The PRACTICE model of coaching: towards a solution-focused approach

Stephen Palmer

Coaching Psychology Unit, City University, London, UK

Abstract

This paper will provide a brief overview to a variety of models of coaching and then describe the PRACTICE model of coaching. PRACTICE integrates solution-focused strategies and techniques within its framework.

Keywords: coaching, problem-solving, solution focused coaching, models of coaching

Introduction

Many different models of coaching now exist. These include well established GROW model which is the acronym for **G**OAL, **R**EALITY, **O**PTIONS, **W**ILL (or WRAP-UP) (see Whitmore 1996; 2004). Dembkowski and Elridge, (2003) developed the ACHIEVE model which represents: **A**ssess current situation; **C**reative brainstorming of alternative to current situation; **H**one goals; **I**nitiate options; **E**valuative options; **V**alid action programme design; **E**ncourage momentum. Libri (2004) developed the POSITIVE model which represents **P**urpose, **O**bservations, **S**trategy, **I**nsight, **T**eam, **I**nitiate, **V**alue and **E**ncourage. Jackson and McKergow, (2007) describe a solution focused coaching model known as OSKAR which represents **O**utcome, **S**caling, **K**now-how and resources, **A**ffirm and action, **R**eview.

Cognitive behavioural and rational emotive models of coaching include Albert Ellis' well known ABCDE model (see Ellis et al., 1997; Palmer 2002) which stands for **A**ctivating event or situation, **B**eliefs, **C**onsequences, **D**isputation of the beliefs, **E**ffective and new approach to dealing with the issue or problem. Edgerton developed the SPACE model (see Edgerton and Palmer, 2005), which represents **S**ocial context, **P**hysical, **A**ction, **C**ognitions and **E**motions. Problem-solving models have also been developed for training, counselling, stress management and coaching (eg Wasik,1984; Palmer and Burton, 1996; Palmer 1997 a, b) and used within cognitive-behavioural coaching (see Neenan and Palmer, 2001 a, b) and coaching psychology (Palmer and Szymanska, 2007).

The development of the PRACTICE model of coaching

D'Zurilla, Goldfried and Nezu developed a number of problem-solving methods that are well documented and have been applied to a wide range of issues and settings. (D'Zurilla and Goldfried, 1971; D'Zurilla, 1986; D'Zurilla & Nezu, 1999). Wasik (1984) described a simple seven-step problem-solving model that has been applied to the fields of counseling, psychotherapy, management, coaching and training. The steps are (Wasik, 1984):

1 Problem identification

2. Goal selection

3. Generation of alternatives

4. Consideration of consequences

5. Decision making

6. Implementation

7. Evaluation

Palmer (2007 a, b) developed the **PRACTICE** model of coaching which is an adaptation of Wasik's (1984) seven-step sequence. A key and important difference is that the PRACTICE framework includes solution-seeking and implementation methods based on solution focused practice (Jackson and McKergow, 2007; O'Connell and Palmer, 2007). For example, at the start of the first coaching meeting the coachee is given an opportunity to talk about him or herself without immediately focusing on their problem(s), issues or concerns thereby allowing the coach to learn more about them (O'Connell, 2003). During the coaching process the coach will draw attention to the coachee any relevant examples of their competence, strengths and qualities and also build on 'exceptions' when the presenting problem or issue is less of a problem. Throughout the whole process of the coaching meeting, scaling questions are used to monitor where the coachee currently is, if progress is being made and what the coachee would need to do to improve the rating. (For a fuller explanation of the solution focused coaching approach, see Green and Grant, 2003; O'Connell and Palmer, 2007; Palmer, Grant, and O'Connell, 2007).

