

STATEMENTS

Coaching Younger Practitioners and Students Using Components of the Co-Active Coaching Model

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Coaching is used to improve performance, achieve preset goals and obtain desired results. Several coaching models have been used in health professions for leadership and professional development. This article describes some components of Co-Active Coaching® that can be applied while coaching pharmacy students and younger practitioners. Co-Active Coaching requires the coach to use a broad range of communication skills, including listening, asking powerful questions, making insightful comments, offering encouragement, and giving sincere praise. The characteristics of the ideal candidate for coaching and the value of coaching are also discussed.

Keywords: coaching, young practitioners, pharmacy student, personal goals, professional growth, Co-Active Coaching model

INTRODUCTION

Coaching techniques have been used in organizations to improve performance among teams.^{1,2} Coaching also has been a tool for faculty development³ and professional development.² Several health fields have reported the application of coaching in developing nurse leaders,^{1,2,4-6} nursing staff,^{4,7} medical residents,⁸ dentists,⁹ physicians,^{3,10,11} students,¹² pharmacists,¹³ and pharmacy leaders.¹⁴ Coaching also has been used in reducing work-related stress and improving work-life balance.^{15,16} Coaching models described in the literature include: peer coaching,^{7,11,17} career coaching,¹⁷ performance coaching,¹⁸ professional coaching,⁵ life coaching,¹⁹ health coaching,^{20,21} and Co-Active Coaching.²² There are several definitions of coaching.^{6,18} Many of them imply that the coach helps the individual being coached accomplish his/her goals much more efficiently than he/she would have alone. The main difference between coaching and mentoring is that coaching deals more with getting desired results by holding the individual accountable to his/her pre-stated goals.^{22,6} In mentoring, there is more giving of advice and instruction and problem solving with the individual.^{7,6} While there is some confusion and overlap in definitions of coaching and mentoring in the literature, in this paper, I discuss components of a coaching model for

which I received training and have used in the professional development of younger pharmacy practitioners and students (hereafter referred to as “the coached”).

Laura Whitworth, Karen Kimsey-House, and Henry Kimsey-House are internationally recognized pioneers in the coaching field and cofounders of The Coaches Training Institute (CTI). In collaboration with Phillip Sandahl, cofounder of Team Coaching International, they created the Co-Active Coaching® model to help coach people toward success in work and life. The Co-Active Coaching model can be applied to any aspect of the young practitioner’s or student’s life, career, or business. The model engages the individual in such a way that the answers and solutions come from the coached and not the coach.²² The art of coaching an individual so that he/she can find the strengths and talents that already exist within and apply them to goals and life involves excellent communication skills. The Co-Active Coaching model requires the coach to do the following for the coached: (1) develop a connection; (2) listen and communicate effectively; (3) keep the end goal in sight; (4) ask powerful or impactful questions; (5) build his/her self-awareness and self-esteem; (6) recognize his/her whole life; (7) acknowledge efforts and accomplishments; (8) identify limiting beliefs; (9) hold him/her accountable; (10) debrief his/her learning; and (11) encourage him/her to celebrate accomplishments.²² Many young practitioners, faculty members, and students would like to have some form of support to help accomplish their career goals through professional and leadership development. Pharmacy educators are ideal candidates to perform this role and coaching is one way to accomplish this in any individual or organization.¹

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SOME ELEMENTS OF THE CO-ACTIVE COACHING MODEL

Develop a Connection

The coach must first develop a connection with the coached; however, how this is accomplished will vary from person to person.^{19,22} It may be their mutual strengths or style similarities when approaching circumstances or situations. It may be a mutual hobby or an inspirational person both admire. Whatever brings resonance into discussions can help to establish a connection with the coached and create “buy in” to the coaching relationship. According to John Maxwell, many individuals will buy in to *you* first before they buy in to *your talk*.²³ Share your story. How did you get to where you are today? Be enthusiastic, respectful, and supportive.¹⁰ Young practitioners appreciate the real-life struggles of a senior practitioner. Hearing about those struggles encourages them on their journey and reassures them that they can make it, too. I have learned not always to paint a picture that makes attaining their goals seem easy. This can make the coached feel inadequate in his/her ability to reach the desired goals. Keith Ferrazzi highlights generosity, candor, vulnerability, and accountability as essential qualities needed in the coach for building a connection with the coached and subsequently a life-long relationship.²⁴ After an initial rapport is established, the next thing to understand is what makes the individual “tick.” What is their essence? How do they operate? What are their strengths and shortcomings? As more is learned about the coached, it becomes easier for the coach to speak the individual’s language and communicate with him/her effectively.

