

Reflection on coaching session



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Objective:

To reflect on my ability to apply the principles and techniques learned during the first two modules to deliver effective outcomes for my clients with an emphasis on assessing:

- My application of the WEGROW model;
- My ability as a coach to use the WEGROW model flexibly as the situation demands

The assignment will outline my experience of using the WEGROW model with an emphasis on my experience with my first client and the lessons learned from that experience. I will also outline how I applied those lessons with the second client and what I did to further explore the issues and improve my coaching practice.

Background Context:

In mid December 2018 I conducted two coaching sessions of approximately 2 hours duration each with two clients, referred to as ' Client A' and ' Client B' hereafter. These were the first formal coaching sessions that I have conducted since commencing study for my Diploma with the IMI. Both clients are work colleagues that I have known for 12 years and 10 years respectively. Both work in different functions and departments to me and each other.

Client A had asked me at the end of October 2018 if I would agree to mentor them. I had also supported Client B previously with two mentoring sessions in early 2018, arranged at their request. I decided to invite both Clients to

partake in coaching sessions with me in December as a way of engaging with the issues that Client A had requested mentoring support for and of re-engaging with the Client B on the issues we had previously explored.

Preparing to Coach - Engaging and Checking the Chemistry

As both clients were known to me for some time, we knew that we had good chemistry and high levels of trust between us. I was concerned, however, that I was at risk of forcing the adoption of a coaching solution to what might be better served through mentoring.

I felt this because the coaching sessions were arranged at my request to help me meet the academic requirements of the programme and to enable me to put into practice the theories and skills that I had acquired through the formal lectures and the supervised coaching practice sessions. While the coaching sessions were a learning and development experience for myself as a novice coach, their primary purpose, in common with all coaching sessions, was to facilitate the clients' 'self-directed learning, personal growth and improved performance' (Bresser & Wilson 2016, p12). If the clients were agreeing to be coached by me out of personal loyalty then I felt that I would not be honouring the clients or the process.

To address this, I met and discussed the situation with both clients in advance of the sessions themselves. We agreed that I would be supporting them as an Executive / Organisational coach as defined by Association for Coaching which places the personal learning and growth in the context of achieving '... improved business performance and operational effectiveness' (Association for Coaching Website; 3 Jan 2019).

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Following the completion of the logistical arrangements – selecting a suitable venue; a suitable time when we would not be interrupted, etc., my next task was to plan the sessions themselves.

Planning the Coaching Sessions

I decided that I would use the WEGROW model to structure the coaching session itself. This is the model that I was most familiar with through our practice sessions and it is a model that has been used widely with 50% of Coaching Psychologists using the GROW or RE-GROW variant of the model as found in a 2008 – 2009 survey by Palmer & Whybrow as referenced by Anthony M Grant (Grant, A. M, 2011, p 119).

The model is a relatively simple one to use and one of the founders of the GROW model Graham Alexander argues that its use is quite intuitive, since it assumes that the Client is functional rather than dysfunctional. (Graham, A, 2016, p. 103) He also argues that it is ideally suited for use in the workplace in an Organisational Coaching context. This is the context in which I was about to coach both my clients. Anthony M. Grant also argues that for Solution-Focused coaching the GROW model provides a suitable – structure to help move the client towards action planning to meet their goals. (Grant, A. M, 2016, p. 126). This aligned to the outcomes expressed by both clients.

Conducting the Coaching Sessions

During our initial ‘ Contract / Chemistry Meeting’ with Client A, I had received an outline of the issues they wished to explore at work. The topic / area for discussion flagged by the client broadly related to a new area of

responsibility at work and issues around capability, capacity for themselves and behavioural / communication issues within their team.

Using the Logical Levels model as developed by Robert Dilts within the field of NLP I identified that this indicated discussion of issues at the lower levels of the model. I was aware that issues at this level are best addressed by training, performance management or mentoring interventions. Therefore I needed to be prepared to coach across multiple levels of the model and ‘ to be flexible enough to honour and work at any level’ (McDermott, I, 2016, p. 150).

