

## The relationship between GROW and SF approaches for performance coaching

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The following interpretation and application of each approach to performance coaching is influenced by my experience of managing teams in financial services and from working as an external executive coach. I believe that while both similarities and differences exist between these two coaching approaches, they are easily integrated and are complimentary. In a nutshell, I believe the SF approach adds significant value to GROW by encouraging coach's to think in a solutions oriented way and to ask insightful and forward moving questions to achieve positive change (rather than encouraging explanations or focusing on cause).

### Overview:

To use either model well requires questioning and listening skills; the coach is interested in collaborating and co-operating to co-construct a solution that meets the individual's and organisation's needs (so the coach does not argue or dispute the coachee's words). For the SF way there is no set order or phase- we have flexibility in how we move towards an outcome bearing in mind a set of guiding principles and utilizing "tools" which are made up of subtle language that focuses and facilitates the coachee towards an outcome. I imagine a similar approach applies for skilled GROW practitioners. The SF approach can be a stand alone approach or viewed as complementing and enhancing the language and implementation of GROW.

**GROW** as a framework is typically used in Performance Coaching. As with any approach how the coach implements GROW has an affect on the usefulness of it. When organisational coaches use this approach the risk is that it presupposes to some extent there is a business "agenda". This may encourage the coach to listen less and direct or lead based on their own perception of reality, rather than facilitate and elicit the coachee's reality to find a useful platform to build upon. However, this can be true of any approach.

The Solutions Focus (SF) approach to coaching conversations steers the coachee away from un-useful explanations and towards what they can and will do. A key to the success of a SF conversation is in the subtle use of language to elicit positive exceptions and resources (see "Counters" below) which may be used to build a solution. The guiding principles of SF (the acronym for these is SIMPLE) encourages coaches to take a step back to look at the "bigger picture" or the system of interactions to identify other entry points to achieve positive change (eg. we look for positive opportunities in what goes on "between the noses rather than between the ears"). SF is particularly useful as an approach for "tricky" situations eg. where person is unclear on what they want or what the goal is.

Note: It is not possible to do a direct comparison between features and "tools" however an attempt to compare typical questions and show complimentary steps between SF & GROW features below. The blue words/phrases highlighted in the GROW column give examples of language that can direct the

- want to achieve?
- ? Why are you hoping to achieve this goal?
- ? What are the expectations of others?
- ? Who else needs to know about the plan? How will you inform them?

Risk:  
Applying the GROW model presupposes the goal is clear. There are times the coachee may not have or be able to attain sufficient clarity- in this case it is likely an SF approach may yield a better outcome.

- ? What skills and resources did you discover then?
- ? What in general has been going well for you?

**Elicit Future perfect (FP)**

***Surface a detailed sensory representation<sup>1</sup> of success to establish a direction***

The FP isn't the goal. Check is there something coachee wants to be different? If this isn't clear, help them get clearer by asking the FP question. Eliciting the FP provides a sense of direction and sets the context for the following discussion re counters, scale, actions etc. As positive change is generated, we then find out more about 'what works' in this case, which in turn helps find more small actions. To find the coachee's FP we ask questions along these lines...

"Suppose the problem vanishes overnight, how will you know tomorrow that the transformation has happened? How will others know? What will you be doing? "

Note: Why questions are less useful than using How and What questions, the latter are used to facilitate a strong sensory specific representation to "pull" coachee towards the future.

<sup>1</sup> Sensory representation- what the coachee can imagine they will see, hear, feel (even taste, smell) to experience the sensation of what success would be like.

**Reality**  
*(Let them tell their story, invite self assessment, what's happening, when does this happen, what effect does it have, other factors)*

- ? What is the reality of the current situation?
- ? Why haven't you reached this goal already?
- ? What is really stopping you?
- ? Do you know anyone who has achieved that goal? (Closed

**Scale**  
*Scaling provides a subjective measure at any point of the coaching conversation, especially useful for creating sense of achievement between start and finish of coaching conversation.*

- ? On a scale from 1 - 10, where 10 is the Future Perfect, where are you now?
- ? What's helping you to reach that level already?
- ? What would take you a small step (say one point on the scale) higher?
- ? What would be the first tiny signs of progress?

concerned with what personal resources, skills, know-how etc will get them forward (see Counters, Affirm and Small Actions) and how a solution can be developed that they will own and implement.

### Options

*(Brainstorm options, ask - don't tell, empower, ensure choice, how can you move toward the goal, what has worked in the past, )*

- ? What could you do as a first step?
- ? What else could you do?
- ? What would happen if you did nothing? (In SF we focus on what they will do not what they won't do)

Risk: Can stifle eliciting all the possibilities by getting too detailed too soon plus lower energy through getting into a pros and cons discussion when one may not be needed if solution is already clear.

**Counters** *(resources, which includes attitudes and qualities, plus skills, know-how, expertise),*

- ? When does the Future Perfect or parts of the Future Perfect happen? Even a little bit?
- ? When do things like the Future Perfect happen already?
- ? How did you do that?
- ? What skills & resources are you using already?
- ? How have you managed to get as far as you have?
- ? What else..? (this is an important and frequently used question in SF Coaching)

### Affirm

- ? What are you most impressed with?
- ? What skills, resources & qualities can you observe?
- ? What are the grounds for optimism?
- ? What's most impressive about what has already happened?

A feature of this step is we focus on finding positive exceptions which provide information and strategies that may form part of the solution and serve to expand both the coach's and the coachee's horizons. Focusing on this creates a positive environment and engenders hope and enthusiasm for a solution.

### Wrap Up or Will

*(Identify specific steps and any obstacles, write action plan, check for commitment)*

- ? Where does this goal fit in with your personal priorities at the moment?

### Small Actions

*Identify and commit to small actions to move towards outcome- questions are asked based on these points:*

- ? Commit to doing more of what works
- ? Take small steps
- ? Identify actions that can be taken now or tomorrow

energy can more easily be directed to implementation creating enthusiasm for action. Taking small steps creates large ripples across organisations.

We guide coachee with goal setting criteria (eg. SMART criteria) to get clear on the actions they are committing to (it's important for person to own the outcome and implementation approach).

#### Review and environmental check

It may be appropriate to ask questions to consider impacts of actions and also to set in place a review process to affirm changes, support, encourage and facilitate identification and development of next set of small actions.