

RECIPE4change - a coaching psychology guide for making lasting and rewarding changes

Abstract

RECIPE4change is a memorable coaching psychology guide designed to stimulate and support people making lasting and rewarding changes. It prompts the use of a range of thinking styles (Sternberg 1997), emotional management and sustained activity in service of chosen goals. It is informed and inspired by current coaching psychology research and could be used as a meta model in conjunction with other psychological approaches. Throughout this article links will be made with Transactional Analysis concepts in order to provoke comparative reflection.

Introduction

The term coaching was initially borrowed from the world of sport and is increasingly used to refer to guidance in the achievement of goals in life and work. As such, it often denotes an emphasis on performance in contrast to a healing or reparative focus typical of psychotherapy and counselling. However, even the world of work has a track record of emphasising that which needs to be fixed. Brook (2006) believes that the application of the competence paradigm to organisational roles over the last three decades has perpetuated a remedial emphasis on training and development. He suggests, that competence frameworks have mostly been used to direct employees' development (including any coaching) towards identifying what's missing and then plugging the gaps.

This remedial emphasis is fundamentally challenged by the proposition that "You will grow the most in your areas of greatest strength" (Buckingham 2007 p.54). This assertion is based on extensive research by the Gallup organisation which has created a strengths-based approach to developing organisations and their employees. This was in turn stimulated by the development of the positive psychology movement which has a broader interest in health, strengths, and happiness (Seligman 2003).

Kauffman (2006) reviewed several research studies which show that high performance teams communicate with each other at an optimal ratio of about 3 positive expressions to 1 negative expression. It is clear that while grounded criticism is an important aspect of dynamic teamwork perhaps we should not give this more than a quarter of our energy or attention.

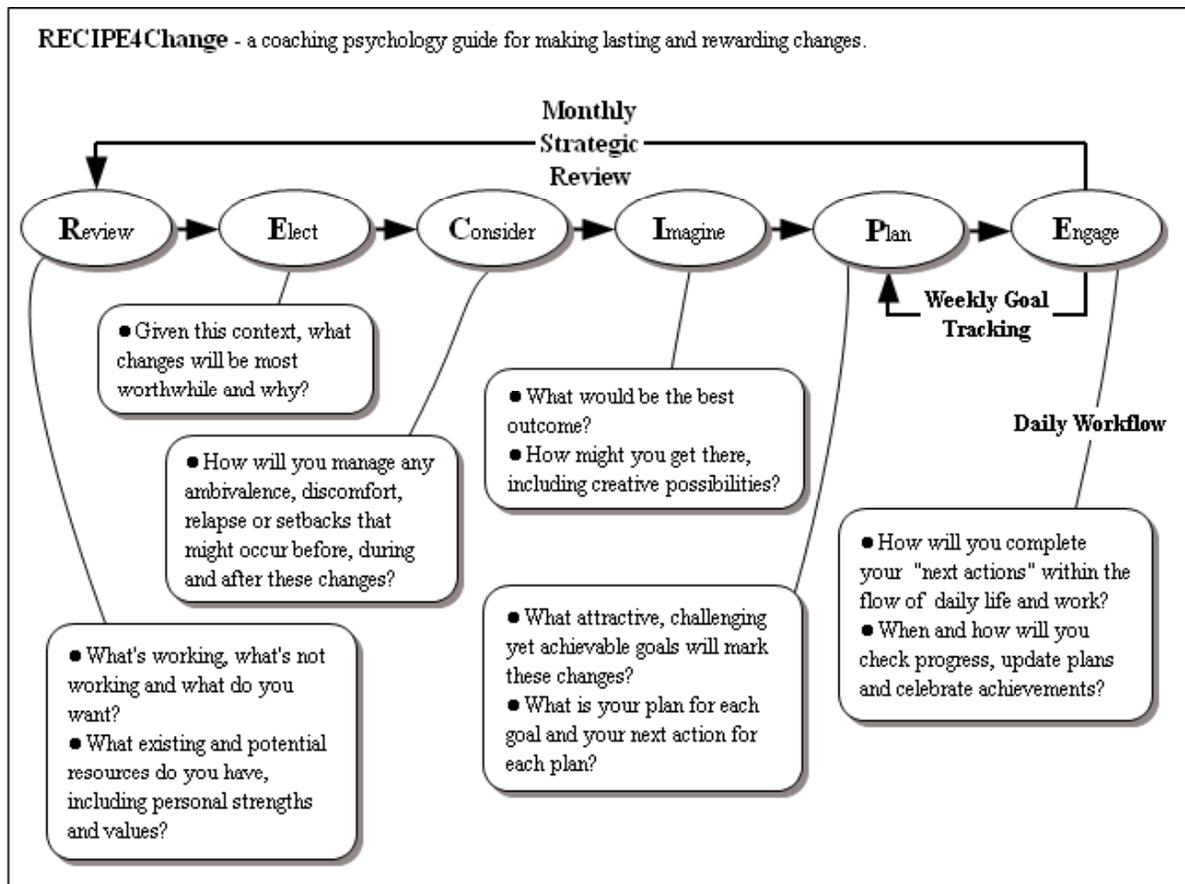
In health promotion, Antonovsky (1979; 1987) provoked a paradigm shift by proposing that studying what is diseased doesn't necessarily help us understand what is healthy because they are actually different subjects and not simply polarities on the same continuum of one subject. This means that designing specific public health interventions to increase health may require different research, theory and strategic thinking than designing interventions to reduce illness.

