

The challenge of getting clients to the critical action stage

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The Blueprint for Career Development (McMahon, Patton & Tatham 2004) points out that individuals are being challenged to accept greater responsibility for constructing their careers across the lifespan and it emphasises the need for career development competencies across the lifespan. McMahon, Patton & Tatham say that the training of career development professionals should have such competencies in mind. They also note, however, that relatively few career practitioners currently have specific qualifications in career development. This is despite the fact that the role of many career practitioners—including those in education, government and private practice—is to skillfully facilitate clients to make decisions and take action in order to get the outcomes they want.

It's no surprise, then, that career counsellors and coaches often feel very challenged when working with people who present as 'stuck', 'resistant', 'depressed' or 'unmotivated'. Could part of the reason be that as practitioners we don't yet have the necessary skills to coach our clients to make real changes in how they think, feel and act?

In the field of career development we have various explanatory models of adult decision-making and transitions but none details the intra-personal mechanisms of change or offers detailed techniques to "get a person into the critical action stage" (Franklin 2005).

So what do we know about how best to assist clients make the changes they want?

In order to change, people need the opportunity to change, the desire to change and *knowledge how to change*. As career coaches or counsellors our ability to facilitate change involves understanding the structure of clients' subjective experience: how they internally represent their experience and how they learn, make decisions and get motivated (or not). Once we know the structure of limiting and unwanted beliefs, emotional states and behaviours we can help clients de-structure and re-structure those beliefs, states and behaviours. As facilitators of change we can show clients how to literally run their own brains. This is called *developmental career coaching* and may provide a missing link in career practitioner training.

What is involved in developmental career coaching? It starts with the skills that all counsellors and coaches use: rapport-building, clarifying outcomes, active listening and supporting, questioning, giving and receiving feedback. *Developmental coaching* skills also include detecting intricate and layered

patterns of thinking and feeling, helping clients change their beliefs and emotional states, tasking clients to take actions to develop skills and holding clients accountable. A *developmental coach* is trained to identify and work with a person's language patterns, personality style and perceptual filters, emotional states and the mental movies they make of their experience.

Developmental coaches are also trained to use the Axes of Change model (Hall and Duval 2004) which is for coaching change among well people of all ages. It conceptualises 'change' as a verb, indicating a process of moving from one state to another according to *four mechanisms or variables* which are—as in many other change models—*motivation, decision, creation* and *solidification*. Each mechanism is an axis with polar thinking styles or 'perceptual filters' deriving from the 16 PF, Type Theory and the Taylor-Johnson temperament analysis. The resulting eight variables are: *Aversions (or move-away motivations)*, *Attractions (move-towards motivations)*, *Awareness (reflective understanding)*, *Deciding, Planning (creative design)*, *Action (feed forward)*, *Reinforcement* and *Testing (monitoring)*.

The coach facilitates the client through eight states, moving back and forth depending on where the client is in the change process. S/he uses questions that engage the higher levels of the mind and uncover the hidden or assumed frames govern the client's thinking, feeling, speaking and perceiving. Thus the coach builds *move-towards motivation* for change, enhances *move-away motivations*, *increases awareness of the need* to change, facilitates the client's *commitment* to a particular course of action, *co-creates* the client's plan of action, facilitates the *actualisation* of the decision and plan by having the client try new ways of doing/speaking, *reinforces and celebrates* success, and *gives feedback* to solidify the gains and learning and to identify further learning, planning and actions. It is not a linear process but rather a 'dance' through the change process with the coach knowing where the client is and where to facilitate the process next.

The Axes of Change model is one of several new models based on NLP and Neuro-Semantics in the field of cognitive behavioural psychology (Hall and Duval 2004). There now is a competency-based training and certification program that develops the skills, knowledge and attitudes needed for *developmental career coaching* and it more than covers the 11 core competencies required by the International Association for Educational and Vocational Guidance for provision of quality services (McMahon 2004).

Would you like to know more? Email Dr Susie Linder-Pelz <susie@gooddecisions.com.au>

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