



**Coaching with Backbone and Heart (O’Neill 2000)**

‘In bringing your signature presence, you bring your ideas, biases and challenging assumptions to your clients. You *also* need to maintain strong relationships and connections with those same leaders’.

Backbone is about saying what your position is, whether it is popular or not. Heart is staying in relationship and reaching out even when the relationship is in conflict.

Those two functions work together and interrelate. Each does not do well in isolation from the other. Neither way is effective in business situations when it is polarised from the other function: for example, speaking strongly while shutting others down or being highly empathetic when others do not know what you think.

Executive coaching is a continual dance of balancing backbone and heart while you work with the leader.

**Backbone and Heart Checklist**

<b>Bringing Backbone</b>	
Does my coachee know what I think? How often do I say, “I agree with you”, or “I disagree with you” and clearly state why?	
Do I say what I need from the coachee in our working relationship in order to be most effective with them?	
Can I give my position without blame or becoming defensive?	
Can I state my opinion without jargon or fancy concepts?	
Can I give hard feedback when I need to?	
<b>Bringing Heart</b>	
Do I understand my coachee’s situation?	
Can I clearly articulate his position and reflect it back to him/her?	
Do I identify and tell the leader hunches I have about possible deeper reactions, feelings, and thoughts he/she is leaving unsaid?	
When there is a disagreement or conflict between the leader and me, do I keep engaging with them or do I retreat and disengage?	
Do I continue to stay in touch?	
Do I express appreciation for the degree of difficulty a situation may be for a leader and also the degree of accomplishment they have achieved?	