

Solution-focused Coach for a Small Business

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Abstract

Professional coaching is unique in the business world. It can be defined as a process and profession based on partnership and collaboration. Specifically, it is characterized as a co-active collaboration based on engagement and feedback. Moreover, professional coaching is designed to develop optimal results that lead individuals to personal behavioral change amongst business strategy for a larger team. Solutions-focused coaching is a model that provides for a powerful, practical, and proven approach to positive change with people, teams, and organizations. This method focuses on the solutions and strengths and what is going well in an organization. For this paper, this author will use a business scenario and find an answer to a common leadership question—time management. A review of the scholarly and biblical literature will incorporate evidence-based recommendations on how this program will uncover competencies and skills to provide the client with new perspectives. The research project will also delineate how this proposed program may not work with the client, replete with evidence-based actions and biblical scripture to support the findings.

Keywords: solution-focused coaching, coaching competencies, Miracle Question, business management, small business leadership

Solution-Focused Coaching for Small Business

It is not uncommon for busy professionals to lack clarity regarding business problems that they cannot find the answers to. This paper aims to explore the benefits of a solution-focused coaching model and apply it to a real-world leadership problem for a client in the design business. This client struggles with time management, priorities, and strategic business planning. Using the literature and scripture, this author will explore how coaching can clarify and focus on solutions for the client. Implementing change through this solution-centric model will create calm, predictable growth and strategic management through exercises and implementing systems and processes that focus on what is working right now.

What is Coaching?

Coaching in some form has been around for ages. Most people think of coaching in the athletic sense, where an individual presides over a team to achieve a collective goal. Executive and professional coaching has been around for decades but recently saw a re-surgency in the last twenty years. Professional coaching can be defined as a process and profession based on partnership and collaboration. Whitworth-Kimsey-House precisely characterizes it as a co-active collaboration based on engagement and feedback (Boysen-Rotelli, 2018). Moreover, professional coaching is designed to receive optimal results that lead individuals to personal behavioral change against the backdrop of business strategy and a larger team (Boysen-Rotelli, 2018, p. 3).

Solutions-Focused Coaching

Furthermore, solution-focused coaching is a subset or model in the coaching industry that provides a powerful, practical, and proven approach to positive change with people, teams, and organizations (Boysen-Rotelli, 2018, p. 38). This method focuses on the solutions and strengths and what is going well in an organization. While professional coaching is not therapy, mentoring, or training, solutions-focused training has its roots in behavioral therapy that is more

common in a psychological, analytic approach (Grant et al., 2018). Therefore, while solutions-focused methods are only one model, it is the choice for this case study exercise. Regrettably, this author has learned through more research that it would not be the most effective approach for the organization and individual used for this paper.

Core Competencies

The International Coaching Federation is the foremost organization that coaches use to obtain training, become certified, and follow a guiding set of ethical values and core competencies in their practice as professional coaches. Like most any coaching model, the solutions-focused coach will not delineate from the competencies outlined by the ICF. A competent coach demonstrates ethical practice personal integrity and is sensitive to clients' identity, experiences, values, and beliefs (International Coaching Federation, n.d.). A capable coach embodies a coaching mindset, recognizes that a client is responsible for their own choices, and engages the client in ongoing learning and reflective practice (International Coaching Federation, n.d.). Through a co-creating relationship, a knowledgeable coach creates a clear and precise agreement and maintains a presence throughout the relationship.

Following Singh's (2020) research found that this competency includes listening, questioning, motivating, and encouraging the client, providing support and feedback, and having regular follow up with the client to monitor their progress. This coach facilitates the client by using tools and techniques such as powerful, questioning, active listening, and works with the client to integrate new awareness, insight, or learning into their worldview and behavior (International Coaching Federation, n.d.). A competent coach partners with the client to design goals, actions, and accountability and invites the client to consider moving forward, including resources, support, and potential barriers.

Further, a solutions-focused coach that embodies Christian values into their coaching practice will follow scripture to guide their relationship with the client. Following the advice in James (NIV), three basic principles: faith, truth, and perseverance can be integrated into practical coaching to add value to the relationship. This methodology fosters a deep-rooted and trusting relationship built on understanding and solutions for coaching practitioners to develop the business leader to enhance connections within the organization. In addition, this method provides foundational competencies which improve the leader in myriad ways. These trusting relationships are an innate necessity for leaders to partake in any endeavor throughout their personal or professional life (Wilson Global Outreach Solutions, LLC, 2018).

The Problem

The client is a small business owner who works in the design industry and has a small team of employees. He has indicated that he struggles with time management and setting priorities. He also suffers from a lack of strategy or business planning. He considers himself financially successful but does not think he is effective in running his business and feels that he could be delivering much better results if he had more time. In addition, the client is suffering from a situational leadership struggle within his company.

