

Coaching the Whole Person*
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Coaching is a new variation of systematically influencing people that appears (to me) to repeat the older wars of consulting versus counseling versus psychotherapy as it tries to differentiate itself as a profession. It is a repeat because the laws that govern learning aren't being reinvented, but poured into new vessels. Moreover, "curative factors" and techniques (e.g., general therapeutic factors – empathy, genuineness and caring) – modeling, reinforcement, cognitive reconstruction, behavior rehearsal, shaping, practice and goal setting also appear in this "new" model, as well as in older ones. When one considers that current coaching models appear based in learnings derived from psychological principles, an argument may certainly be made that some psychological research does have a definite place in coaching. There's no need for new models to force us to throw out the proverbial baby with the bath water.

In our own 8-Factor Model of Personal Effectiveness we look at the eight variables that the last 50+ years of psychological-based research indicate are significant aspects of effectiveness – Skills, Abilities, Interests, Personal Style, Family of Origin, Values, Goals and Career Development Stage. A Coach should have as his/her conceptual framework not one, but all eight factors as a way of thinking and acting in relation to a client as a *Whole Person*.

Factor Life-Span Career Development

Career Development is a multi-dimensional concept. We draw from over 60 years of research conducted by D. Super's and others in viewing a career as a series of predictable stages with cycling and recycling of developmental tasks through the lifespan. Careers become a way for individuals to implement their self-concepts as a means of self-expression. One can then use this model to understand an individual's behavior in their specific life context.

Case Example

John, a 42-year-old successful executive chose to leave his company after a recent merger. He wanted to try something new and he now had the resources to do just that. At this point, his coach laid out some of the predictable tasks and stages that lay ahead for him. First, he needed to recycle through Super's stage of Exploration by looking at choices and narrowing them down, he would also then go through the tasks of Crystallization (formulating a general vocational goal); Specification (a period of moving from tentative to specific); Implementation (developing, if necessary, the new skills); and Stabilization (experience within the new preferred careers as an expression of its appropriateness). After a year in his new career, John has moved into the Stabilization developmental task and has decided that his new job does not match his view of himself. He starts the stage over again. Five years later he describes himself excited by his new

position and well into the stage of Maintenance and the final development task of Consolidation (establishment in a career by advancement, status and seniority.) Career tasks and stages are predictable stages we all encounter as we develop.

Factor: Abilities

Abilities are your natural strengths and are often confused with “skills,” but are quite different. Our abilities dictate how we solve problems and how we learn new things. They are generally the types of things we can do without consciously thinking about them. In fact, one could argue abilities are those behaviors we perform automatically. Abilities are also those parts of us that are relatively unchanging over a lifetime.

Case Example: Martha F. discovered that she had two abilities that made quite a difference in the workplace. Martha could easily generate “out of the box” solutions, as well as many ideas for selling those solutions in a short period of time. She intuitively felt that this was a strength, but had no objective way to understand this ability or really see it as a strength relative to her peers. Martha got some coaching on how to begin the process of “programming or psych-seeding” her boss so he would think of her as someone who could generate many ideas in a short period of time. At a meeting several months later, Martha’s boss used that exact phrase to describe her and now assigns her to projects that require that ability. A win-win situation for Martha and her organization, as satisfaction lies in using what you have.

Factor: Skills

Skills are the “how-to’s of a role” – what you have learned and what can be transferred. Organizations have relied on skills assessments as part of the employee selection process for a long time. Because we perform skills every day, it’s difficult for us to recognize the number of skills we possess. We cannot visualize our skills as part of our own success stories. It’s important to remember that skills can be connected to innate abilities as compensators or extenders of innate talents.

Coaching Case Example: Sam was asked to write down a “success story,” which would illustrate that he was at his best when leading others. After writing the story down, Sam was told to deconstruct the event by pulling out the skills he used for success. He wasn’t surprised to see that it wasn’t by sheer chance that in leading a soccer team to a national ranking he performed his career best, but what did surprise him was the skills used – teaching, foresight, analyzing patterns and communicating. Interestingly, his skills also reflected his natural abilities and also combined with his passion for excellence. This realization of skills, abilities and passions gave Sam a solid foundation on which to build his current, team leadership plan – and he could now do this in a conscious manner.

Factor: Interest, Passions and Fascinations

Many advocate following Joseph Campbell’s dictum to “follow your bliss” to love what you do. That makes sense for many of us (and those we coach,) but it isn’t that easy because life and responsibilities get in the way! Some advanced planning can help us to better navigate our future career moves. Interests are what we are passionate about and

when you tap into them your energy, and enthusiasm goes up. One doesn't have to relegate Interests to that box in your life of "not work". Interest inventories pioneered by Strong in the early '40's and further developed through John Holland's work over the past 30+ years clearly illustrates that our interests can reflect combinations of personality patterns, which in turn lead us to seek out compatible work environments.

Case Example:

Elaine was unhappy with her career. Although she made very good money, she longed for her time away from work to cultivate her fascination with the outdoors. Her daily drive to the office was more exciting to her than what she did! As she explored her fascinations with the outdoors, she also started to think about how she could incorporate her passion into her job. She struggled under her family's dictum (see Family of Origin below) that "work was work and who said you were to enjoy it!". (And, no, she didn't leave her job right away and go become an Outward Bound Instructor, but she started to bring more of the outdoors into her office by adding posters, rocks, and plants.) By the way, in the long run she did leave her job after creating a 2-year plan that brought more of her passions to her new position.

