

coaching models

THE GROW MODEL

The first and most basic model, which both coaches and mentors use, is called the GROW model. It is usually taught to new coaches and to managers who want to develop coaching skills. It was developed by Whitmore (2004), and is described in various textbooks (e.g. Whitmore, 2004, Downey, 2003, Hawkins, 2006).

Its strength lies in enabling the coach to structure the conversation and reach a meaningful result. Downey (2003) describes how, in the early days of coaching, coaches worked intuitively. Over time it became apparent that in the more successful sessions there was a certain sequence of key stages. This pattern became the GROW model.

Table 9 shows Downey’s (2003) pictorial representation of the model. The arrows reflect the fact that in reality, conversations are not always linear, so people have to shuffle between stages.

Table 9 The GROW Model

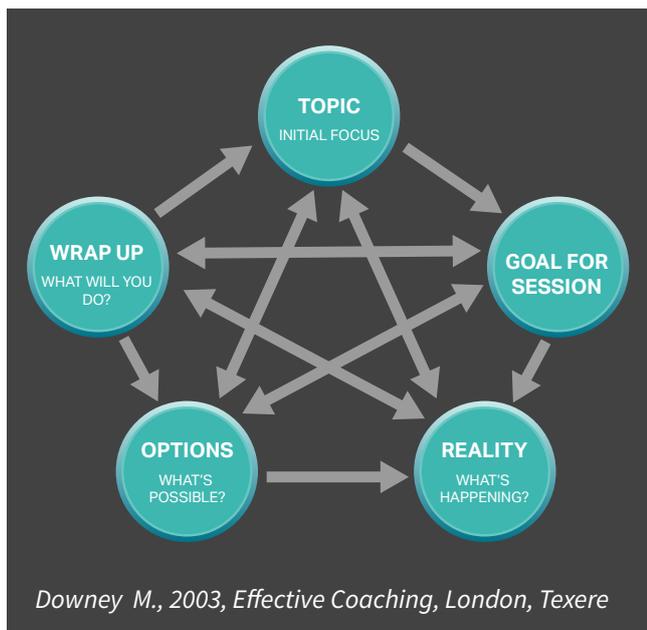


Table 10 shows the sorts of questions you can expect to be asked at the different stages of the GROW model.

Table 10 Typical Questions at different stages in the GROW model

STAGE	TYPICAL QUESTIONS
GOAL	What do you want to talk about? What would you like to get out of this session?
REALITY	What’s actually happening? How do you know that? What are you most concerned about? Who else is affected by this? What have you tried so far?
OPTIONS	What can you do differently? How might you do that? What else could you do? Which would give you the best result? Who could help you?
WRAP UP - WILL	What are you going to do? Anything else? When will you do this? What might stop you? How will you manage that? Who needs to know? How will you know when you’ve succeeded?

The GROW model gives the coach a process with which to structure a coaching session. Other coaches have subsequently developed variants on this theme (eg Flaherty (1999), O’Neill (2000), Hawkins (2006)).

The following models are not process models. Coaches work in many different ways. These models introduce you to various orientations or schools of coaching, and

some of the assumptions and thinking underlying the way coaches work. However, it should be born in mind that many coaches work in an eclectic, integrated or pick and mix way, using different models as appropriate in terms of the client's issue and the coach's skill set.

PSYCHOLOGICAL MODELS

We saw earlier that psychology has been one of the major influences on coaching. Lee (2003) was among the first coaches to write about the important contribution psychology could make to enabling people to change. His view was that coaches (and this applies to mentors too) who relied solely on their business experience were ill equipped to enable people to change:

“Resistance to change is part and parcel of being human, and if coaching is to be successful, it must engage with the unconscious resistance that managers have to change, as well as their conscious intentions and determination. It needs to evoke a depth of personal understanding that enables them to see how their habitual styles and preferences have developed, and to use this awareness as a platform for defining and realising new possibilities (p1).”

Lee argued that it was only by engaging managers in the relationship between their individual drives and business goals, their blind spots and their development needs, that coaching could leverage the passion and conviction that underpin excellence in leadership. In his book, *Leadership Coaching*, (2003), he describes models he has developed which coaches can use to help coachees become authentic leaders.

Lee's approach, with its recognition of the importance of the unconscious, fits within the psychodynamic perspective. A coach with a psychodynamic orientation is comfortable in facilitating their coachees' self-awareness, helping them to understand more about how what they think, feel and react, so that they can exercise conscious choices and make decisions which align with their values and the interests of their organisation (Peltier 2010). This may include identifying the ways coachees distort or deny reality to avoid being too hurt or threatened – in other words, identifying the defence

mechanisms they use. Familiar examples include repression, denial and projection, and can be seen at large in organisations. For instance, as employees are promoted, they have to learn new skills and operate at a different level. If managers find this daunting, they are often tempted to wobble back to their previous level of competency in order to compensate. They over strive in certain areas they are already good at in order to manage a perceived weakness. This defence mechanism is called compensation. Recognising what is going on enables the coachee to make a conscious decision about how to behave.

Peltier (2010) suggests ways a psychodynamic coach can be useful:

- when you want to develop political or interpersonal skills
- to help you understand other people's behaviour
- to deal with senior managers
- to lead and manage team members
- to deal with difficult people
- when you want to learn more about your strengths and weaknesses
- when you want to change self-defeating behaviour

If you want to learn more about psychodynamic coaching, Sandler's (2011) book, *Executive Coaching: A Psychodynamic Approach*, gives a good analysis of how it works in practice.

COGNITIVE PSYCHOLOGY

Cognitive therapy has been used widely and successfully in the NHS. The cognitive approach focuses on how people think, and the way bad thinking can create negative emotions. It is based on the belief that thoughts cause feelings. The core concept is that people can learn to notice and change their specific thoughts, and by doing so, change how they feel (Peltier 2010). Unlike psychodynamic theories, its focus is on conscious thoughts, rather than unconscious processes.

