

Coaching Notes

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What are the ingredients of successful coaching?



A recent massive study by [Erik de Haan](#) and colleagues looked at 366 coaches and their 1,895 coachees to identify the ingredients of what coaches and coachees consider success. The coachees “self-efficacy” (“Yes I can make progress on this”) was an important contributor to ratings of “coaching effectiveness”. The implication is that coaches and coachees should invest time on checking, and if necessary lifting self-efficacy.

A task and goals focus was more important than the “bond” formed between coach and coachee. And there was evidence that “a strong emphasis on goals in the working alliance” could compensate for lower self-efficacy.

Some suggestions on lifting self-efficacy

An example of self-efficacy is a person looking at a change they would like – a change that matters to them, perhaps because it is aligned with important values – and seeing that while it will be challenging it is “do-able”. In contrast, someone with lower reserves of self-efficacy might be more inclined to see the threat of failure if they attempt that change.

One approach to lifting self-efficacy is to explore previous successes and tangible achievements, and to mine these for evidence of the person’s skills. Or when giving feedback – help the person see what skills they are using to produce good results (“how do you feel about that achievement?”, “what were you doing that helped in the success?”). This helps the person internalize that strength. Reinforcement of success builds the inclination to explore new possibilities. As a coach you can work with the coachee to build a ladder of more challenging steps – where each step is a natural progression and their attention is focused on short-term “do-ability”.

This will not always be easy or stress-free. As IBM CEO Ginni Rometty says “growth and comfort do not co-exist”. One approach, developed by Kelly McGonigal at Stanford, is to ask people to make two lists – things that stress them and things that matter to them. Stressful options can be seen as meaningful areas for development as well as being

achievable targets. Stress can be seen as a natural aspect of trying hard, and also a contributor to performance. People given this helpful perspective [do better](#) in working on later challenges.

And some suggestions about useful goals

Some guidelines for results in turning intentions to action and results –

- Challenging and specific goals
- Identify the first steps rather than the long term objective
- Prioritise what needs to be learned and done differently rather than an output – what can I think, feel or do differently (that should contribute to the end-goal)
- Promote the positive vs stop the bad
- Identify stress-points, obstacles, and ways through or around these
- Keep a regular record of what you've done, and ideally share that with supportive friends
- Use self-motivating self-talk – in one study a phrase such as “I can do better” lifted effort and results

For example –

- Say I want to reduce LDL or “bad” cholesterol, via changes to my diet. I intend to eat less saturated fat (butter, cheese, full fat yoghurt, cake, biscuits, ice-cream, chips, fried food, red meat) – framed positively = eat more nuts when I might otherwise eat “SatFat”.
- My learning goal – when I recognize the desire to eat “SatFat” foods – think – “I can do better”, reach for nuts and savour the flavour
- Monitoring – keep a daily score of how many nuts (they are in a little plastic container – a very visible record)
- Sharing – show friends how the contents of the container are going
- Dealing with obstacles - What if in social setting with SatFat in reach? Little container in pocket or handbag!
- Use of motivational self-talk – “I can do this!”

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