The client struggles to establish self-evaluate his competence and commitment, which may significantly lower his ability to foresight and misdiagnose their strengths or struggles (Yammarino and Atwater, 1997; as cited in Thompson & Glasø, 2018). By lacking the leadership and understanding, the client sees himself as a poor or average performer, even if he is financially successful. The client is likely amenable to doing the work necessary and tries hard to improve, but they do not accurately recognize their strengths and weaknesses. (Atwater *et al.*, 2005; as cited in Thompson & Glasø, 2018). This lack of self-awareness may result from overly critical self-evaluation, combined with setting high standards for themselves, continually striving to meet

feedback expectations of others, and leading them to pursue easy and unchallenging improvement goals (Tekleab *et al.*, 2008; as cited in Thompson & Glasø, 2018). However, their tendency to overestimate weaknesses may be compensated through hard work, resulting in greater success in task accomplishment (Atwater *et al.*, 1998; as cited in Thompson & Glasø, 2018). Since solutions-focused coaching builds on the assumption that people are inherently capable of knowing what is best for them and mobilizing available resources to realize their desired goals, this approach can achieve the desired results (Seko *et al.*, 2020). Consequently, positive feedback provides them with incentives to undertake corrective action. Hence, this client would be an excellent candidate for a solutions-focused program that emphasizes what is already there in their business and works on the possibilities—past, present, and future.

The Process

At its most basic level, a solution-focused coaching model focuses on what the client wants differently, not on what is not broken. He struggles with time management and strategic planning in this client's situation. It is the position of the coach and the client to find what works and do more of it (Grant & O'Connor, 2018). In short, find an exception to the time management problem and then replicate it. It is imperative to coach the client to stop doing what does not work and do something else. Often, the solution can become a problem itself, creating a cycle of incomplete projects, missed deadlines, and ineffective leadership.

A solutions-focused coach is adept at exploring solutions with the client and uses the available time and energy in coaching sessions to solely examine the future rather than focus on the past. In this client's case, it is essential to acknowledge that things are not working (e.g., time management and setting priorities), illuminate resources, uncover skills and competencies, and master a situation that the client can comprehend and implement (Boysen-Rotelli, 2018).

Grant & Gerrard (2020) posits that positive emotions promote the discovery of novel ideas and actions, including goal attainment and positive change. In this client's case, small and significant events can be implemented, and the coach can coach the client to understand the exceptions. By providing present and future questions, the coach focuses the client on what is working and what they would like the situation to be. Solution-focused coaching is a very goal-oriented, collaborative, client solution where the practitioner compliments and validates the client to embrace change and do more of what has worked in the past (Schwellnus et al. 2015; as cited in King et al. 2019).

The Big Picture and the Miracle Question

Problem-focused questions have a long tradition in the helping profession and can effectively create change (Freud, 1920; Lee, 2019; as cited in Grant & O'Connor, 2018). Often a process of creating a vision statement (Toros, 2019) and pre-determine what the future looks like. Unique to most other coaching models, the solutions-focused model uses the Miracle Question to be determining what is next. The miracle question method is a way to open and cultivate a dialogue with clients around well-formed goals that focus on solutions. The practitioners expressed their astonishment about how the miracle question had changed their understanding of the importance of exploring strengths and resources and had given the service user the chance to voice their wishes about the desired change and the support needed to move towards it, rather than focusing on past negative experiences (Toros, 2019)

This question is empowering not only to the client but also to the coach. It believes that the client can find their solutions. It is the practitioner's position to facilitate and inspire attitude from the client and provide opportunities for reflection on what a solution holds. This reflection empowers not only the client but the coach, as well. This process can create incrementally or

possibly even massive change when the client is willing to work toward it if given a chance (King et al., 2019).

What's Next

No matter the coaching model used, a fundamental tenet of coaching is that the client must be coachable. Bush (2004; as cited in Boysen-Rotelli, 2018) notes that the client brings motivation, willingness, openness to the process, and commitment to do the work. Sztucinski (2001; as cited in Boysen-Rotelli, 2018) postulates that a client committed to doing the work, making time for the process, and practicing new skills are just as important as what the coach brings to the relationship. Having the client ready to learn and motivated to solve issues will allow the practitioner to move toward the solutions-focused outcomes outlined in the agreement.

The coaching practitioner will ask scaling questions to the client that will assess their situations and track progress. An example for the client would be: “if we could implement a solution that automated your client onboarding process, would that allow you to have more time to dedicate to other projects?” The coach will then ask solutions-focused questions to the client. Here are some examples (Toros, 2019):

1. What would you like to achieve from this coaching session?
2. Who can help you with you setting priorities?
3. When have you achieved a positive outcome in your time management protocol in the past?
4. What would it mean to you to achieve success?
5. What progress have you made so far?

