



## **Benefits of using a Coach**

### **The importance of professional reflection, debriefing and mentoring**

**Presentation by Linda MacKay PhD**

**On 28 May 2015 at Relationships Australia**

Linda has a PhD in Critical Psychology. She is a trauma therapist and teacher in the field nationally. She lectures university students and provides supervision and coaching to senior practitioners and teams in psychiatry, psychology, social work and family mediation services. She is a contractor to Relationships Australia.

#### **How can collaborative lawyers benefit from reflection, debriefing and mentoring?**

All too often family lawyers are concerned with the dynamics between the couple who has separated. Yet there are dynamics of relationships between colleagues. How colleagues interact can impact the way clients interact and vice versa.

The process of knowing is continually evolving. The dynamic is not, as we often think it is, one between the clients and one between the colleagues. How people act and react often is the function of a triangular relationship where two factions align and one faction is on the outer. That alignment can shift in the same group of people from time to time.

Reflection is vital. It is important to think about how you can do something differently to shift the dynamic.

Debriefing is a structured way of getting to how you can do something differently which examines expectations, distress, airtime being given to each person and approval needed and given.

Lawyer's limbic systems are effected even in collaborative matters when there is an action by their client or the other client, which causes the lawyer to perceive an attack and they either defend or withdraw.

Dynamics in the team are also affected by coaches and child specialists where mental health professionals have a softer approach and work on building trust which can cause lawyers to become impatient. As they are from different disciplines, they have to look at differences in their views about what is worth focusing on; what is too much and what does "taking too long" mean?

Mentoring helps to learn how to build more mature reactions.

It helps understand how people (including us as lawyers) function under distress.

It often helps to know how a client has gotten under your skin.

It reminds us to maintain an openness when clients are in the attack/defence mode.

The whole process is behaviorally focused.

Please note that the more you say or indicate that you do not understand another persons view or proposal the more you fire their limbic system.

**Further reading**

Casey, T (2004) "Reflective practice in legal education: the stages of reflection."  
*Clinical Law Review* 20 (2) 317-354