

STEPPPA Coaching Model

Many coaches desire a framework for coaching that keeps them on track with their coachee's progress towards motivated and achievable goals. Any model needs to be simple and memorable enough so that it does not inhibit the coach's attention on their coachee or on their coachee's material. The STEPPPA model emphasizes both progress and motivation in a systematic way. As with all stories, there is a beginning and an end but there is also one overarching, or meta-feature of the model, and that is emotion, 'E'.

Emotion

The reason for highlighting emotion overtly is that emotions are the biggest motivators and de-motivators around¹ – if we ignore them, we may be misled about the achievability of our coachee's goals and the coachee fail. Performance Coaching is just that, it encourages performance so that the coachee is always winning, building their self-confidence in their areas of former (relative) weakness. It is critical to coaching generally that coachees have goals that are both achievable and motivating. Emotional context is therefore of great importance when choices and decisions are being made, and especially so when actions will be required – hence its position between Target Identification (T) and Perception (P₁).

For the coach, the area of emotion may be dark territory. Also, coachees may not wish to provide emotional context to their material. A coach who is familiar with emotional expression (including their own) already has an advantage over a coach who does not.

It is unrealistic to imagine that emotion will not find its way into the coaching dynamic since we are working in the field of motivation, goals, threats, frustrations and conflict on a regular basis. I, and others, recommend that coaches have training in counselling or other 1-2-1 person-centred disciplines².

Ranking Question

John Whitmore³ favours the ranking question in coaching and it has at least two important uses in coaching: firstly, in identifying the level of perfection that a coachee experiences a particular (past or future, desired) state, for example:

Coach Zero through ten, how perfectly are you experiencing that as if it is happening now?

¹ McLeod, A. (2003), Emotion and Coaching, *Anchor Point*, **17**, 2, 35-41; and, Emotional Intelligence in Coaching (2002), *Rapport*, 58, 53

² McLeod, A. (2003), Performance Coaching, Crown House, NY & Carmarthen

³ Whitmore, J (2002), Coaching for Performance, 2nd Edition, Nicholas Brealey, London

And secondly, in identifying the level of commitment to a particular goal, as this example shows:

Coach Zero through ten, how certain are you of achieving this plan to your chosen goal?

This question is only useful if the work beforehand has fully contextualized the plan and if the ramifications of it have been fully understood – ideally, fully ‘experienced’ rather than simply understood. We know for example that many able managers are unable to give up smoking, even after having made rational commitments to do so, with high degrees of certainty. Whether one invokes the Bateson/Dilts model of Hierarchical Levels⁴ or not, it will be the feelings associated with the material that dictates whether success is achieved or not.

Cold Fish

So, what does the coach do to establish emotional congruence in the worse-case scenario where the level of emotional expression is zero? The coach may already have tried to encourage the coach to an experience of their Future Desired State and found this rather unrewarding. A useful question might be:

Coach Having agreed a series of actions to the time-scales set down here, what would it be like to fail? What is this failing like?

In meta-program terms, we are seeking the ‘away-from’ and the reaction to this question may be terse and emphatic,

Coachee I do not fail.

However, the coach has the information needed; their coach is highly directed away from failure. That, coupled with their stated desire to achieve their goal provides a second measure of their chance of achieving it. The question posed may be challenging, as the example above may be to certain coaches. In coaching, rapport should be risked during the sessions. If you are not risking rapport, you are not coaching.

The Model

Now lets consider each of the other elements of the STEPPPA Model in order. A flow diagram is also presented (fig. 1) which suggests many of the possible directions that a typical coaching session may take when using STEPPPA as a template.

STEPPPA contains the prime elements of establishing and checking that the strategy will be carried out, be successful and enhance the wider context of the executive’s role

⁴ Bateson, G (1973), Steps to an Ecology of Mind, Paladin Press, Boulder, CO; Dilts, R (1994), Strategies of Genius (Vol 1) Meta Publications, CA

and life. The steps may go out of order but every step is important - it may be risky to miss one.

