



Rethink
Mental
Illness.

Empowering people.

Coaching for mental health recovery. By Rani Bora



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Who we are

Rethink Mental Illness is a charity that believes a better life is possible for millions of people affected by mental illness. For 40 years we have brought people together to support each other. We run services and support groups across England that change people's lives and we challenge attitudes about mental illness.

Foreword

This guide introduces a coaching approach that can often be really useful when it comes to conversations between mental health professionals and the people using their services. We know that the quality of the relationship between mental health staff and the person receiving support is of crucial importance. We hear this again and again from people affected by mental illness and from carers and others who provide informal support. Research on the effectiveness of different types of therapy also points to the importance of the therapeutic relationship.

This booklet can be used by all staff working in mental health services, and might be useful for anyone seeking to have supportive conversations with people who experience mental illness.

The author of the booklet, Dr Rani Bora is a Consultant Psychiatrist in Rehabilitation and Recovery with the Devon Partnership NHS Trust in Exeter, Devon. Over the last six years Rani has studied coaching and recently published an academic paper (Bora et al 2010) where she described how this approach has some similarities with principles of personal recovery as applied in mental health. We are delighted to be able to publicise Rani's insights for a wider audience.

We hope you will find this useful, and that people using mental health services will benefit as a result.

Paul Jenkins

CEO, Rethink Mental Illness

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Purpose of the booklet

This booklet can be a useful guide for anyone working with people with mental health difficulties and especially for mental health professionals keen to embrace a coaching approach in their everyday practice.

‘Coaching’ wasn’t considered relevant in most mental health settings until recently but gradually people are starting to accept how useful it can be. In the previous publication by Rethink Mental Illness ‘100 ways to support recovery’, Mike Slade commented that staff should be using coaching as a specific communication style (Slade, 2009).

This booklet introduces the concept of coaching and its application in mental health. It covers some key aspects from Life Coaching and one of the most recently emerging fields, Narrative Coaching.

Personal note from the author

Working in mental health is rewarding and sometimes challenging. At times I have found myself asking, as you might have done: “How come things are still the same? Am I not doing it right?” In this booklet, I look at some empowering questions we can ask ourselves in order to generate the best possible outcomes.

I am a mental health professional with training in Life Coaching, Narrative Coaching and other holistic approaches to mental well-being. Whenever I have had productive coaching conversations, it has had more to do with my ‘being’ a certain way and engaging in a ‘shared inquiry’ with the person, and less to do with any particular tool or technique used. Also different was that the ‘power’ did not reside in me or the person but it lay in the conversation in which we were engaged. I am mindful that it may not always be possible to use a coaching approach and sometimes it may not be appropriate. Participants need to be willing and able to engage in coaching conversations for any such approach to work.

I hope that this booklet will ignite in us the desire to nurture relationships with people by using a coaching approach. I also hope that it will improve the relationship we have with ourselves, family, friends and our colleagues at work.

Part 1 – What is coaching?

Definition of coaching

‘Coaching is the art of creating an **environment** through conversation and a **way of being** that facilitates the process by which a person can move toward desired goals in a fulfilling manner.’ (Gallwey, 1974)

This widely quoted definition of coaching makes reference to the emotional environment that is created when two people connect and engage in a conversation of possibilities. Coaching is akin to an art, a process of engagement between coach and coachee (the person the coach has dialogues with) through a series of conversations, aimed at bringing out the best in the person being coached. The coachee begins to see opportunities, maybe for the very first time. They can then take a fresh perspective on personal challenges and begin to move in the direction they want to go, at a pace that feels right for them.

Many people see coaching as another tool to add to their ‘tool-kit’. Coaching however can be much more than just a tool; we can adopt

a coaching **stance**. A ‘coaching stance’ is a way of being, a helpful approach to adopt, no matter what the challenge; it is about having a fresh perspective and asking ourselves outcome-focused questions rather than dwelling on problems.

Examples of different types of Coaching

- Sports Coaching
- Business and Executive Coaching
- Team Coaching
- Career Coaching
- Relationship Coaching
- Transformational Coaching
- Life Coaching
- Narrative Coaching

Life Coaching is a goal-directed, outcome-orientated approach which focuses on the *here and now*. The main emphasis of Narrative Coaching is on understanding people's problem stories, listening out for strength stories and helping the person to re-author by constructing a new narrative.

Benefits of coaching

Coaching enables people to 'cope with life challenges, achieve their goals, improve performance and have a better quality of life' (Whitmore, 2002). Once we learn the process, coaching oneself becomes a valuable approach to self-management.