Factor: Personal Style

There is little question that personality factors impact who we are and how we feel. Personality is the filter we use to look at the world influenced by heredity, family, peers, religion, and culture. There is considerable support for instruments like the MBTI, FIRO-B, and many other self-report measures tapping into the sum of the reality that we call Personal Style. Among the most rigorous scientifically is the NEO-PI of the Five Factor Model. Unfortunately, time and time again I hear of how these instruments are used in isolation and trainers engage in the faulty thinking that *Personality rather than one factor is the whole story rather than 1/8 of the story!* Along with the aforementioned tools, we usually incorporate a work sample measure we call "Time Frame," as an element of one's personal style. The assumption is often made that everyone's time frame orientation (or their preference for planning ahead and achieving results) is the same. In fact, individuals have very different time frame preferences. Some are able to plan far into the future and can visualize the impact of today's actions on events 7-10 years down the road. Others enjoy immediate results and are more comfortable planning for the short-term world of six months from now.

Data from various sources suggest that top executive and military leaders possess a 5- 10-year time frame orientation. My own experience supports this assertion. I have found through my work with researchers in pharmaceutical labs and labor/contract negotiators that these professions also display longer time frame orientations.

Case Example: After one year as a manager, a position he had sought and attained, Jim found his work in the energy plant very stressful. He felt like he was constantly putting out fires and working to get derailed projects back on track. Rarely did he have time to think through the issues and then sell plans to the company for longer-term changes that would likely alter the climate of constant crises. This is the kind of stress that people

with Long Time Frame caught in a Low Time Frame roles experience. Jim was very good at his job, but the constant need for immediate crisis problem-solving was draining for a person who could see the benefit of better planning by using his personal style of 7-10-year time frame. Over a 6-month period Jim worked to shift his daily work roles by as little as 5-10%. He purposefully sought out roles consistent with using more of his Time Frame ability. For instance, he worked on becoming a member of the long term planning team that looked at and assessed future energy business opportunities. As he entered roles that captured this aspect of his personal style his satisfaction increased.

Factor: Family of Origin

Family of Origin is also a significant factor. This is not about the search for pathology that might occur in traditional psychotherapy, but a search for generational work patterns and roles. While coaching clients, family messages about the nature of work come out loud and clear. The power of Family of Origin matters, as it is our family that gives us the primary filter (at a very early age) for looking at the world of work. It is only as we move into our 20's and 30's (and for some 40's and 50's) that we can finally begin to sift through and differentiate our own perspective from that of our family. In business settings it's common to find that there is an effort on all our parts to recreate in our work family the patterns (good and bad) we learned to traverse the world in our early formative years.

Case Example

By the time he was in his mid-40's, Peter was quite successful in his work, but felt that he was somehow miscast – prompting him to change jobs and fields every several years. As he explored the Family of Origin factor, the insight he achieved devastated his world view – he was living out the dreams that his father had for him! Now that doesn't sound like a shocker to many of us, but for someone who has never looked at himself (as is often the case with the high-achieving professional) his world was rocked! Initially he became depressed about his past choices until he realized that he now had an opportunity to figure his career anew. Over a period of 3 weeks he worked to create a plan to move in new directions. As it turned out, his “new direction” was really based in an earlier interest that had been squelched by his father as being unrealistic.

Factor: Values

Acting as our guides, values *push* us from the past (family of origin) and *pull* us into the future. Since the mid-sixties humanistic psychology has urged upon the field the study of values. It is our values that dictate what we put our time and energy into, and what we attach importance to. Values can be so significant that they may become how you are known to others, or may become, following Seligman, our Signature Strengths.

Case Example

As a senior auditor, Jim was recently promoted to team leader. While he felt he deserved the position, he didn't see himself possessing many of the traits he saw in other admired leaders – and he didn't. After exploring the issue further and observing Jim with his team, it became obvious that his strong values guided his behavior and communicated to others his deep respect for them as people and a willingness to stay open to hear dissenting

views before arriving at a decision. These values became the basis for how Jim was known and helped him to see his leader role in a very different light, i.e., based in his signature strengths

Factor: Goals

Your goals, whether they be short-term or long-term, conscious or unconscious, yours or someone else's, pull your behavior into the future and represent what you are trying to accomplish. Goals are really not separate from the other factors, but are ways to express how you put together your values, personal style, etc. Two conclusions from research are: 1) Specific goals lead to higher performance and 2) Performance generally increases in direct proportion to goal difficulty. Goal setting is the way to plan how.

Case Example

In the above examples of the Factors I have usually said that a "plan" was established by the individual. That plan usually consists of a series of self-established goals drawn from the *integration* of the 8 factors with the main goal of maximizing individual effectiveness, productivity and satisfaction in their career or in the balancing of work and family.

Integration and Conclusion

No one factor is **the** truth and in our rush for quick fixes coaches may fall victim to that easy ideology. The 8-factor attempts to capture more of the complexity of what people and effectiveness really are. Depending on the age and circumstance of the individual, some of the 8 factors will play a larger role than others, while at other times other factors move into the light and others form a background. Complex, yes, but the only danger is in not knowing how the eight factors influence who we and our clients are!