The **PRACTICE** sequence is described below:

Steps	Possible questions, statements and actions
1. **P**roblem identification	What's the problem or issue or concern or topic you wish to discuss?
	What would you like to change?
	Any exceptions when it is not a problem, issue or concern?
	How will we know if the situation has improved?
	On a scale of 0 to 10 where '0' is nowhere and '10' is resolved, how near are you now today, to resolving the problem or issue?
	Any distortions or can the problem or issue be viewed differently?
	Can you imagine waking up tomorrow morning and this problem (or issue or concern) no longer existed, what would you notice that was different? (An alternative would be to use the standard Solution Focused Miracle Question - see Palmer et al, 2007)
2. **R**ealistic, relevant goals developed (e.g. SMART goals)	What do you want to achieve?
	Let's develop specific SMART goals.
3. **A**lternative solutions generated	What are your options?
	Let's note them down.
4. **C**onsideration of consequences	What could happen?
	How useful is each possible solution?
	Let's use a rating 'usefulness' scale for each solution where '0' is *not useful at all*, and '10' is *extremely useful*
5. **T**arget most feasible solution(s)	Now we have considered the possible solutions, what is the most feasible or practical solution(s)?
6. **I**mplementation of Chosen solution(s)	Let's implement the chosen solution by breaking it down into manageable steps.
	Now go and do it!
7. **E**valuation	How successful was it?
	Rating 'success' scale 0 to 10
	What can be learnt?
	Can we finish coaching now or do you want to address or discuss another issue or concern?

To aid the coaching process and encourage the use of the model outside of the coaching meeting, forms can be used that include the PRACTICE sequence (see Appendix 1). Neenan and Palmer (2001 a, b) suggest that once coachees have become experienced at using the seven-step model, with straight-forward issues they can start to use briefer models to speed-up the solution-seeking process. Examples include:

PIE:
Problem definition;
Implement a solution;
Evaluate outcome.

STIR:
Select problem;
Target a solution;
Implement a solution;
Review outcome.

Conclusion

The PRACTICE model is based on earlier models and frameworks of counselling, training and coaching. Whenever possible, coaches using the PRACTICE model focus on solution-seeking and implementation and avoid problem-talk. The PRACTICE model has been used for business, performance, executive, career, redundancy, health and life/personal coaching, and also to aid stress management, counselling and psychotherapy (Palmer, 2007 a). For an in-depth article on PRACTICE with a case study see Palmer (2007 b) which can be downloaded from *The Coaching Psychologist* website.

Correspondence
Professor Stephen Palmer
Coaching Psychology Unit,
City University, Northampton Square,
London, EC1V 0HB, United Kingdom.
Email: dr.palmer@btinternet.com
Coaching Psychology Unit Website: http://www.city.ac.uk/psychology/research/CoachPsych/CoachPsych.html
Centre for Coaching Website: http://www.centreforcoaching.com

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Biography

Professor Stephen Palmer PhD is Founder Director of the Coaching Psychology Unit, City University and Director of the Centre for Coaching, London, UK. He is Honorary President of the Association for Coaching and Honorary Vice President of the Society for Coaching Psychology. He is Co-editor of the *Handbook of Coaching Psychology*, Executive Editor of *Coaching: An International Journal of Theory, Research and Practice*, and UK Co-ordinating Editor of the *International Coaching Psychology Review*.

APPENDIX 1: PRACTICE STEPS TO SOLUTIONS FORM (© Stephen Palmer, 2008)

STEP 1: **P**ROBLEM IDENTIFICATION
What is the problem, issue or concern? What would you like to change? Are there exceptions when it is not a problem? How will we know if the situation has improved?

STEP 2: **R**EALISTIC RELEVANT GOALS DEVELOPED
What do you want to achieve? Select specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, timebound goal(s)

STEP 3: **A**LTERNATIVE SOLUTIONS GENERATED
What are your options? Write down possible ways of reaching your goals.

STEP 4: **C**ONSIDER OF THE CONSEQUENCES
What could happen? How useful is each possible solution? Weigh up the pros and cons. Use a usefulness rating scale: 1-10

STEP 5: **T**ARGET MOST FEASIBLE SOLUTION(S)
Choose the most feasible solution(s).

STEP 6: **I**MPLEMENTATION OF

CHOSEN SOLUTION(S)

Break down the solution into manageable steps. Now go and do it.

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STEP 7: **E**VALUATION

How successful was it? Use a rating 'success' scale 1 to 10. Focus on your achievement. What can be learnt? Can we finish coaching now or do you want to address or discuss another issue or concern? Review and revise plan as necessary.

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