We can use coaching tools to manage how we respond to stressors in life, especially by asking ourselves the right kind of questions that direct us to solutions.

Coaching opens up space for personal reflection. People become more aware of their strengths, resourcefulness and other ways to achieve their goals. This results in improved confidence and self-esteem. It brings about a change in how we see and understand things and events. A person can gain more awareness and be able to challenge themselves by asking – '**Is this my**

perception of reality' or '**is this absolute reality?'** followed by '**What can I choose to believe?'**

Role of a coach

In Narrative Coaching, the coach's task is repeatedly to expand the coachee's comfort zone, and to keep the coachee (and themselves) at the edge of the expanded zone (Interbe, 2010).

A coach facilitates the coaching process. The coach **provides and holds a safe space** within which the coachee can explore issues, hopes and goals, thus creating a healthy emotional environment. The coach invites the person to participate in a process of **collaborative or shared inquiry**, based on trust, openness and transparency. In this inquiry the coach **suspends their judgments and assumptions** of what is possible and what is not possible for the coachee based on past information or their own standards, values and beliefs.

As the relationship strengthens with time, and they make good use of the space that was created, the coach will look at ways to keep nurturing the person and challenging them in order to achieve the agreed outcomes.

Coach does:	Coach does not:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Appreciate – Facilitate – Nurture – Challenge – Empower – Provide opportunities for exploration, experimentation and failure – Make safe space – Behave in a way that is real and transparent, communicating fully 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Solve or fix – Generate results for the person – Give the message that they (as the coach) are the expert and have ready answers to the person's issues – Impose their own reality or meaning or interpretation – Dominate – Go it alone – Predominantly give advice

(Adapted from 'Narrative Coaching' – Interbe, 2010)

Role of a coachee

Coaching is a collaborative process. The coachee needs **to participate** in a coaching conversation. This starts with something as basic as turning up on time and showing an interest in engaging. As the coaching relationship strengthens the coachee takes an increasingly active role in the process.

Coachee:	Coachee does not:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Is open to new learning – Realises that there are no quick-fixes – Is willing to enter into a shared inquiry with the coach – Accepts that they need to take action to achieve whatever they want to achieve – Gives the coach feedback about what's working and what's not working 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Become defensive and threatening when challenged – Blame the coach for their slow progress or the lack of progress

(Adapted from 'Narrative Coaching' – Interbe, 2010)



Part 2 – Coaching for recovery

What is it?

The concept of using coaching in mental health is relatively new. There are a number of similarities between the principles of recovery and coaching (Bora et al, 2010).

Coaching for recovery is about mental health professionals adopting a coaching stance to enable recovery. One-off coaching conversations may seem helpful but for best results these conversations need to be ongoing.

Coaching for recovery is about starting and maintaining conversations of hope and desired outcomes and replacing old disempowering conversations with new ones. This can be used in conjunction with Wellness Recovery Action Plan (WRAP) and recovery engagement and outcome tools such as the Recovery Star (see www.mhpf.org.uk).

Principles of coaching for recovery

(Adapted from ‘Narrative Coaching’ – Interbe, 2010)

Principle 1: You can only take people as far as you have gone yourself

Coaches are prepared to “go the distance” themselves. They are willing to learn through personal experience and self-reflection. They show an interest in being coached themselves as well as coaching others.

Coaches are people willing to learn how to manage themselves.

Principle 2: Coaching is a conversation

Coaching doesn’t need to be a formal procedure. The coach can work informally and have a coaching

Recovery principles	Life coaching principles
Recovery is about building a meaningful and satisfying life, as defined by the person themselves, whether or not there are ongoing symptoms or problems.	People are not broken; they do not need to be fixed. Coaching is about uncovering what someone truly wants and their core values, and supporting people to be aware of their own resourcefulness.
The helping relationship between clinicians and people moves away from being expert/patient to mentoring, coaching or partnership on a journey of personal discovery.	The coaching relationship is a partnership of equals, rather than anything parental or advisory.
Hope is central to recovery and can be enhanced by people discovering how they can have more active control over their lives and by seeing how others have found a way forward.	People have the resources and skills to make any change they want.
Recovery represents a movement away from focusing solely on pathology, illness and symptoms to health, strengths and wellness.	We get what we focus on – the ‘power of focus’.
People are encouraged to develop their skills in self-care and self-management in whatever way works for them. There is no ‘one size fits all’.	People can generate their own solutions. People are ultimately responsible for the results they are generating.
Recovery is about discovering and often re-discovering a sense of personal identity, separate from illness or disability.	The past does not dictate the future. We need to listen to and acknowledge an individual’s story and past experiences but, having done so, support them to create new stories and unlock their true potential by taking action to change their lives.
Finding meaning in and valuing personal experience is important, as is personal faith for some people who draw on religious or secular spirituality.	The spiritual aspect of coaching looks at who we think we truly are i.e. our identity and our purpose in life.

conversation at any time, in any setting, as appropriate. Effective coaches are skilful in shifting old conversations, creating new conversations and maintaining the flow of these new conversations.