In Co-creative TA, Summers & Tudor (2000) critiqued the over-emphasis on pathology embedded in core TA concepts (especially Games and Scripts) and sought to create a platform for describing and promoting health through their conceptual re-formulation. In a similar vein Tudor (2003) noted the comparative lack of attention given to the Adult ego state in TA literature prior to strengthening and developing it as a theoretical construct.

In short, defining "development" in terms of emphasising health and strength is in ascendance both within and outside of TA and coaching in its varied forms is poised to represent this shift in focus. Of particular note is work stemming from the Coaching Psychology Unit at Sydney University written both for lay people (Grant and Greene 2001) and for people with a professional or academic interest (Stober and Grant 2006). The former is an accessible and creative synthesis of mostly cognitive behavioural techniques and the cycle of change (Prochaska and DiClemente 1984) written in a self-help format. The latter explores the evidence base of a broad range of psychological approaches within coaching in a manner characteristic of a mature discipline.

RECIPE4Change, shown below, is inspired and informed by both of these approaches and as such could be used either as a "self help" guide or in conjunction with a sophisticated and layered coaching process in which the same questions are explored and answered at deeper levels. The six stages represented by the acronym RECIPE will be described. Each stage is named and includes at least one prompt in the form of a

question. The reader is of course invited to test the model and consider the questions in relation to an area of personal or professional interest. Each question is briefly discussed and includes useful tips and/or references for further reading.



Review (...your situation)

Q: What's working, what's not working and what do you want?

These three sub-questions prompt a review of the present situation in terms of satisfaction. The answers can stimulate analytical reflection and motivation for change by clarifying desire for a) more of what works, b) less of what doesn't work, or c) something different. The focus and scope of the situation under review is of course negotiable and can therefore be shaped to be optimally challenging.

Appreciative inquiry (Cooperrider 2004) and solution focused coaching (Greene and Grant 2003) are approaches that make particular use of analysing what works now or what has worked in the past. In co-creative TA terms this could mean describing healthy transactions, positive games, mutually affirming script messages and periods of Adult flow (Summers and Tudor 2007).

We can access a range of valuable concepts across many TA traditions for exploring and describing what is not working e.g. symbiosis, impasses, drama triangle, stroke economy etc. all of which can inform effective strategies for change. The third sub-question "what do you want?" is a shortened version of James' (1986 p.195) first contracting question "what do you want that would enhance your life?" and carries the same meaning. The first two sub-questions here help place our desires in the context of present function and dysfunction.

Q: What existing and potential resources do you have, including personal strengths and values?

This prompts a scan of external and internal resources that might be consciously utilized in a change process. This is a deliberate accounting (rather than discounting) of self, other and the situation designed to affirm resourcefulness. This question primes healthy "seeking" neural networks (Panksepp 1998) in readiness for proactive movement towards goal fulfillment. Affordable and accessible online assessment tools can help clarify personal strengths (Rath 2007) and values (University of Pennsylvania 2006) in addition to personal reflection and feedback from other people. This focus on describing our strengths in detail is an excellent way to give ourselves and others recognition (strokes) for what we do well and encouragement to use these abilities to get what we want. Buckingham (2007) however, stresses that, by definition, when someone is using their strengths they are not only skillful but also energised by what they are doing. It is not just a case of doing what you are good at but also a case of doing what you love.

