



COACHING EXERCISE #22

Understanding Behavior Change

A New Integrated Individual Behavioral Change Model for Coaching

One important fundamental goal of multi-rater feedback, particularly within coaching interventions, is actual change of behavior on the job that has not been highlighted enough by coaches and consultants (Joo 2005; London & Smither, 2002). Initiation of new behaviors and sustaining them over time is particularly challenging for most individuals. The likelihood that an employee will or will not engage in a particular behavior is influenced heavily by their predictions of the effects and consequences of that behavior in relation to their own professional goals and objectives. Behavioral change efforts are often not linear but tend to be progressive, regressive or even static. It seems intuitive that focus on a single behavioral change is easier to initiate and sustain but, surprisingly, multiple simultaneous efforts (e.g., behaviors planned to improve multiple competencies at the same time) tend to be equal or even more effective because they reinforce quick benefits (Hyman, Pavlik, Taylor, Goodrick, & Moye, 2007).

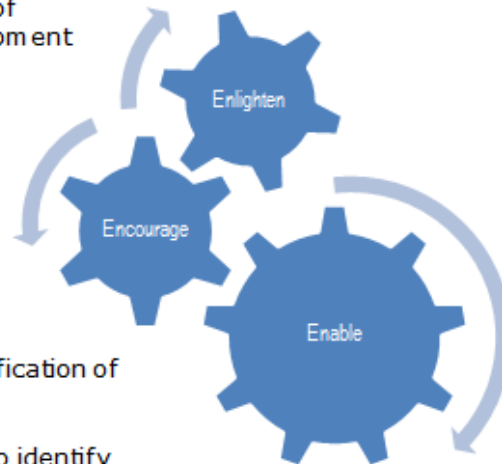
Building on the feedback process models of Smither et al., (2002) and Gregory et al., (2008), a more specific individual behavioral change model is proposed here based heavily on evidence-based research in the health psychology and behavioral medicine literature. The Enlighten, Encourage and Enable model (Figure 1) is based on the most often applied theories of individual behavioral change including the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1991), self-efficacy and social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1977), the health belief model (Becker, 1974), and the transtheoretical model of change (Prochaska & Velcier, 1997). Each of these theories should be useful to all coaches who are attempting to extend the utility of multi-rater feedback beyond awareness to enhanced effectiveness or impact.

A large body of research has explored the importance of “readiness to change” as described in the transtheoretical model (Prochaska & Velcier, 1997). This readiness to change model has introduced specific stages in which people are thought to move from a state of no motivation to change to one of internalization of new behavior as a new habit that is sustained over time. The transtheoretical model (TTM) construes change as a process involving progress through a series of five interdependent stages (precontemplation, contemplation, preparation, action, maintenance) including the possibility of relapse giving coaches an important approach for facilitating successful behavioral change efforts based on intrapsychic factors such as motivation and core self-evaluations (Bono et al., 2005).

1. Enlighten

Individual Assessment of skills, personality, style, interests and/or values (e.g., 360 feedback, personality/style)

Feedback Process (awareness of strengths and potential development areas)



2. Encourage

Readiness to Change (clarification of motivations and beliefs)

Motivational Interviewing to identify the change drivers in clients (emphasis on "what's in it for me")

Goal Setting/Developmental Planning (measurable and specific)
Skill Building

3. Enable

Reinforcement (individual and organizational incentives for successful learning and development)

Monitoring (continuous reminders on developmental planning progress)

Social Support to reinforce learning and behavior change

Relapse Prevention Training

Evaluation (knowledge acquisition, skill transfer, impact)

Stage 1: Enlighten

The "what's in it for me" (WIFM) is a critical leverage point for coaches to be successful in behavioral change efforts with their coachees using multi-rater feedback interventions. Helping coachees to become more self-aware of their intent to change, identifying "signature strengths" to leverage or developmental opportunities to work on as well as clarifying potential derailment factors to be managed can be useful to help increase readiness for behavioral change. However, insight and self-awareness is only a fundamental first step that is a necessary, but not sufficient condition, for behavioral change to take place. Motivational interviewing (MI) is a useful individual-based approach for coaches and consultants to assist coachees to reflect and target specific developmental goals to work on and a powerful way to enhance self-insight and commitment to change. It is a style that values and emphasizes the coachee's self-evaluations, values, interests and motives and utilizes reflective listening and probing to help the coachee make lasting behavioral changes.

MI is a collaborative approach to identifying motivations to change, potential obstacles, targeted goal setting and re-appraisal to ensure long term success without being overly directive with the coachee (Passmore, 2007). The coach must identify the key “readiness to change” stage from pre-contemplation (no intention to change), contemplation, preparation, action, maintenance, and relapse and apply specific approaches, techniques and strategies at each stage to help facilitate successful long-term success (Prochaska et al., 1997). From an MI perspective, coaches would diagnose to carefully understand the coachee-environment system. They would need to listen intently to the coachee’s feelings, motives, fears and barriers to behavioral change.

As an example, the coach would ask open-ended questions to help the coachee see an association between how one’s ability to change specific leadership behaviors could be related to enhanced team performance and engagement of talent reporting to the coachee. The coach would help the coachee reflect on the advantages of committing to behavioral changes and facilitate the elicitation of “change talk” to increase readiness and motivation to try new behaviors on the job based on the multi-rater feedback results.

A technique suggested by Miller and Rollnick (2002), that a coach may utilize to assess a coachee’s stage of change, is by simply asking them to rate their perceived readiness to change on a scale of 0 – 5, with 5 being that they have already made change, and 0 being not at all interested in changing. To assess confidence to change, a confidence “ruler” can be employed by the coach: “Why are you an X on the scale and not a zero?” and “What would it take for you to go from X to a higher number?”