Next steps

The main idea behind solutions-focused coaching is that the techniques are positive and solution-focused and allow a brief amount of time for the client to be in a coaching agreement. The

process is designed to improve the decision-making processes for the client, with them at the center and in the driver's seat of their growth. Typically, a solutions-focused coaching program will be an average of five to eight sessions (Toros, 2019). During the sessions, goals are set, and different actions are explored and deployed into the client's daily life. By keeping track of what works and what adjustments need to be made, clients can better track their progress. The following method was developed from the Miracle Question entitled The Miracle Method (Miller & Berg; as cited in Toros, 2019):

1. The coach will ask the client to desire something in their life that they would like to be different (e.g., time management, priorities, and goal setting).
2. Ask the client to envision a miracle happening and how their life is different (e.g., suppose you woke up tomorrow and had a solution for your time management struggles?)
3. The coach will inform you to keep the miracle small (e.g., what is one thing you can do to free up time in your business?)
4. The coach will define the change with language that is positive, specific, and measurable (e.g., suppose that we implement a system where you automate your emails that you send to your new client leads, and after the system is in place, it saves you two hours each day from constantly answering inquiry emails?)

Solutions That Work

Firstly, the coach suggests that the client ask people, who are important to the client, how they view the client's strengths. Collecting these strengths from another perspective can bring the client into a strength perspective and allow for more remarkable change. Secondly, the practitioner urges the client to focus on a time in their business when they had the time to make strategic decisions and were not burdened by time answering a plethora of emails from prospective clients. Finally, the client attended a training seminar that taught the client how to implement simple

automation processes that will take new clients on an onboarding journey through a pipeline. The system works very well, and it is designed to give the client more flexibility in making strategic decisions for his business.

Thirdly, the coach will urge the client to conduct a mind mapping or brainstorming exercise to discover solutions to the priorities and time management problems. Using the mind-mapping idea, the client can branch from a solution-centric problem and explore options that the client will self-generate and be more connected to the outcome. Using time management as an example; the client can find actionable items using action plans, time-wasters, distractions, organization, saying no, teamwork, and priorities. Each branch will provide insight into possible solutions and outcomes.

When the Solution-focused Model May Not Work

Many solution-focused techniques require compliments and reframing, which must be done from a position of genuine positive regard and a desire to understand and move toward the client's end goal. The solution-focused technique can appear superficial and manipulative (Grant & Cavanagh, 2014). Moreover, the wording of the miracle question can be problematic. Some clients may experience talk of miracles as pollyannish and silly (Grant & Cavanagh, 2014). Therefore, the coach must ask questions that allow the client to shift from an exploited or deliberative mindset to an implementational mindset (Bayer & Gollwitzer; as cited in Grant & Cavanagh, 2014).

Of course, there are times when the solution-focused approach is not appropriate. For example, some clients may have causal stories about their situation, which form a central and protected part of their worldview. Similarly, when clients have deeply felt the need to explore etiology, attempting to shoehorn them into a methodology that feels incongruent is likely counterproductive. In short, a client is not amenable to coaching as outlined in Boysen-Rotelli (2018).

Conclusion

God can provide a coach with the knowledge to respond in the moment and in a way that is precisely what the client needs to hear (*New International Version*, 2011, Prov. 19:18). The client in this case study seeks solutions to everyday business problems to the busy and successful entrepreneur. So often, clients like this will desire a professional coach to find answers to issues they are grappling with but do not know the process to follow to achieve positive outcomes. A solution-focused approach will provide the client with a proven and practical method to positive change and allow the business owner to use what they have in their business and find ways to focus on possibilities in the future.

The literature shows that a client who strives to find what works and does more of it will positively (Grant & O'Connor, 2018). However, the solution can often become a problem itself, creating a cycle of incomplete projects, missed deadlines, and ineffective leadership. A solutions-focused coach is adept at exploring solutions with the client and uses the available time and energy in coaching sessions to solely examine the future rather than focus on the past. In this client's case, it is essential to acknowledge that things are not working, illuminate resources, uncover skills and competencies, and master a situation that the client can comprehend and implement (Boysen-Rotelli, 2018).

Positive emotions do work, and Grant & Gerrard (2020) posits that these emotions promote discovering novel ideas and actions, including goal attainment and positive change. A solutions-focused coach can provide present and future questions and focus the client on what is working and what they would like the situation to be. In short, solution-focused coaching is a very goal-oriented, collaborative client solution where the practitioner compliments and validates the client to embrace change and do more of what has worked in the past (Schwellnus et al. 2015; as cited in King et al. 2019).

For this client scenario, there are ideas of what can work. Mind maps, solution-focused questions, family support, are great methods to aid in the process. But there is a caveat; the client must be coachable and be willing to put in the work to make meaningful changes. A competent coach can assist this client in getting there, but a solutions-focused model, in this case, will work for all parties involved, which makes a coaching relationship different and so unique.

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