Scanning for "potential" resources heightens the importance of predicting what new resources and opportunities may become available at a future point in time as a consequence of local, national or global events and trends. It is also important to consider what personal and professional relationships could provide the support and challenge you need in order to thrive.

Elect (...worthwhile changes)

Q: Given this context, what changes will be most worthwhile and why?

This prompts for strategic judgement taking into account who you are, what is happening now, what might happen next and where you want to go. This judgement balances analysis of the past and predictive intuition to create a meaningful focus for present, choiceful behaviour. Clarifying "why" these changes are worthwhile in terms of your situation and your own conscious values and desires creates a powerful resource that is particularly useful when navigating the emotional challenges of change making.

Highlighting the importance of judgment in selecting a focus for change reflects a common understanding among TA practitioners that change should promote health and autonomy rather than simply reinforce a pathological or fixed frame of reference. The process of selecting which changes to make within our given context is therefore critical and may involve surfacing and challenging previously unquestioned assumptions.

Consider (...how you will manage discomfort)

Q: How will you manage any ambivalence, discomfort, relapse and setbacks that may occur before, during and after these changes?

The normality of ambivalence in relation to changes has been highlighted in Motivational Interviewing (Miller and Rollnick 1991) and pragmatically accounted for within the Cycle of Change (Prochaska and DiClemente 1984). In TA we talk about the clarification, heightening and resolution of impasses considered to be located within (Goulding and Goulding 1979; Mellor 1980) or between (Summers and Tudor 2000; Hargaden and Fenton 2005) people.

Creating important changes often includes dealing with loss for what we leave behind. The real or perceived risk-taking involved can stimulate fear for what we might lose as well as excitement for what we might gain. Setbacks in important plans can stimulate hurt, anger or even despair. In addition, actually getting what we want may stimulate not only joy but also grief as the experience of satisfaction juxtaposes (Erskine 1993) with our previous experience of deficit. We increase the risk of sabotaging our own best laid plans if we do not anticipate this mix of feelings within ourselves and those around us and find ways of accepting, tolerating and managing them. It is in this emotional realm that we will most likely transfer (and, with appropriate support, potentially transform) unresolved feelings from past experiences.

Berne (1964) used children's games as a metaphor, suggesting that we engage in psychological games with other people in order to regulate feelings within a shared (although hidden) structure. A TA based intervention may help people understand their emotional investment in negative games and find more rewarding ways to manage emotional life.

Relapse is a normal part of any significant change process. It is therefore to be expected rather than condemned and used as a prompt to review personal resourcefulness alongside the predisposing,

precipitating and perpetuating conditions (Johnstone 2006) of both old and new patterns and how these can be managed more effectively.

Imagine (...the best outcome)

Q: What would be the best possible outcome?

This question and the one that follows stimulate the use of creative thinking. They challenge us to become (transactional) designers rather than just (transactional) analysts and imagine how our best outcome would look, feel and sound.

“With analysis we are interested in *what is*. With design we become interested in *what could be*” (de Bono 1992 p.63).

Q: How might you get there, including creative possibilities?

Both the outcome and the pathway to get there deserve creative and lateral consideration. This may involve finding or creating new resources or using familiar resources in novel ways.

Creativity has been associated with the Free Child, Little Professor and Integrating Adult within different ego state models. Schmid (1991) described using intuition to consider what might be possible for clients and in doing so shifted away from Berne’s past (and pathological) emphasis on using intuition for ego state diagnosis.

Plan (...your path to success)

Q: What attractive, challenging yet achievable goals will mark these changes?

Having expanded options in the previous stage we are now prompted to exercise judgement again in selecting from the field of possibilities in order to create a focused direction for purposeful action. Cognitive behavioural therapy stresses the importance of defining clear and measurable goals. TA has largely addressed this in terms of contracting (Sills 1997) and Stewart (1996) has specified the value of using clear behavioural markers for measuring proposed changes.