When I met Client A we quickly fell into an easy, free flowing general conversation and established an easy rapport in preparation for the session ahead. Because the earlier pre-session meeting I quickly moved to contracting and asked the client to reaffirm that they were happy to proceed with a coaching approach which they did. Having completed the more procedural elements of contracting around confidentiality; number and duration of sessions etc. I quickly moved on to defining the topic for discussion and goal setting.

Following a series of open questions to stimulate the client’s thought processes they started to describe the work-related challenges that they were experiencing. This was broadly consistent with the issues discussed as part of our initial chemistry meeting. As we explored what outcomes the client was looking to achieve they were struggling to describe the outcome other than it being ‘ better than it is now’. My sense was that they had a lot more to say. I recognised that I needed to get the client to describe a future

outcome that they could move towards rather than away from but I was concerned that I wasn't asking the questions in the correct manner. I decided to ask the client ' To describe what would success would look like; feel like or sound like?'

Asking for a feeling response triggered a very different reaction. The client paused and became quite emotional. They became teary eyed and stated that they'd ' feel successful'. I asked them to describe what being successful actually felt like to them. Quickly the client became upset and outlined that they were concerned that they weren't succeeding at work or in life; that they were experiencing a complete lack of confidence and profound feelings of loneliness. We had a very sudden and unexpected shift to highly personal and emotional issues.

Personally, I found the situation disconcerting and I was worried that I may not be able to support the Client deal with the issues that had just surfaced. I hadn't anticipated the personal issues and I had moved through the contracting phase without agreeing as to how we would handle personal issues. I sensed some hesitation on behalf of the client.

I decided to do three things to ensure that I continued to play the role of the coach

- First thing was to ensure that I demonstrated my maximum presence to the client so that they knew that they were being listened to and it was ok to proceed.

- Secondly I needed to focus on continuing to own the process by sticking to the WEGROW model and by continuing to ask open and clarifying questions.
- Thirdly, to allow the client to own the content and to resist any inclination to judge, collude or to take ownership for the issue. (Bresser & Wilson 2016, p19). I found this very difficult.

The remainder of the coaching session was an open exploration of the client's issues and the emotions associated with and generated by those issues. In terms of the session structure we moved back to the goal setting element and oscillated between goal setting and exploring the current reality.

By the end of the session which lasted over two hours we acknowledged that we hadn't reached a point whereby the client was ready to explore options. The breadth and depth of emotions being discussed merited more time to explore them. There were a couple of occasions during the session when I stepped out of my strict coaching role and offered my perspective on the situation. In truth, on at least one occasion, it was due to me sympathising with the client's emotion and was an error on my part. On another occasion I felt that their inner critic was unduly harsh triggering a crisis of confidence which hindered their ability to recognise and acknowledge success and I needed them to reframe the issue.

In our immediate review of the session the Client and I came to the following conclusions:

- Overall the client viewed the session as a success albeit it did not achieve the outcomes we would have wished for at the start.
- Not discussing how we would deal with personal issues as part of the contracting phase was a mistake on my part and the client revealed that they were unsure if it was ok to persist with the discussion of the personal issues at first.
- Once I continued to demonstrate that I was listening and continued to ask open questions the client felt it was ok to proceed and to explore the topic further.
- The client reflected that they felt listened to and safe to explore what was for them a deeply personal and emotional topic that they had been struggling with. They thanked me for this.
- The client found the session cathartic which, in and of it-self, was probably an essential first step towards allowing time and space for reflection and Goal setting to commence.
- In turn I revealed that during the session, the emergence of the issue in such a wave of emotion had made me feel somewhat uncomfortable and uncertain, that I had the skills and techniques to support them correctly.
- I felt conflicted with letting the client dictate the agenda and unsure how to move them through the structure of the session to explore options and determine courses of actions. I was unsure where this was leading and unsure that I was guiding the client correctly. I was feeling the need to move them to agree actions to address the issues raised.
- We agreed that:

- when I stuck to the coaching approach of asking open questions to stimulate the client's thinking and allowed the time and space for that thinking to evolve and emerge the client achieved their best results.
- we needed to schedule a follow up coaching session to allow the client to continue their exploration of the issues raised. This has been scheduled.
- the client had a specific mentoring support need to address work-related issues around their new responsibilities and they wanted my input. This was prioritised as it was causing the client stress due to capacity challenges and sapping their confidence. The session has already taken place and proved very successful with a second session planned for 11th Jan where the client will present their action plan for discussion.

