

Coaching with OSKAR

A solutions-focused approach to effective and sustainable change

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Looking to enhance the effectiveness of coaching in your workplace? Read on to discover the growing popularity of solutions-focused coaching and OSKAR.

Coaching has become an increasingly accepted feature of the workplace in the last few years. Managers have learned about the power of questioning to raise awareness and responsibility, and specialist coaches are becoming more common. Many coaches will have been introduced to the popular GROW model, devised by Sir John Whitmore in the classic book 'Coaching for Performance', which first appeared as long ago as 1990.

So, where are we to look for new developments in coaching? The Solutions Focus (SF) approach to coaching has been gaining in popularity over the past five years. Developed from the brilliantly simple 'brief therapy' work of Steve de Shazer and Insoo Kim Berg, SF offers a new level of effectiveness to the coaching conversation. Rather than identifying what's wrong or looking for barriers to progress, the focus is simply on finding what works.

This simple yet subtle approach has been found to be effective in many front-line situations. It is now in use in many well-known organisations around the world, including (in the UK) Nationwide Building Society, Walkers Snackfoods and the BBC. Managers and specialist coaches alike enjoy the positive nature and rich sense of possibility that the SF approach brings.

The most popular SF coaching model is OSKAR. Invented by Mark with his co-author Paul Z Jackson for a project in the years 2000, OSKAR is becoming widely accepted as an easy-to-use way to harness the positive power of SF. OSKAR stands for:

Outcome
Scale
Know-how
Affirm & Action
Review

Outcome: This is similar but different to the 'goal' in most coaching models. However, the outcome is not simply the goal of the coachee. It is the difference that the coachee (and those around them) want to see as a result of the coaching. Suppose that suddenly and miraculously overnight, the goal was achieved and the problems vanished. This leads to a discussion not merely about results, but also about small and visible signs that the results are starting to happen.

Scale: To start to find what's working, we set up a scale from 0 – 10, where the Outcome is 10, and 0 is the complete opposite. Where does the coachee rate themselves now on the scale? Perhaps surprisingly the answer to this is not 0, but usually rather higher – perhaps 3. There are some signs that small pieces of the outcome may be already happening occasionally.

Know-how: Many conventional coaches might start to look for 'how to get to 10' at this point. An SF coach, however, knows the power of finding what works. The Know-how phase of the coaching is therefore to establish what is already happening so that we are at a 3 on the scale and not lower. What else? What else? The coach builds up as big a collection as they can find about what is helping.

Many coaching models stress the importance of the coach asking questions and drawing out knowledge from the coachee. OSKAR coaching is no exception. However, when we were creating OSKAR, the clients were very keen to promote know-how sharing throughout the organisation. The search for know-how may be extended to include other people and teams, and even the coaches know-how may be deployed in the conversation. The know-how is of course all about what works or what has worked rather than what won't work or what is wrong.

Affirm and Action: The A in OSKAR is made to work twice as hard as the other letters, as it stands for two steps. **Affirm** is where the coach affirms the positive qualities of the coachee, based on what they have observed during the coaching conversation. Recognising and naming these useful qualities helps to build the coachee's self-belief, as well as enhancing the relationship between coach and coachee.

Action is about finding small next steps to build on what works. We find that often only small actions are required to start making great progress. Because these actions are built on what is working we can usually be very confident that they will be effective, and the coachee will usually be very motivated to try them out after the conversation. This is a big idea about small steps.

Review: In follow-up sessions, we want to find and build on whatever is working. The way to find this is to ask about 'what's better?'. Not whether the action was carried out, or what happened, but anything that is moving things in the right direction. We may go back to the scale too, to find out how much things have improved and what has helped. The coach can be impressed and affirm more about the coachee, and more small actions contemplated.

The benefits of this kind of coaching in practice are:

- Positive and progress focus leads to good motivation for the coachee
- Positive questions lead to excellent relationship between coach and coachee
- Incisive focus on what works leads to rapid and sustainable results
- Focus on know-how of what works encourages shared wisdom throughout the organisation

The Centre for Solutions Focus at Work leads the world in applications of SF in the workplace. For more information about Coaching with OSKAR trainings, articles, books, in-house courses and more, visit our website www.sfwork.com.

Reference

Paul Z Jackson and Mark McKergow, *The Solutions Focus: Making Coaching and Change SIMPLE*, Nicholas Brealey Publishing, 2nd edition (2006)