Principle 3: Everybody has resources within them, most of which are yet to be tapped

People usually try to do the best they can given their experience, awareness, opportunities and choices that seem available to them. Coaching can help access potential and resources within, something the coachee might be unaware of. Coaching can make possible things that previously seemed impossible.

Principle 4: The person is not the problem. The problem is the problem

This is one of the most fundamental principles of recovery coaching and requires an important shift in perception. It involves the professional's willingness to accept the person's identity as separate from, and not enmeshed with, their illness or problem behaviour and to support the person to make this important distinction. Someone who cannot achieve this separation is disempowered. They will believe that they are the problem, that something is wrong with them, and perhaps therefore that there is no solution. This in turn leads to self-

blame, guilt, feelings of failure and hopelessness.

"I am a schizophrenic" is a common example of a person enmeshing their identity with their illness or problem.

Principle 5: People are multi-storied

The story a person tells about themselves is only one of many possible stories. People have multiple stories; some stories hold people back whereas others empower them (the latter tend to be fewer and are rarely voiced in problem cases). Although we need to honour stories, we should not allow these to get in the way of the person achieving their hopes and wishes. With coaching, we encourage the voicing and re-telling of the 'less-often-told' empowering stories and thereby facilitate people to re-author their 'whole life story'.

Taking personal responsibility

"Nobody can make you feel inferior without your consent."

Eleanor Roosevelt

According to Narrative Coaching, responsibility is a **moment by moment choice** we each make in our lives to 'OWN' our experiences and perceptions (Interbe, 2010).

Each of us views the world through our own perceptions of reality. This is based on our learned/taught standards and values, personal experience and the meaning (views and beliefs) we give events as a result of these. Once we own our own experience of reality, we realise that we have a choice either to react or respond in any given situation.

“Taking responsibility” – what it means in coaching practice.

Imagine this scenario: you hear that someone is making abusive comments about you. The meaning that you automatically give this experience is that the person is attacking you personally when you had done nothing wrong and that they had no right to do so. You lose your temper, shout back at them and believe this person ‘made you react’ that way.

The other person did what they did. In coaching, it is not the other person’s behaviour that is of most relevance as this is not within your control. It is your reaction to their comments or actions that matters.

The alternative scenario is: someone makes abusive comments about you. You take a deep breath and pause before responding, thereby giving yourself time. You realise that the person is very angry for some reason. You then say gently

but assertively that the person’s behaviour is not acceptable, that you would talk to them only when they calm down and walk away from that situation; alternatively you might ask them why they are angry.

These scenarios highlight that **we have a choice**, and that we can choose to ‘respond’ in the most appropriate way. In Narrative Coaching, this approach to taking responsibility by responding rather than reacting is called “increasing the space before meaning”.

Let’s say, something happens i.e. there is a stimulus (event) – we give it a certain meaning – we then react or respond. By increasing the space between stimulus and meaning e.g. by pausing, taking deep breaths and not saying anything offensive, we increase the chances of us responding appropriately. This needs some practice as it is not easy. But with time we can certainly get better at this.

“Responsibility is owning our perception of reality.”

One may ask ‘But how do I own my experiences and perceptions?’ One way of doing this is to acknowledge our feelings, thoughts and actions triggered by another person or event but at the same time recognising that these are based on the meanings

we attach to that particular event. When something unexpected and unpleasant happens, it is only natural to feel bad and attach a very disempowering meaning to that event and experience. What if despite this we were still able to respond and not react? The key is to remind ourselves that we don't need to allow someone else's actions and behaviour to dictate how we behave, that we do have a choice.

We need to ask ourselves – “If I were to take responsibility for the meaning I gave the event how would I feel? What would I do differently?”

Questions to aid reflection

- a. What meanings do I give to events at my work place?
- b. What meanings could I choose to give to these events instead?
- c. How do I choose my responses?
- d. What if I could choose not to feel offended/ angry/ anxious? What could I choose to feel instead?
- e. What experiences am I creating for myself and my life?



