

# Avoiding BTN Coaching Relationships

By Leonard Lang, Ph.D.

I once read a relationship book that talked about BTN relationships that mess many people up. In BTN relationships, both people generally like each other and feel less lonely together than if they had no romantic relationship. But they remained a BTN or “Better Than Nothing” relationship because they aren’t in love or on the same page going forward toward what each really wanted.

Unfortunately, I sometimes see people in BTN coaching relationships that go on and on without ever reaching the goals the client wants. Like the BTN relationship, the BTN coaching situation can make you feel you must be doing something good because a professional is at your side and you are engaged in talk about your work life. But like the BTN romantic partnership, the time to get out (or make the changes that will realistically improve matters) is the instant you realize it is only a BTN, distracting you from your real work. As in the BTN romance, it isn’t that there’s something “wrong” with you or your partner (coach). Just that the other person is not the right coaching match for you.

So here are 4 Warning Signs you are headed toward or in a BTN coaching relationship:

1. No clear goals. If you don’t know what will be different in your life at the end of the coaching sessions, you don’t have the vision or framework for succeeding. You might spend a session or two coming up with the goals, but you shouldn’t wander through your coaching without them.
2. No meaningful homework between sessions. Maybe it’s you--you don’t want to, don’t have the time, aren’t committed enough. Or maybe it’s more the coach who isn’t coming up with or helping you come up with actions to take between sessions, but either way it’s one possible indication things aren’t going well. .
3. No useful new thinking or actions or results after a reasonable time (If there’s no new thinking or actions in just a couple of sessions, that’s a warning sign. Obviously, new results may be quick or may take a lot longer, depending on what kinds of results you’d like).
4. No increase or improvement in energy confidence, optimism and/or joy. Coaching isn’t therapy, but the very nature of being questioned and coming up with new solutions and taking action typically creates more energy, confidence, optimism and joy in your life. If not, at least ask yourself why not.

Sometimes the coaching starts out great, but becomes a BTN as you have learned what you need to have learned and are able to do now what you want/need to do. If that’s the case, first applaud yourself and your coach for the successes you’ve had. Then move on. Of course, you can return to coaching if you get stuck again.

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