



**Dancing between Cultures: Culturally Intelligent Coaching for Missions and Ministry**  
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## **Relationship/Task: Boundaries and Burnout**

Anne, a coach who has lived and worked for many years in Asia, writes:

When coaching a Relational client through the issues of boundaries and burnout, it seems that the focus needs to be very specifically on areas of time management and what they *do* have control over. In people-oriented societies there is always an “open door policy”, and a visitor always has priority over task, regardless of how important that task is. So if one tries to coach a Relational value client around the “big picture” of how to get the job done, the leader can quickly give up and say that they don’t have control over their time, therefore they cannot engage in basic time management skills. There needs to be some discovery that drills down until the coach helps to identify one specific, concrete thing that the Relationship culture leader can feel they own and have control over. Even micro steps forward can start to relieve some of the pressure and help the leader to feel they have a certain amount of control of their own lives...Another complicating factor is that with clients for whom relationship takes priority over action items that are task-focused, the client may feel they have let the coach down when action steps are not completed. This may result in delaying sessions or discontinuing coaching. The coach can proactively address this possibility by normalizing setbacks.<sup>1</sup>

Personal boundaries will look and feel different in working with clients at different places on this continuum. While some Task clients may be reluctant to say no and find setting and keeping boundaries between work and home stressful, most Task clients will have a cultural understanding that boundaries are helpful and should be maintained. Their challenge in burnout situations often involves disengaging from a task. A sabbatical coach, for instance, may help the client learn to rest and refrain from doing tasks and accomplishing objectives. It may be particularly hard for such a client to lay down responsibility for their *ministry*. However, Relationship-oriented coaches may be shocked at the Task client’s ability to completely disengage with *ministry partners and relationships* during a sabbatical season. The Relationship

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<sup>1</sup> Anne, Personal Communication, Permission granted on September 17, 2015.

valued coach can serve their Task oriented clients well by posing perspective questions that help the client explore the impact of disengaging from relationships (which can happen not only during sabbatical seasons, but also in times of high task pressure!). Coaches can also leverage relationship value questions in burnout situations, such as, “What lifegiving relationships do you have that you want to continue to invest in during this time? how will that help you to recover long-term?

Relationship-culture clients, such as those Anne describes, may not have an understanding that boundaries are helpful or may have a much looser interpretation of what good boundaries look like. Leaders who have both a Status and Relationship orientation may have a particularly difficult time when they are stressed and burned out, since Status-culture leaders often feel a high degree of responsibility for the people they lead. When coupled with a Relationship orientation, their outlook may feel extremely over-responsible to a Task coach. Anne’s suggestion to focus on micro-steps can be helpful in such a case.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.