriend via a Post-it™ note. This is an extreme example of avoidance, yet most people would love to resort to this kind of avoidance in ending relationships, if it wouldn't reflect so poorly on them. What we are really avoiding is the maturity of being in relation-

You're so fired	It's time to let you go
S/he drives me crazy	I'm not providing value
S/he is so stuck and resistant	Client may not be ready for coaching
S/he doesn't pay me on time	Client may not be ready to commit to self
We keep coming back to the same place	Therapy would be of great value to my client
S/he says s/he's doing great but nothing changes - s/he's lying to him/herself	Therapy might be of value here
S/he talks the talk but there's no action	Therapy might be of value here



“Ending any relationship is tough, especially when you know that ending is the right thing to do.”

ships. Unlike a personal relationship, in the coaching relationship there is nothing to talk out — we are simply moving our clients on.

Many of us avoid what we think is confrontation. Perhaps we worry that others won't like us, but avoiding something (or someone) does not do our humanity justice. We may think we're avoiding confrontation with the other person, but in reality the person we're avoiding confronting is always ourselves.

To have these connective conversations of completion, we (coaches, clients, humans) must first confront our own fears of being with the uncomfortable. Sure, we can put the attention over there on someone else by saying we don't want to hurt their feelings, or that we're afraid of how they will react, but that just is not the truth. We are afraid that if we open what may be an unpleasant conversation, it means that in the end we won't be loved. In the absence of that real love we substitute being liked. And because being liked is conditional we avoid such conditions, like ending a relationship with grace, in which being liked might be pulled like a rug from under our feet.

When our clients have grown into their visions or goals or outgrown the coach's skill set, the coach should be the first one to approach the subject of completion. When your client has achieved what they came to do, I hope you do some celebrating about yourself too. For both parties, it is a real time of celebration for a job well done.

Compassionate completion — the act of sacred leadership

Separation is painful for most folks, which is why so many of us avoid dealing head-on with a break-up. Separating is an opportunity to mature our emotional processes. Pain is a teacher, compassion its lesson. Compassionate completion tells us to take it easy on each other. Compassionate completion reframes the wounds of rejection (focus on a negative story about self) to learning ways to say goodbye to comfort for comfort's sake. In letting go of our clients, and in personal relationships, we remake ourselves. No longer able to identify as the coach, client or lover in relationship to that person, institution or group, we are guided (or forced, if we resist) to reinvent ourselves ever so slightly (think Martha Stewart).

This is the real gift of the end of any cycle, including life itself: to know that we can and will go on, perhaps stronger in heart (i.e. more vulnerable) than before. Each time we take the time to peel away another level of who we *were* to discover who we *are*, we come closer to the core of *what* we are. Completion changes our story, our biography. Our internal topography shifts; our inner landscape transforms. This is how wisdom is nurtured; acceptance is how it blossoms.

Letting go so the client will flourish is an act of generosity. Completing with grace when a client is the first to let go asks you to lean into sacred leadership. It doesn't matter who lets go first, unless you're hold-

ing on for self-centered reasons. What is important is *how* we let go. Like you, I have also had to let coaching clients go. Saying goodbye does not need to be a dreaded or avoided event. We can end our relationships

with grace, honesty and care, and in this process have a teaching moment with our client, modeling how to complete a relationship as an artful and honest being.

The great news is that as part of the

cycle of life, our lives will be refreshed. We have a model for completion in which we say what needs to be said or do what needs to be done so that we feel complete in the relationship.

What footprint are you leaving?

Completion of any relationship is the ultimate follow-through. Completion asks you to trust the relationship more than the false comfort that avoiding gives you. In the end, completion is choosing the relationship between your highest self and your ego self. The highest self wants to honor the bond between life and human. The ego wants to just end things.

You've heard the phrase "We are all connected." You may believe or agree with it — but do you behave it? Until you *behave* what you *believe*, what you're really saying is that you agree with the statement, but not enough to live it. To behave what you believe is truly a relief: liberation from second guessing, avoiding and escaping. What do you believe about your relationships to your clients and to mankind? Whatever that is, I encourage you to live it fully.

In aligning behavior with belief, an internal resonance evolves that reassures and caresses us. We acknowledge and cherish our connection to others. When we are able to behave in tune with our beliefs, we leave the smallest negative environmental (mental, intellectual and spiritual = environmental) footprint on other humans.


Sometimes we make the greatest investment in others by letting them go. •

Melanie DewBerry-Jones is a speaker, writer and coach. She is a twice-certified coach and a member of the National Speakers Association.

**Wondering
What's Next?**

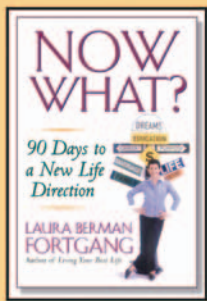
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