Listen and Communicate Effectively

Knowing what communication style motivates the individual is essential.^{22,6} Words that motivate one person may be de-motivating language for another. A coach should learn what works and use it often to help the coached move toward their pre-stated goals. Many organizations administer the Myers Briggs test to individuals to determine their personality types. The test can also help to determine which communication tools work best for the person.²⁵ Some organizations use the DISC (dominance, influence, steadiness, conscientiousness) personality test to describe people’s behavior.⁶ True Colors is also a simple way to identify the preferences of the coached practitioner or student. This will help the coach select phrases and perspectives that optimize communication with the coached.²⁶ Many individuals might find one of the following phrases a subconscious mission in their interactions as they journey through life: “Get it done!” “Do it right!” “Get along!” or “Just do it!” Depending on the preference of the young practitioner

or student, the coach will need to design a unique set of strategies for effective motivation and communication.²⁶

Keep the End in Sight

A powerful way to keep the practitioner or student motivated is to help the individual visualize a goal in such a way that he/she can practically reach out and touch it. This is where it is important to ask what the individual’s goals are and what they mean to him/her.^{22,6} The coach should have the practitioner or student describe the goal in such detail that even the coach can experience the exhilaration and excitement of what it would mean to accomplish this goal. The coach will need to “hold this picture of their dreams up for them” so that when the individual gets discouraged or overwhelmed, he/she can gradually shift back into a more positive and motivated mindset.²² The more the practitioner or student is able to experience this positive place represented by his/her goal (the thoughts, feelings, and confidence) the more likely the coached will be to take steps forward toward reaching the goal.²² The more the practitioner or student takes action, the more energized he/she is and momentum builds.²² Some questions the coach should consider asking the coached are: “What is your dream? What would it mean to you to accomplish that? How will it make you feel if you accomplished that by your deadline? What would you do to celebrate? Who do you need to be to accomplish your goals?”²²

Ask Powerful Questions

Asking powerful questions is a way to get a lot of learning and action from an individual.^{22,5} Powerful questions are not ones with yes or no answers and are not typically “why” questions as these types of questions can put the person in a defensive mode or limit opportunities for inward reflection and truthful expression. A powerful question typically promotes reflective thought; the more the practitioner or student has to think about the question before answering, the more powerful the question.²² Examples of powerful questions from the Co-Active Coaching model include: “Who are you becoming? Where else does that problem show up in your life? What patterns are you noticing? From this place of reflection, ideas surface and the individual is able to develop solutions to problems, which motivates him/her into action.^{22,17}

Build Self-awareness and Self-esteem

Another role of the coach is to build the individual’s self-awareness and self-esteem. This can be more easily accomplished if the coach has excellent listening skills: listening for what is important to the individual, what is changing in his/her life, and which ideas resonate and

which do not. Listening for what he/she is not saying can also help. The practitioner or student may be giving off nonverbal signals that the coach should point out and discuss. What is the individual's prevalent mood or feelings today? What does his/her tone indicate? Is the person's energy level up or down? The coach's intuition will help determine what the next course of action is. Sometimes the individual may need to be reminded of past experiences, successes, progress, and accomplishments.^{19,22} Telling the coached practitioner's or student's story back to him/her can help the coached see what progress has been made toward the pre-stated goals. Additionally, it instills self-worth¹⁹ and encourages the individual.²² Many times the coach may have to remind the practitioner or student of prior stellar performances. This helps to build self-esteem and confidence and reduces insecurity.⁷ It also increases self-awareness and inspires the individual to face current and future projects with a positive "can do" attitude.¹⁹

Recognize Their Whole Life

Too many times, coaches are reluctant to coach younger practitioners or students from a perspective that recognizes the individual's whole life. A coach inquiring about an individual's life outside of school or work should by no means be seen as an opportunity to be "nosey" or to cross any professional boundaries. It is, however, an acknowledgement to the individual that "life happens" and he/she must learn to manage all aspects of life effectively.²² This acknowledgment really can put the individual at ease, and prove to him/her that the coach is practical and nonjudgmental about the person's whole life. When the individual knows that the coach acknowledges and respects his/her life situations and circumstances, he/she feels noticed, reassured, and supported. These days every aspect of our life goes with us and shows up whether we like it or not. Coaching can be used to reduce stress and facilitate a work/life balance.¹⁵ Some students tell me they feel less burdened as they pursue their desired goals when the coach recognizes their whole life in a supportive way. While the student/practitioner is revealing information about other aspects of his/her life is not the time for the coach to start a professional discussion, but rather the time to listen and ask additional powerful questions such as: What are you learning from your experience? Where else is this showing up? What will you do differently next time?²² It is important to allow the individual the opportunity to reflect on this without judgment so he can actually receive feedback as he prepares to move forward.

