

Stakeholder Centered Coaching (SCC)

Coaching for Behavioral Change

(Developed by Dr. Marshall Goldsmith)

SCC/Behavioral Coaching—The Basic Approach

Behavioral coaches that work with the SCC model use the same basic approach. First, we get an agreement with our coaching clients and their managers on two key variables:

- 1) What are the key behaviors that will make the biggest positive change in increased leadership effectiveness; and
- 2) Who are the key stakeholders that can help support and determine (6-12 months later) if the stated change has occurred?

There are several different types of coaching. SCC is a behavioral coaching for successful leaders—i.e., not strategic coaching, life planning, or organizational change. Thus, SCC/behavioral coaching focuses on changing leadership behavior.

Involving Key Stakeholders

The coach is *not* the key variable in behavioral change. The Marshall Goldsmith organization conducted research with over 86,000 respondents on changing leadership behavior. As such they learned that the key variable for successful change was *not* the coach, teacher or advisor. The key variables that determines long-term progress are the people being coached and their stakeholders (i.e., their “360”). A motivated, coachable, hard-working client is more important than a brilliant coach.

SC Coaches spend much time with the key stakeholders around the client. By doing this, the clients results have dramatically improved.

How do we involve key stakeholders? We ask *them* to help the person being coached in four critically important ways:

- 1) ***Let go of the past.*** When we continually bring up the past, we demoralize people who are trying to change. “Whatever happened in the past happened.” It cannot be changed. By focusing on a future that can get better (as opposed to a past that cannot), the key stakeholders can help my clients improve. (We call this process *feedforward*, instead of feedback¹).
- 2) ***Be helpful and supportive, not cynical, sarcastic or judgmental.*** As part of our coaching process, clients involve key co-workers and ask them for help. If clients reach out to key stakeholders and feel punished for trying to improve, they will generally quit trying. If clients’ co-workers are helpful and supportive, the client will experience increased motivation and are much more likely to improve.
- 3) ***Tell the truth.*** We do not want to work with a client, have them get a glowing report from key stakeholders and later hear that one of the stakeholders said, “He didn’t *really* get better, we just said that.” This is not fair to my client, to the organization, coach, or client.
- 4) ***Pick something to improve yourself.*** SCC clients are very open with key stakeholders about what they are going to change. As part of the process, clients ask from stakeholders for ongoing suggestions. It helps the stakeholders act as “fellow travelers” who are trying to help the client

improve, not “judges” who are pointing their fingers at my client. It also greatly expands the value gained by the corporation in the entire process.

Steps in the Behavioral Coaching Process

The following steps outline the Stakeholder Centered/behavioral coaching process.

- 1) ***Involve the leaders being coached in determining the desired behavior in their leadership roles.*** Leaders cannot be expected to change behavior if they don't have a clear understanding of what desired behavior looks like. The people that we coach (in agreement with their managers) work with us to determine desired leadership behavior.
- 2) ***Involve the leaders being coached in determining key stakeholders.*** Not only do clients need to be clear on desired behaviors, they need to be clear (again in agreement with their managers) on key stakeholders. There are two major reasons why people deny the validity of feedback, wrong items or wrong raters. By having our clients and their managers agree on the desired behaviors and key stakeholders in advance, we help ensure their “buy in” to the process.
- 3) ***Collect feedback.*** In my coaching practice, I personally interview all key stakeholders. The people that I am coaching are all high potential professionals, and the company/organization is making a real investment in their development. However, at lower levels in the organization (that are more price sensitive), traditional 360° feedback can work very well. In either case, feedback is critical. It is impossible to get evaluated on changed behavior if there is not agreement on what behavior to change!
- 4) ***Reach agreement on key behaviors for change.*** Experienced coaches recognize that a strong approach to coaching is often simpler and more focused. We generally recommend picking only 1-2 key areas for behavioral change with each client. This helps ensure maximum attention to the most important behavior. Clients and their manager (unless client is the CEO) then agree upon the desired behavior for change. This ensures that we won't spend a year working with the client and have their manager determine that we have worked on the wrong thing!
- 5) ***Have the coaching client respond to key stakeholders.*** The person being reviewed should talk with each key stakeholder and collect additional “*feedforward*” suggestions on how to improve on the key areas targeted for improvement. In responding, the person being coached should keep the conversation positive, simple and focused. When mistakes have been made in the past, it is generally a good idea to apologize and ask for help in changing the future. We suggest that clients *listen* to stakeholder suggestions and not *judge* the suggestions.
- 6) ***Review what has been learned with clients and help them develop an action plan.*** As was stated earlier, clients must agree to the basic steps in our process. On the other hand, outside of the basic steps, all of the other ideas that we share with clients are *suggestions*. We just ask them to listen to the coach's ideas in the same way they are listening to the ideas from their key stakeholders. We then ask them to come back with a plan of what *they* want to do. These plans need to come from them, not the coach. After reviewing their plans, the coach will almost always encourage them to live up to their own commitments. A coach is much more of a facilitator than a judge. We usually just help my clients do what they know is the right thing to do.

- 7) ***Develop an ongoing follow-up process.*** Ongoing follow-up should be very efficient and focused. Questions like, “Based upon my behavior last month, what ideas do you have for me next month?” can keep a focus on the future. Within six months we conduct a two-to-six item mini-survey with key stakeholders. They will be asked whether the person (client leader) has become more or less effective in the areas targeted for improvement.
- 8) ***Review results and start again.*** If the person being coached has taken the process seriously, stakeholders almost invariably report improvement. Build on that success by repeating the process for the next 12 to 18 months. This type of follow-up will assure continued progress on initial goals and uncover additional areas for improvement. Stakeholders will appreciate the follow-up. No one minds filling out a focused, two-to-six-item questionnaire if they see positive results. The person being coached will benefit from ongoing, targeted steps to improve performance.

The Value of Behavioral Coaching for Executives

While behavioral coaching is only one branch in the coaching field, it is the most widely used type of coaching. Most requests for coaching involve behavioral change. While this process can be very meaningful and valuable for top executives, it can be even more useful for high-potential future leaders. These are the people who have great careers in front of them. Increasing effectiveness in leading people can have an even greater impact if it is a 20-year process, instead of a one-year program.

People often ask, “Can executives *really* change their behavior?” The answer is definitely yes. At the top of major organizations even a small positive change in behavior can have a big impact. From an organizational perspective, the fact that the executive/leader is trying to change anything (and is being a role model for personal development) may be even more important than what the executive is trying to change. One key message that every should understand is “To help others develop – start with yourself!”