During this Enlighten stage, the coach is using the data from the multi-rater feedback process to help the coachee to interpret the meaningfulness of rater perspectives compared to their own self-perceptions. One important role of the coach during this stage is to help manage potential coachee reactions to ensure that the feedback does not elicit disengagement or cause the coachee to ignore it or to overly emphasize it in light of multi-rater feedback research previously cited (Smither et al., 2004; Sedikides et al., 2003; Brett et al., 2001).

Reactions from any multi-rater feedback process might range from being pleasantly surprised to experiencing hurt, anger and even depression with predictable consequences to performance, health and psychological well-being (Eisenberger et al., 2003). As Joo (2005) has pointed out, the feedback orientation and personality will directly affect the coachee’s openness to the coach’s input, suggestions and feedback that can affect the overall effectiveness of the intervention.

Recent research suggests that affect is actually more important than cognition in predicting both self-reported intention and behavior (Lawton, Conner, & McEachan, 2009). Their findings suggest an important role of coaches in targeting the emotional reactions and consequences for engaging in new behaviors as well as assessing “readiness to change” stages. Coaches should assess their own skills, training and experiences and seek additional training and consultation, if necessary, to best help the coachee to understand and interpret their feedback.

Stage 2: Encourage

One key to successful long-term behavioral change is in the planning process that should also include “deliberate practice” of newly acquired skills or leveraging of one’s strengths. The coach’s role is to ensure the translation of the Enlighten stage to the creation of a realistic, specific and measurable performance development plans in the Encourage stage. Goal setting and developmental planning are generally addressed in most feedback models (Gregory et al., 2008) and as previously pointed out, coaching appears to significantly help the coachee translate awareness and motivation into specific behavioral change goals (Smither et al., 2003).

The Encourage stage involves gaining commitment with the coachee towards a collaborative and explicit behavioral change plan. The coach, during this stage, explores signs of resistance and actively strengthens clarity of action plan goals and commitment to implement them. The coachee’s motivation to change is a function of the discrepancy between their action plan goal and current situation. Coaches also should help the coachee to see if the goal is realistic as a large gap between ideal and current states may actually decrease confidence to sustain change over time leading to possible relapse (Dimef & Marlatt, 1998; Parks & Marlatt, 1999; Larimer, Palmer & Marlatt, 1999).

Following the clarification of the action plan, coachees are encouraged to consider specific methods to successfully achieve their goals including exploring potential barriers and challenges. This discussion leads the coachee to an explicit summary of why the goal is important, how the goal can be successfully achieved and what metrics can be developed to track and monitor progress. The coach should secure a verbal commitment from the coachee to strengthen their intention to actually implement the behavioral change goal (i.e., making it public) as well as elicit verbalizations about the feelings underlying the stated intent to change.

Stage 3: Enable

This is the stage in which coaches begin to actually help the coachee acquire new knowledge, increase self-efficacy, and reinforce deliberate practice of skills to initiate and maintain important new behaviors. In general, coachees are more likely to try new behaviors in which they are confident in a successful outcome and feel a sense of mastery in maintaining it over time despite some possible setbacks and challenges.

If the coachee is lacking confidence in his/her ability to implement the plan, the chances that he or she will maintain it over time will be low. It is the role of the coach to provide encouragement and support with their coachees to explore their feelings about their developmental journey through structured emotional expressive writing or by probing directly for reactions, reflections and insights in each session.

This Enable stage is critical for long-term success of any behavior modification program and this stage is often overlooked or minimized by many coaches. When possible, coaches should be working during this stage to help the coachee to manage lapses, recognize successes, enlist the power of social support systems (e.g., help educate the coachee’s manager about what they can do to follow-up and reinforce key behaviors and learnings),

and focus on progress through structured reminders, recognizing and rewarding goals and to evaluate overall success.

The coach's role is to assist the coachee with re-evaluating the importance of their goals and exploring some relapse prevention strategies to prepare the coachee for the inevitable lapses that accompany any behavioral change effort. For example, the coach could help the coachee anticipate future unavoidable high-risk situations and prepare in advance for inevitable lapses with their boss or work team. Encouraging ways for the coachee to reward sustained behavior is also something the coach can discuss during their follow-up meetings along with an analysis of the coachee's professional and social support network and what role they can play in maintaining new behaviors over time.

Coaches should help facilitate the self-esteem of their coachees to help facilitate self-regulation and better to handle potential failure in light of the inherent challenges to both initiate and sustain behavior over time (Newton, Khanna & Thompson, 2008). Self-esteem is a complicated construct (it can be stable or unstable) and it can both facilitate goal completion but also increase the likelihood of failure by increasing the selection of risky options or unrealistic outcomes (e.g., in coachees with exaggerated self-efficacy). Coaches should attempt to help their coachees build stable self-esteem and explore areas of self-doubt that seem to be at the core of unstable self-esteem which is commonly conceptualized and defined as fluctuations in reported self-esteem over short periods of time (Seery, Blascovich, Weisbuch & Vick, 2004).

The strategy of goal reappraisal should also be emphasized during the entire coaching process with a coachee (Tolli & Schmidt, 2008). The coach and coachee should mutually define ways to track, monitor and evaluate progress on the specific goals that are set and sustained over time. Ideally, continuous reminders can be sent to the coachee to highlight progress and successful performance towards his/her development plan and involvement of all relevant stakeholders involved in the coaching intervention (e.g., the coachee's manager, direct reports or internal mentors).

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