Acknowledging or Validating

Acknowledging or validating a person is a powerful approach to use when coaching younger practitioners and

students. Throughout the individual's life, no one may have noticed anything good or positive about them. The person may have received so much negative feedback that he/she unconsciously minimizes his/her strengths, capabilities, and accomplishments. This is the perfect opportunity to emphasize what is good or even great about the individual! The coach should allow the practitioner or student to see that he/she notices the small and big things the individual is doing. When the coach catches the practitioner or student doing the right things,¹³ he/she should say "I am confident of . . ."¹³ or use words that describe what the coach sees in the person.²² An acknowledging and validating statement simply uses adjectives to describe the individual.¹⁸ "You are thorough" or "You are so dedicated."²² Most of us do not receive acknowledgement like this on a regular basis, so when we do, it usually is deeply appreciated and inspires us to more action. One thing about acknowledging strengths and accomplishments is that it needs to be true, because the comment is more powerful when it comes from a coach.²² The coach has to really believe in the person to acknowledge or validate in a way that will seem sincere and make an impact.²²

Identify the Limiting Beliefs

Everyone has a voice telling them what they will never do, say or accomplish in life. This is a *limiting belief*, or according to Co-Active Coaching, the "saboteur" or "gremlin."²² It is important for the coach to fully understand who the individual is and what he/she wants to become in order for the coach to be able to identify when the limiting belief shows up. The coach then can employ the previously reviewed skills of "building self-esteem" or "keeping the end in sight."²² As the coach acknowledges the practitioner or student to build the individual's self-esteem and self-worth, the coach should also point out that the coached should not allow the limiting belief to govern his/her life, future projects, goals and dreams.²² Having a coach help him/her emerge from a "pit" by constantly reminding the student/practitioner of who he/she is and what he/she is becoming in life can be very liberating for a young person. The coach may never be able to help the individual get rid of all of his/her limiting beliefs and saboteur insinuations, so he/she should teach the individual how to manage these limiting beliefs when they surface.^{19,22}

Hold Them Accountable

A coach can hold the individual accountable by making simple requests about action items or steps that the coach has created alone or in collaboration with the practitioner or student. If the coached underestimates his/her

abilities, then the coach should challenge the individual to a higher standard.²² This challenge to the coached can inspire a sense of contribution toward his/her progress.^{1,22} “What will you accomplish and by when?” or “will you accomplish that?” can be helpful questions to make sure the person is committed to the task and propel the individual toward his/her goals or deepen his/her learning.²² This is where the coach needs to make sure that he/she provides assignments (but not busy work) that really deepens the individual’s learning experience. Assignments may include reflection, specific details, and self-directed activities.

Debrief Their Learning

It is important for the coach to check in with the coached on a regular basis to see what the individual has learned (debriefing) and to encourage reflection throughout the process.^{10,22} It helps the coach and the individual see what is being accomplished and how it is being accomplished.¹ Is the person (1) taking the process seriously? (2) really moving toward pre-stated goals? (3) perceiving obstacles in the process?²² It also provides the coach with the opportunity to see what he/she can do to be more supportive.⁵ Debriefing the learning experience can also help the coach assess his/her coaching skills to see if he/she is pushing the practitioner or student hard enough or too hard. During the debriefing process there is learning for the coach and the individual. When learning truly occurs, it can motivate the young practitioner or student and inspire the coach.¹ This is where results are achieved and the performance of the student or practitioner is enhanced. This is an opportunity to celebrate!

Celebrate

Too many times we go through life accomplishing great things without reflecting about them or stopping to celebrate. The young practitioner or student may be no different. The coach should ask the individual, “How do you celebrate accomplishments?” Every step, big or small, takes us closer to our desired goals. This means the coach and the individual being coached have made some movement in the right direction, which is certainly a reason to celebrate. Celebrating can be as simple as offering a few congratulatory words or giving a pat on the back, or as elaborate as giving a gift or treating the student or practitioner to dinner if appropriate. No matter the length or extent of the celebration, having the coach celebrate the moment with the coached will make it more meaningful since the coach may be the only one who understands the significance of the event in the individual’s life. There is nothing like winning the game of life, and certainly it is more exhilarating when the coach is there at

the finish line to champion, acknowledge, and celebrate with the person he/she has coached.²²

THE IDEAL CANDIDATE FOR COACHING

Not everyone is receptive to being coached and it is important for a coach to be able to identify those who may be more amenable to participating in the coaching process. Typically, coaching can only happen when 2 people are actively engaged in working toward the same goals.²² A candidate who already is motivated and has goals he/she wants to achieve but needs someone to help him/her to get from one point to the other is the ideal candidate. The person being coached has to understand that the coaching process may not always be easy, and that his/her commitment must be authentic and he/she must be willing to work with the coach to accomplish the pre-stated goals. Attempting to coach someone who just wants advice can be frustrating, so defining the nature of the relationship (mentor, coach, or both) at the onset is important. This will help the coach set the right expectations for the individual and self-manage accordingly.

THE VALUE TO THE COACH

The more that coaches see progress in the individuals they coach, the more fulfilled and motivated they feel. The experience can be inspiring²⁴ and provides an opportunity for leadership development.^{19,23} It puts the coach in the mindset of raising a pipeline of leaders and excellent individuals with strong work ethics within the profession.^{17,23} Coaching forces us to keep up our communication and interaction skills while improving the art of listening and the use of intuition.^{17,22} Ultimately, the most rewarding part of coaching is seeing an individual grow personally and professionally and accomplish their goals, confirming to the coach that the time spent was a worthy investment.⁵

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