

The ACHIEVE Coaching Model™

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The seven-step ACHIEVE Coaching Model™ focuses on five essential coaching skills – development of rapport, deep listening, creative and open questioning, open and honest feedback, and use of intuition. Here the model is explained, and its practical application is demonstrated in two case studies.

The ACHIEVE Coaching Model™ in practice

In 2002-3 we conducted an international best-practice study of executive coaches in the US, England and Germany. The study has led to the development of the Achieve Coaching Model™. The model is now helping coaching clients to improve their performance and reach their objectives. It has stimulated great interest in the European coaching community and the business world, and has received widespread attention in the UK and European press.¹

What lies behind the success of the new model? Transparency increases trust. Uncovering what the best coaches do, and sharing this with others, can help improve executive coaching practice and help buyers and users of executive coaching services to assess offers for coaching services.

We conducted our study by observing excellent coaches in action, and supplemented our observations with interviews guided by the seemingly simple question: 'What do great coaches do to achieve outstanding results?'

Distilling the results of the study reveals that there appear to be five essential coaching skills:

- development of rapport;
- deep listening;
- creative and open questioning;
- open and honest feedback; and
- use of intuition.

Our study showed that those coaches who gain the best results for their clients were following, consciously or unconsciously, a seven-step process. From this we developed the Achieve Coaching Model™.

The GROW model developed by Sir John Whitmore² is the best-known coaching model in the UK.

Many coach training programmes use this model as the framework for developing the coaching relationship. A recent study (2002) conducted by the Work Foundation and the School of Coaching³ revealed that one third of respondents stated that they used the GROW model, one third said that they used a variety of models, and the remaining third did not know what model or process was used in their coaching activities.

The GROW model was used as the starting point for the development of ACHIEVE.

Key learning points

- ◆ Provides a description of a new coaching model – the ACHIEVE Coaching Model™.
- ◆ Lists key skills for each step.
- ◆ Provides examples of how the model has been applied.

CASE STUDY 2 Making that secret desire become a reality

Sarah James (name changed) is also reaping the benefits of coaching with ACHIEVE. Sarah currently works as a local government officer, but nurtures a secret desire to branch out on her own as a consultant. After more than 20 years with the same authority, she has made good progress, but she was recently turned down for promotion and now sees her way forward blocked, waiting for 'dead men's shoes'. She knows she has transferable skills and experience which she could put to good use elsewhere. However, the recent set-back left her feeling blocked and confused. A friend suggested she should seek the help of a coach.

Her first meeting with Fiona Eldridge went well, and she decided that she would embark on a short course of coaching sessions. In the first session Fiona took time to assess Sarah's current situation and helped her identify the blockers to progress. Sarah commented, 'Just writing them down started the process of generating alternatives, and I began to see ways in which I could move forward.'

Fiona said, 'Quite often I see the same pattern of issues holding someone back from taking the plunge into self-employment. There are usually some big fears around money and isolation and a lack of support. What I do is shake up the client's thinking, so that they can see that there are other ways to maintain a network and help them to test the viability of their idea as income generating.'

Key to Sarah's progress was the development of an action plan. She is very process driven, and having a plan with set target dates launched her away from merely dreaming towards actually doing something. The first steps in this process included a session brainstorming all the possible ways she could earn a living, drawing on her existing skills and experience. Nothing was discounted – in fact, the wackier the idea the better! Equipped with several sheets of flipchart paper, Sarah and Fiona worked collaboratively to evaluate the options and decide upon a course of action.

Several sessions down the line, Sarah has had the courage to make exploratory applications to a number of public sector consultancies. The first responses are looking good. Fiona's role is now to keep Sarah on track, which she does via e-mail and telephone.

The ACHIEVE Coaching Model™ builds upon and enhances well-established coaching models. It is intuitive and helps buyers as well as clients to gain transparency in the coaching process. This increases trust and is an important foundation for further developments and the establishment of quality criteria in coaching.

Top tips

- Encourage the coachee to keep a personal journal charting progress.
- Keep good coaching records – that will help you and the coachee keep on track.
- Broaden your toolkit of tools and techniques – explore alternatives and complementary disciplines to broaden your scope and enhance the coaching experience for your clients.
- Hire a coach yourself.
- Join a professional association to keep abreast of new developments.
- Know when to keep silent.
- Recognise your limitations and refer on to another professional when appropriate.

Reference

- 1 F Eldridge and S Dembkowski. 'Beyond GROW: A New Coaching Model', *The International Journal of Mentoring and Coaching*, vol 1, issue 1, November 2003. It has also received coverage in the *Daily Telegraph* in the United Kingdom, *Der Standard* in Austria, *Impulse* and *Wirtschaft und Weiterbildung* in Germany.
- 2 J Whitmore. *Coaching for Performance: Growing People, Performance and Purpose*, Nicholas Brealey Publishing Ltd, 2002
- 3 *The Manager Coach – Nice Idea or Organisational Necessity?* Work Foundation, 2002

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Sabine Dembkowski is based in Cologne, Germany. She is director of The Coaching Centre. She trained as a coach with various institutions in the US (LoreInternational), UK (School of Coaching) and Germany. Before becoming a coach she worked as a top management consultant for A.T. Kearney and Monitor Company in London. Today she supports leaders across Europe in organisations such as Roland Berger, Citibank, Procter & Gamble, Metro, and Merck.

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A commitment to increasing the transparency of coaching processes

So what is the ACHIEVE model™? It is a logical progression from GROW, and follows the development of a coaching relationship in a systematic manner.

Step 1. Assess the current situation

The coach establishes rapport and begins the dialogue, using open questions. Clients become aware of their current situation and quite often start to recognise behavioural patterns that hinder success.

