

Workplace Coaching:

What is it and how is it effective?



What you should learn from this article:

- What is coaching
- Solution-Focused Cognitive Behavioral (SFCB) Coaching:
 - Characteristics of SFCB
 - The science behind its effectiveness
- Tips for managers

BACKGROUND

For the past two years, coaching has been named one of the top workplace trends (SIOP Administrative office 2016, 2018). However, coaching is not only a trend; it has become an effective talent management strategy in leadership development and performance management. Despite its popularity, there isn't a lot of clarity surrounding how to coach and why coaching is effective. In this paper, we outline some of the background research on coaching and some best practices for managers.

WHAT IS COACHING?

Coaching "...is a one-to-one learning and development intervention that uses a collaborative, reflective, goal-focused relationship to achieve professional outcomes that are valued by the coachee," (Jones, Woods, & Guillaume, 2016, p. 4; adapted from Smither, 2011). Coaching helps employees and leaders to develop skills, reach work-related goals, and improve performance (Grant, 2016). It is effective, in part, because coaches gain an in-depth understanding of an employee's individualized experience as a result of both their self and their work context (Ladegard, 2011). Coaching has also been found to reduce stress, even months after the coaching sessions have been completed (Ladegard, 2011).

SOLUTION-FOCUSED COGNITIVE BEHAVIOURAL COACHING

Based on current research, solution-focused cognitive behavioural (SFCB) coaching has especially promising results for promoting positive work behaviours (Grant, 2017). Some of the main characteristics of SFCB Coaching are:

It is goal-focused and solution-focused.

According to Grant (2017), talking about a goal leads to goal commitment. Goal commitment triggers a sequence of events for effective problem-solving: (1) it results in actual planning of how to achieve your goal (referred to as goal striving, Latham & Locke, 1991) and (2) brainstorming various ways to achieve your goals and developing new schemas to solve problems (referred to as pathways thinking, Locke & Latham, 1996).

The coach helps employees outline the steps needed to achieve their goals and checks in to make sure the employee is managing and planning their actions. The coach identifies progress toward goals and assists employees with their action plans.

Re-evaluating progress encourages self-reflection, which increases self-regulation and decreases stress and anxiety. People stop and think about what they are doing, i.e. they reflect on what steps they are taking to solve the problem. Employees are then able to apply carry forward skills they've learned from solving this problem to the next.

The coach focuses on understanding the person's strengths and instilling a sense of confidence so that employees develop worth, efficacy, and motivation.

Attending to an employee's personal strengths is important because it increases well-being, motivation, and cognitive flexibility (Grant, 2017), all of which lead to more productivity. It also instills confidence and encourages positive behavior to be repeated.

With some oversight from the coach, employees should be able to self-regulate themselves.

Having a coach preserve an employee's autonomy is pivotal. Despite being there to guide the employee, the coach still allows the employee to regulate themselves. Autonomy is key for motivation, and in turn, reaching goals.

BECOMING A SUCCESSFUL COACH

Below are five steps based on Grant and Hartley's (2013) recommendations to become a successful coach:

- **Reflect on your listening skills** – Are you an empathetic listener? Do you make time to listen?
- **Prioritize coaching** – Be mindful of coaching opportunities, even on busy days!
- **Revise goals when needed** – Make specific goals with employees, however, recognize that you may need to change them based on situations or context.
- **Coach yourself** – Use self-talk or reflection to give yourself encouragement and check-in.
- **Take the time to build a rapport with employees** – Your relationship with employees is vital to the effectiveness of coaching.

ACHIEVERS AND COACHING

The Achievers Engagement Science Model (AESM) builds on many of the same principles of SCFB coaching. Our AESM pillars: Engagement is Fluid, Personal, and Requires Action (see [here](#) for detailed explanation of our model) all fit into the framework of SCFB coaching and employee development.

- **Development is fluid:** Coaches need to check in with employees and adapt to the changing organizational environment and employee needs. Action plans or goals may need to be revised.
- **Development is personal:** The needs of one employee may differ from another employee; i.e. what works for one employee may not work for another. It is important to identify individual employee strengths and work with those strengths.
- **Development requires action:** Coaching should be goal-oriented and solution focused.

CONCLUSION

Coaching is an effective tool to help employees develop, goal-set, and decrease their stress. SFCB coaching – which is characterized by setting goals, highlighting employee strength, encouraging autonomy, and re-evaluating progress – impacts employee development and performance. To become a successful coach, keep the attributes of SFCB in mind, while also remembering to reflect on your listening skills, prioritize coaching, coaching yourself, and building rapport with your employees.

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