Q: What is your plan for each goal and your next action for each plan?

David Allen (2001) advocates the integration of vertical and horizontal planning. Vertical planning belongs to this stage of RECIPE and is the process of creating a practical sequence of steps towards your goal and then clearly specifying the next action required to move it forward. Horizontal planning will be discussed in the next stage.

TA theorists have typically focused on considering the treatment plan of the practitioner or the change plan of the client as articulated through contracting sequences (e.g. James, 1986). In Co-creative TA the game plan has been applied to positive and negative games to clarify the steps we take to create consistent positive or negative outcomes with others.

Creating your plan may involve the three thinking styles of analysis, creativity and judgement (Sternberg, 1997) in order to formulate a realistic, novel, yet pragmatic pathway to your goal. Allen further suggests that you specify the context in which your next action will take place e.g. home, work, on errands, on the phone, at computer etc. This is how you prime yourself to translate your vision into reality. Your plan is a tool - and clearly specifying your next action and the context in which you will do it will keep it's cutting edge sharp.

Plans may initially include ways that you will manage any uncomfortable feelings (as discussed in the "Consider" stage) or this may be added later as you get clearer about what form of emotional support, if any, may be required.

Engage (...your strengths at the cutting edge)

Q: How will you complete your "next actions" within the flow of your daily life and work?

This is where horizontal planning (Allen, 2001) is required. This is the ability to review and complete your planned “next actions” in the appropriate daily or weekly context. In this way you remind yourself of your

next action for a given project when you're in the right place to do it. Allen's somewhat ingenious personal productivity system helps busy people progress their projects by prompting goal derived "next actions" to be completed within normal daily workflow. Within this guiding framework it is vital to find ways to consistently engage your personal strengths (see Buckingham, 2007) at the cutting edge of your plans to develop or maintain high performance and personal satisfaction.

The closest that TA has come to the classifying of individual strengths has been through highlighting the positive aspects of driver behaviours, conceptualised by Hay (1997) as working styles. Generally speaking however, TA has many more words and categories for types of pathology than types of health or strength.

Q: When and how will you review your goals, update your plans and celebrate success?

Experiment with reviewing your goals and updating plans on a weekly basis. Check that they continue to engage your personal strengths in service of your values and make adjustments if necessary. Take a broader RECIPE review every month. This keeps your vertical planning fresh. Adapt these suggestions over time to a pattern that suits you. In practice this discipline is an integral part of a professional coaching relationship where the meetings themselves prompt such a review and subsequent strategic adjustments. Find meaningful ways to celebrate successfully completed stages of your plan. Celebration reinforces our capacity to be creative, proactive and effective in improving or maintaining the quality of our life and work.

Conclusion

As we work within the performance paradigm of coaching psychology it is essential to retain a sense of our value distinct from how well or badly we are performing. The person-centred notion of unconditional positive regard or the TA concept of intrinsic Ok-ness are accounted for here. That said, the motivation to develop and exercise our competence is recognised as present from infancy (Stern 2003). In addition, people often report being most happy when they are effectively using their strengths in service of something greater than themselves (Seligman, 2003).

Cornell (1988) specifically criticizes TA theory of life script for being overly concerned with attachment and cites developmental studies which highlight the importance of our need to develop task mastery as well as a sense of belonging or "Ok-ness" with others. Indeed the tension between attending to competence and attachment patterns may be a contributory factor in the ongoing, sometimes conflicting, dialogue as to whether TA is a cognitive behavioural or a relational approach.

It is however clear that our drive for attachment and competence are inter-related. Gallup research shows that high performers across many different types of work consistently select "Strongly Agree" in response to the questions: "Does my supervisor, or someone at work seem to care about me as a person?" and "Do I have a best friend at work?" (Buckingham and Coffman 1999 p.21). The consistency of these findings prompts this author to propose the Person-Performance Factor: "feeling valued as a person, and not just for how you perform, is critical to high performance". It is clear that when we are working from our strengths that we are expressing who we are through what we do in a way that is both authentic and powerful and yet we still need to feel valued by others for more than our achievements. It is in this important context that RECIPE4change is presented with the aim of assisting ongoing engagement in happy, productive living.

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