Cognitive work starts with an assessment of feelings. The coach uses these feelings to get through to the thoughts or thinking patterns that caused them. Cognitive coaches can help clients recognise how they distort their thinking, perhaps by catastrophizing (expecting disaster), or polarising (things are either black or white, with no grey area). This method can get fast results, as

long as the coachee is able to describe what their inner voice is telling them, and the coach is able to reinforce changes in thinking and behaviour.

The cognitive perspective is particularly useful for helping coachees manage stress. Palmer and Cooper's book, *How to Deal with Stress*, (2010) offers a clear and simple exposition of the steps coaches can take when working with clients who are stressed, or who want to develop resilience or assertiveness.

NEURO-LINGUISTIC PROGRAMMING

Neuro-linguistic programming (NLP) offers another popular coaching approach. Sue Knight, a leading figure in NLP, defines NLP as "the study of what works in thinking, language and behaviour. It is a way of coaching and reproducing excellence that enables you to consistently achieve the results that you want both for yourself, for your business and for your life" (2004). Like the cognitive approach, NLP makes clients aware of the patterns they use in the way they think, speak and behave, and, importantly, the patterns which represent excellence in performance. NLP is a process of modelling excellence. When you know how someone else manages a situation extremely well, you have the key to reproducing that experience yourself. Deploying NLP techniques can help people alter their response patterns to a range of events or people.

According to Knight (2004), NLP accelerates your ability to learn, so that you not only manage change, but initiate and embrace it. NLP enables you to let go of old, traditional patterns and habits that are holding you back, "and release the hidden talents that are appropriate to today and the future" (Knight 2004). This would seemingly have relevance for health and social care workers who are currently undergoing change. More information can be found at www.sueknight.co.uk.

APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY

Developed by David Cooperrider in America in 1980, Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is different from many coaching models in that it is not a problem-solving, deficit model. Instead, it offers a positive, strengths-based approach to organisational development and change management and looks for what works (Renton, 2009, Hammond 1998). AI thus offers an anti-dote to the blame culture.

COOPERRIDER (2005) DEFINES AI AS FOLLOWS:

Appreciative Inquiry is the co-operative search for the best in people, their organisations, and the world around them. It involves systematic discovery of what gives a system 'life' when it is most effective and capable in economic, ecological, and human terms... AI involves the art and practice of asking unconditionally positive questions that strengthen a system's capacity to apprehend, anticipate, and heighten positive potential.

Two key underlying assumptions are that:

- all people and organisations have many untapped and rich past, present and future capacities, which they can access to achieve desired change
- individuals respond more favourably to positive affirmations of their skills and qualities than to criticism about perceived inadequacies

Cooperrider's work has found much favour with coaches. If your coach uses an AI model, you would typically expect them to praise and affirm your abilities and gently challenge you, rather than directly confronting you, to find your own solutions to your problems (Renton 2009).

SYSTEMIC COACHING

Systems thinking and systemic coaching have their origins in family therapy and organisational systems. Systemic coaching is a solutions-focused approach.

The idea is that individual parts of the system (the coachee) can only be understood in the context of the whole system (the organisation) (Peltier, 2010). So the dynamics that surface in organisations and present themselves as difficult behaviours, dysfunctional teams, 'stuckness' or conflict are seen as an expression of something in the system. Behaviour is controlled by the system, and behaviour changes the system. The systems approach offers an opportunity to illuminate, clarify and resolve organisational dynamics (Whittington, 2012).

Systems thinking differs from older coaching models in so far as

- it places the emphasis on the context (or system) in which the coachee operates, rather than on the person. When an individual behaves in a certain way, it is understood in the context of the organisational dynamics, rather than a result of his or her characteristics. Behaviour is seen as a response to the demands of the system
- it is therefore a circular, rather than a cause and effect, model
- it does not focus on, or require, insight. Time is not spent working out how a problem came about, or what it means. Instead, the focus is on making an intervention in a way that produces change (Peltier, 2010)

Systemic coaching considers personal, leadership, team or whole organisational issues in the context of the system in which they belong. In organisations, employees sometimes take on roles of which they are only vaguely aware. A systems approach can help them clarify role-related behaviour and its meaning and function in the organisational system (Peltier 2010). It is a useful approach for individuals who are discouraged or anxious about the future. But for it to be effective, coachees have to be prepared to consider their own share in the problem (De Haan, 2008).

Whittington has extended systemic coaching into working with constellations (2012), where clients identify their own systems, sometimes by physically embodying them in the room. This is reminiscent of sculpting, a method used in family therapy and social work. (Waldron-Skinner (1976) describes sculpting in the context of systems theory, in her book, *Family Therapy*.) The bibliography at the end of this paper contains some on-line resources and further reading about this approach.

In addition to using the sort of models just described, coaches and mentors need to be sensitive to their clients, tailoring their approach to their needs and feelings throughout the session. This means coaches should take into account the extent of direction they give, the degree of challenge they offer, and how the individual is reacting to the impact of change (Foster-Turner (2006).

De Haan (2008) suggests that coaches have two main choices at any time during a session. Like Foster-Turner, he sees the first as being about the nature of the direction they give: should they explore their coachees' thoughts, or guide them by commenting upon them and making suggestions? In other words, how directive should they be?

Secondly, coaches can choose whether to support or confront and challenge. They can decide, at any given moment, whether to build on and reinforce the coachee's perceived strengths, or whether to bring up and help the coachee overcome perceived weaknesses. De Haan presents these choices in pictorial form, and usefully relates them to some of the coaching models discussed earlier.