



Episode 73: How to Build a Good Working Relationship

Welcome to In the Right Direction podcast, where we believe you get to choose what's on your plate, you can manage the overwhelm, and that change is possible. I'm your host, Deb Elbaum, and I'm here to share insights and strategies to increase your happiness, one baby step at a time. Let's dive in.

Hi everyone, it's Deb. Here are the starting questions today: when you begin in a new role, or start working with someone new, how do you make sure that the relationship gets off to a good start? In your first few conversations, what do you make sure to talk about?

When we have trust with others, we can communicate more openly. When we know what others expect from us, we can let go of second guessing and focus on being productive. And when there's clarity about each person's role and how you're going to work together, it's easier to achieve success.

The reason for today's topic is that everything happens through relationships.

If you want to communicate openly, be more productive, and achieve success, you need to start by setting important relationships up for success.

Now, sometimes, you start working with someone and you just "click". You seem to "get" each other right away. Most of the time, though, when you start working with someone new, it takes time get to know them. You're figuring them out, and they're figuring you out.

Because we're all different. We have different core values, different ways of seeing the world, and different approaches to decision making and handling conflict. We manifest stress in different ways and need help in different ways when we're under stress.

We bring all of these qualities – our values, our perspectives, our experiences, and our ways of navigating stress – to work. When you need to work with someone new, that's a lot to figure out about them!

Today's coaching tool is a way to more quickly understand someone. It's a conversation that focuses on getting the relationship off to a strong start to work together effectively. Because working together effectively makes work easier and more enjoyable for everyone.

Today's tool is called designing the alliance.

Designing the alliance means talking about how to work effectively with someone. It's a conversation about the people involved, their preferences, their approaches, their habits, and their expectations.

It's a conversation about the *how* of work, rather than the *what* of work. Too often, when people start working together, they dive into the what of the work before talking about the how.

Taking a few minutes to talk about how they'll communicate and interact can save time and avoid misunderstandings and frustrations later on.

When I start working with new clients, we have a designing the alliance conversation in our first coaching session. I explain that we're going to talk about how to work most effectively together, so the coaching sessions will be most productive for them.

I say that I'm going to share some things that I keep in mind that make for effective coaching, and then I'll ask them what else I need to know about them to coach them most effectively.

Then we have the designing the alliance conversation. Here are examples of some categories and information that I share.

I talk about communication: I tell them that they can email me any time about anything. I give them my cell phone, and I tell them that they can text if something urgent comes up, although email is my preferred way of communicating.

I share expectations about coaching sessions: that it's helpful if they bring real situations to the coaching; and that they get to say yes, or no, or make a counter offer to any coaching homework I suggest.

I share about my coaching style: that I tend to look around the room when I think and that I value comfort. I tell them they're welcome to eat or drink to nourish their body and brain.

The goal of the designing the alliance conversation is to introduce myself to them so that I can feel a bit more familiar, so that their brains can relax into the coaching.

Then I ask them what else I need to know about them to coach them most effectively.

Some people describe their learning style: for example, that they like examples to understand concepts better; or that they like to digest and think about information so might not have answers right away.

Some people share about their personal lives: that they have a pet who might bark or need to be let out; or that they have a family member who is ill and on their mind.

Some people share feedback preferences: that they want to be told things directly, because they're always looking to grow.

When they tell me how they work, I get to know them better.

After more than a decade of being a coach, I appreciate people's individuality. One person might need a few minutes of personal connection at the beginning of a coaching call; another dives right in to the topic. One processes by talking things through out loud; another processes quietly to themselves.

Although their styles and habits can be different, in general, my clients want the same thing. They want to have a conversation about something that matters. They want to leave a coaching session with hope, clarity, and a plan. They want to feel heard and understood.

Feeling understood and respected is a human need, and having the designing the alliance conversation helps to bring those values into the relationship.

After my client and I have our designing the alliance conversation, I always invite them to consider who in their world they might they want to have this type of conversation with. It might be a new person

they're working with – like a new boss or new colleague – or they might want to have a re-designing the alliance conversation with someone they've worked with for a while.

Especially if you've worked with someone for years, it can be helpful to have a redesigning the alliance conversation to update the way you work together.

Here's an example. One of my clients used to report to someone, and now they're peers. My client shared that there were some patterns that felt outdated. She now wanted to have more of a voice in making decisions, and she wanted to have more control in certain areas. We talked through how she might broach a redesigning the alliance conversation with her peer.

We also discussed the categories they might want to talk through. When you have a designing the alliance conversation, it helps to think through ahead of time the categories of things to be discussed.

For example, you'll likely want to talk about communication – the mode of communication you'll use, the expected response time to an email, and expectations around communicating at night or on the weekends.

You'll likely want to discuss decision-making to have clarity around who makes what decision, and what you'll do when there's a disagreement.

You might also want to talk about feedback, and how you'll give each other feedback, what type, and when.

Discussing these areas at the outset, and then following through with your behaviors will help build a trusting, solid relationship more quickly.

Let's bring this to you. I invite you to think about your key relationships at work – the ones that feel easy, and the ones that might benefit from more clarity and understanding. Think about how you might bring up the idea of taking a step back to talk about how you work together.

Let others know that the conversation is for the sake of being even more productive and effective. Then think about the topics you want to discuss – what you want to share, and the questions you want to ask.

Showing others that you care about how you show up and that you care about creating an effective working relationship is being an intentional leader. It's honoring values of respect, collaboration, curiosity, and clear communication. And any time we bring more clarity into the world, it's a gift to everyone.

Thank you so much for listening and being part of my community. If you want help improving key relationships, please reach out. Email me at deb@debelbaum.com or go to my website debelbaum.com to schedule a consult. I look forward to it. I'm here to help you create your best self at home and at work, so that you're confident you're moving in the right direction for you.

Until next time!