Following the session I took the opportunity to reflect on the lessons learned and to consider what I would do differently with Client B who was scheduled for the following day. While I was not 100% satisfied with the outcomes from the first session I decided that I needed to persist with the WEGROW model as I do not have the coaching repertoire to try something else but that I needed more robust upfront contracting to build a successful coaching session.

My experience with Client B was very positive. We spent the first 40 minutes teasing out what they wanted to achieve from the overall relationship; from this specific session and how we wanted to work with each other. We discussed personal and emotional issues and I made sure that the client

know that I was happy to discuss them should they choose to do so. The client was very clear that they wanted a coaching approach and that they intended to source mentoring support elsewhere. The topic was very business improvement focused and we stayed very much on theme.

By the end of the first session we had made excellent progress. We defined the topic; set and achieved realistic outcomes for the first session and agreed what we wanted to achieve over the next two sessions and set our next meeting date for mid-January. We explored options and agreed a course of action following session one. Overall, the session very much adhered to the WEGROW model.

Further reflections, reading and conclusions:

Having completed both sessions, I undertook some additional reading to understand others' views of the GROW model, how that compares to my experience of using it and how can I apply insights gained to improve my coaching practice.

Stefan Cantore and Jonathan Passmore argue that the GROW model in its earliest and simplest form has an inherent weakness due its inflexibility and that it fails to recognise the impacts on emotions and cognition on behaviour and performance. They also point out the goal setting approaches maybe suitable in a business or sporting context but that they have limitations in career or life coaching. (Cantore, S and Passmore, J, 2012, pp. 21-22). They go on to suggest that the use of cognitive behavioural, transpersonal or existential approaches may be appropriate in certain circumstances.

Grant & Hartley also suggest that one of the keys to success in embedding coaching skills in the workplace is to design a 'solution-focused cognitive-behavioural' framework. (Grant A. M., Hartley, M, 2013 p. 104). So there is an argument that coaches need to be able to apply a range of different models in different circumstances.

Whilst challenging that the simplicity of the GROW model can make it less flexible, Cantore and Passmore also see this simplicity as one of its greatest strengths because it makes it easy to use. (Cantore, S and Passmore, J, 2012, p. 21). Grant, argues that the simplicity of the model makes it easy to understand and apply and in fact, its simplicity makes it a highly flexible model, capable of responding in differing circumstances. (Grant, A. M, 2011, p 121).

Having experienced the model in two very different coaching sessions I agree with the view put forward by Grant that the GROW model is a highly flexible one that can adapt to the particular session. If treated as a non-linear session structure and one where you can revisit and re-explore the goals or current reality as often as required then the model becomes a guide rather than a rigid process to be followed. Grant points out that 'coaches need to work with an emergent and iterative process.....' and that for novice coaches this can cause 'anxiety and frustration' and cause novice coaches to cling on 'too tightly to the model'. (Grant, A. M, 2011, p 122 - 123). This describes exactly the anxiety I experienced in the first coaching session borne out of my concern that I would not be able to move the client along the model structure which I was clinging to as an anchor.

In conclusion, I now recognise that I have taken the first significant step in the journey of self-discovery on the road to developing my coaching practice. The WEGROW model offers an excellent structural guide for my coaching sessions within which I can focus on supporting the client and improving my attentive presence and open questioning to aid self-discovery. Grant and Hartley point out that it takes three to six months to get really comfortable with using coaching skills. (Grant A. M., Hartley, M, 2013 p. 102).

In time there will be opportunities to explore other models and techniques such as cognitive behavioural coaching, NLP coaching, etc., which will expand my understanding and offer additional ways to help clients reflect and unlock insights. For now, I intend focusing on getting more familiar with using WEGROW as a guide whilst improving my listening and questioning skills. The journey has just begun.

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