Key skills

- Sensory acuity.
- Building rapport.
- Listening.
- Asking good questions.

Step 2. Creative brainstorming of alternatives to the current situation

How often have you experienced that feeling of being stuck in a situation, with no apparent options to escape it? All too often that leads to

increased stress. The secret here is for the coach to ask an unexpected question that takes the client out of their stuck state. Brainstorming should be as free as possible, with no limits on what is suggested.

Key skills

- Maintaining rapport.
- Creation of an open, non-threatening atmosphere.
- Listening.
- Asking good questions.
- Giving feedback.

Step 3. Hone goals

We've all experienced goal setting of some sort. Try to be SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time bound) about it. However, for a goal to be really useful, it needs to be meaningful to the individual. The best coaches devote significant time to working with clients to develop and refine the goal they really wish to achieve.

Key skills

- Maintaining rapport.
- Listening.
- Asking good questions.
- Assisting with goal setting.
- Giving feedback.

Step 4. Initiate options

Novice coaches are inclined to rush through this stage of the process, and at times they give advice. How much easier it is to tell someone! But, advice is not coaching ... great coaches take time, ask open questions and let the client generate new options for action and behaviour.

It is only when the options come from the client that real commitment can be generated for action and change. Perhaps one of the greatest skills for a coach is to know when to keep silent and wait.

Key skills

- Maintaining rapport.
- Listening.
- Asking good questions.
- Giving feedback.
- Encouragement and challenge.

Step 5. Evaluate options

In this step the coach works with the client to develop a set of criteria to evaluate the different options. For example, what investment (money, time, energy) and resources are needed to put a specific option into practice? It often helps to provide a visual stimulus by writing things down on paper.

Key skills

- Maintaining rapport.
- Listening.
- Asking good questions.
- Giving feedback.

Step 6. Valid action programme design

It's like building a bridge. The best coaches work together with their clients to bridge the gap between where they are at present and where they want to be. This step requires rigour from the coach in order to gain the client's commitment to action. It's all very well planning, but nothing will happen unless the client actually takes the first step. As with any journey, it is also important to know when you've arrived. So, time is spent on working with the client to recognise when they have achieved their goal.

CASE STUDY 1 Breaking through the glass ceiling

Julia Smith (not her real name) is a busy, successful senior manager working for one of the top ten cosmetics organisations in the world. Last year she was sitting where many of your clients might be – wondering how to make the next year really different and reach her goals. Julia has achieved much in the last 20 years. Every two or three years, her responsibilities have changed and grown until suddenly, in her 40s, she arrived at one level below the board and her career stalled. Not surprisingly, she felt frustrated and demotivated. She was on the verge of leaving the company when someone suggested coaching. She engaged Dr Sabine Dembkowski as her coach.

What happened in the coaching sessions? Julia takes up the story.

'We hit the ground running. Sabine helped me make an assessment of my current situation that included an in-depth personal inventory check. It sounds silly, but reliving some of the "golden" highlights of my career really boosted my confidence and reminded me that I can do it.'

Once the current situation and the positive resources from the past had been identified, Sabine worked with Julia to establish options and goals. One thing was very clear – if she were to achieve her ambition of being at the top, it would have to be in an organisation where she could be authentic and shape the future of the company. Sabine helped Julia establish her personal brand. Working from that blueprint, Julia then got to work on realising her goal. Together they developed options for specific behaviours Julia could display at work and evaluated these options in a systematic way. From session to session Julia committed to embarking on specific actions. She began to take greater initiative at work, wrote proposals, headed up task forces and changed the style of her communication with previously difficult colleagues. Six months after starting coaching, Julia was invited by the board to head up a new company where she would be responsible for the set-up of the whole enterprise. Julia concludes, 'Sometimes I come home and think – is this really happening to me? I felt good after the first session, but that it would have such a positive impact on my career is beyond my wildest dreams.'

Key skills

- Maintaining rapport.
- Listening.
- Asking good questions.
- Assisting with goal setting.
- Giving feedback.

Step 7. Encourage momentum

Finally, the good coach is also a professional nagger. Clients continue to require motivation. To keep them on track, e-mail and phone calls can provide the necessary prompts.

Key skills

- Maintaining rapport.
- Listening.
- Asking good questions.
- Giving feedback.
- Encouraging and challenging.

Case examples

Of course, the usefulness of any model can only be tested in action. We have used the model in leading organisations in Europe and the UK, in both the private and public sectors.

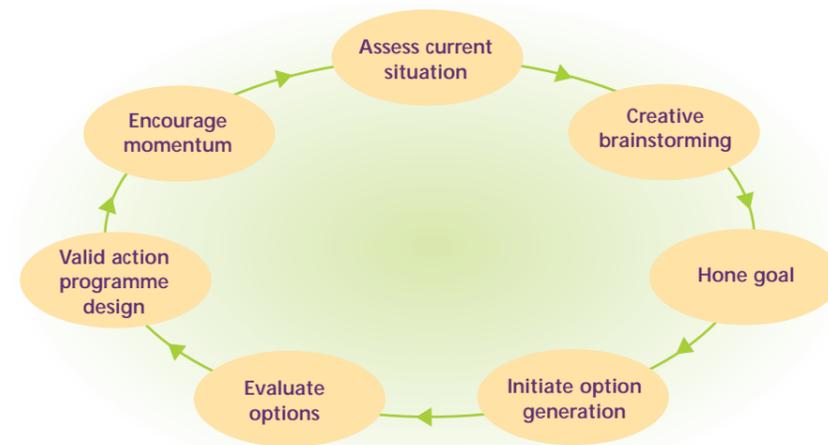


Fig. 1: The ACHIEVE Coaching Model™