SUBJECT

Coachees bring a variety of issues and goals, sometimes planned, others often arising during the coaching itself. The coach needs to check that the subject is one that is permitted within the terms of any contract. A desire to get out of the organization may not be allowable. The coach will also wish to check that the coachee has clarity about any subject of concern, if not, the coach will help them to arrive at a clear understanding. Coaching, whether 1-2-1, by telephone or by email, is immediately helpful since it can help the coachee to set down their issue logically. Where an issue has emotional distress around it, this may not yet have taken place. It is also possible that a coachee may have shelved the issue (specifically to gain coaching intervention) without defining it adequately for themselves. In both cases, the coach will wish to check that the coachee has rich contextual understanding of their subject issue.

TARGET IDENTIFICATION

Very often, the coachee also brings a target (goal) but is having difficulty in motivating themselves to achieve it. The coach will already be assessing whether the target is realistic and within the control of the coachee. If not, further questioning and challenge will help the coachee arrive at a target that does begin to meet the needs for a well-formed outcome. Also, progress may not have been made because the target is either not motivating enough or because their plan for achieving it is not sufficiently influencing. Any target will need to fit in with the organizational remit for the assignment. Where there is no obvious target expressed by the coachee, the coach will return to this issue after Perception and before Plan.

EMOTION

See above.

PERCEPTION and CHOICE

Coaches aim to widen the coachee's Conscious Perception of their issues and targets. At this stage of the STEPPPA Model, the coach wants the coachee to widen their Conscious Perception in order to increase choice. The tools used include questioning and challenge. Note too, the importance of silence in coaching – silence is where major leaps of understanding can take place⁵.

⁵ McLeod, A (2002), The Power of Silence – Coaching by Quality, not Content, *Effective Consulting*, 1, 8, 31-32

Conscious Perception gives the coachee wider and clearer views of the Subject and Target and provides new choices of progress. It is the stage where the coachee may find too many choices. Some choices will have a better fit for their personality and for their organization. At the end of the period of extending and developing Conscious Perception for choice, the coachee will focus increasingly on targets and strategies that are achievable and exciting for them. In most cases, the coachee will quickly arrive at a single solution. If not, they may need further contextual understanding or more experiential learning to make their single preferred choice. Coaches must not keep widening choice because they do not like the coachee's chosen path. Always work with the coachee's material.

PLAN & PACE

The plan (P_2) leads to the Target. It will be a process, not a series of choices. If choices are still being pursued, then it is too early for planning. Where the coachee has a clear Target, they may be motivated to get on with it immediately. The coach will encourage the coachee to pause and check that the Target is achievable, that the strategy is feasible, is within their area of influence and control and that they have considered the wider implications ('ecology') for colleagues, for themselves and (potentially) for their families. Does every element of the plan accord with corporate policy and the culture of work?

Pacing (P_3) will establish defined time-scales (milestones) for the plan and further information about the realistic nature of those time-scales. A Timeline can achieve Planning and Pacing in one process.

ADAPT or ACT

It's important to adequately review the Plan before seeking commitment. Once a level of commitment has been established, the executive will have invested sufficient attention to the subject and target to want to move on. However, the level of motivation is still a variable, both rising and falling. The coachee may need exposure to some more perceptual work, further attention to vision, beliefs and identity to adjust the Plan to achieve a highly motivated state. Checking the emotional commitment is helpful and good attention to pacing will have helped to make sure that the plan is achievable.

CONCLUSION

I do not urge coaches to use any particular model of coaching and I work with many skilled coaches that only use a model if it is prescribed by the client. Many coaches work from an intuitive base underpinned by the elegant use of (familiar) coaching language and tools. Where one is going to use a model, then it should have adequate regard to emotion as the most powerful human traits to empower or demotivate. The STEPPPA

Model includes emotion overtly, together with a process that helps to achieve motivated plans and successful targets.

Angus McLeod's latest book, 'Performance Coaching: The Handbook for Managers, HR Professionals & Coaches'. ISBN: 1904 424 058 can be ordered from Crown House Publishing US., PO Box. 2223., Williston, VT-05495. Phone: (877) 925 1213 or web (purchasing): www.chpus.com/
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Next Page shows figure 1.