Part 3 – Fundamental coaching skills

Connecting with the person

Most of us can relate to another person's experiences and connect with them at some level. Sometimes these connections might be on a superficial level, especially if the two people do not know each other well.

When we take a coaching stance, we intentionally 'slow down' and 'pause' to connect. The coach suspends judgements about the coachee and devotes time for the person. The foundation of any successful, collaborative work is a healthy, trusting relationship between the parties involved.

Generally before embarking on a 'shared inquiry' journey, it pays to invest time in getting to know the person, working alongside them and holding hope for them. It is impossible to predict how long this might take. However, once the person feels they can connect with and trust the professional, it is possible to engage in a coaching conversation and work on the coachee's hopes and wishes.

What else can help connect?

- Look for something good in the person, something that makes you admire the person, i.e. their qualities.
- If you find your judgements about the person surfacing, just notice them and choose to let them go. After all these are just thoughts.
- Remind yourself – 'the person is not the problem; the problem is the problem'.

Using questioning effectively

We, as mental health professionals, often ask a lot of questions to gather information. We do well at putting together a person's problem story – the predisposing factors, family history, personality predisposition, triggers, life events, influence of one's environment etc. We do not do quite as well when it comes to asking questions that can elicit the person's strengths and positive attributes.

Use of 'how' questions rather than 'why'

We have a tendency to focus or even dwell on problems. When we do so, the questions we repeatedly ask ourselves only add to the problem. For example: 'Why did I have to say that?' 'Why did that happen to me?' 'Why did they not take my side?' And so on.

In contrast, when we take a coaching stance we ask 'how' questions. For example: 'How can I make this work?' 'How can I learn something from this?' 'How can I do this differently next time?' And so on.

Use of open rather than closed questions

Open questions give people the opportunity to talk and for us to listen empathically. Asking open questions gives people the opportunity to open up and provide more information about their thoughts, feelings, beliefs and so on. In contrast closed questions elicit a 'yes' or 'no' answer.

During a coaching conversation, ideally the coachee will do most of the talking. For that to happen the coach needs to use more open than closed questions.

Examples of open questions

- What was your learning from that experience?
- Could you say a bit more about that?
- How would you use this to help you achieve your goal? What else?
- Why would you believe that to be true?

Examples of closed questions

- Have I got that right?
- Is this where you want to end this conversation?
- Have you done what you said you were going to do?

‘Being’ a coach – rather than ‘doing’ coaching

What you do as a coach doesn’t matter as much as ‘who you are BEING’ as a coach. According to Martin Heidegger, a renowned German philosopher, ‘being’ is the intentional act of creating possibilities, of creating something from nothing. According to him all possibilities exist only as potential.

Possibilities come into existence in language, through coaching conversations. When the coach is in that space where the ‘latent’ or ‘unexpressed’ potential of the coachee can be experienced, the latter will start achieving results. ‘From nothing we create something; we create what’s possible.’ – Martin Heidegger (Interbe, 2010)

In order to coach people, one must be willing to see the potential in every person.

Active listening and shared inquiry

We all can and do try to listen. Let me ask you this:

When you are with someone, what do you listen out for? Do you listen to uncover what was going wrong and give advice? Or do you listen because you have a desire to understand the personal account of the experience as well as listen for ‘the story that is told less often?’

Active listening is listening with the intention to understand, i.e. actively seeking to understand. The person who actively listens does so not from a position of fixing problems but rather from a position of shared inquiry. Shared inquiry is about entering into a two-way conversation. You as the coach inquire whilst the coachee reflects and goes into a ‘self-inquiring’ mode. The coachee might then come up with ‘less-often-told’ stories. This kind of inquiry demonstrates genuine curiosity on the part of the coach to discover and tap into the coachee’s inner resources.

When you are in a shared inquiry you start noticing and commenting on both **the spoken and the ‘unspoken’**. You are not engaged in a ‘talking to and giving advice’ conversation. Rather you engage in a shared journey of discovery.

Building self-awareness

Most of us have ‘blind spots’ about our inner qualities and about our ability to deal effectively with life’s challenges and achieve our goals. We might be unaware of our own potential and feel inadequate or lack confidence about what we can achieve. Coaching helps build awareness of these blind spots. Feedback, reflection of our own experiences and listening compassionately all help to throw light on these blind spots.

Exercise to build self-awareness

Try this exercise. Stop doing whatever you are doing and spend a couple of minutes in silence. Sit upright with both feet firmly on the ground and relax your muscles as best as you can. Pay attention to your breathing, the gentle rise and fall of your chest with each breath. Start counting your breaths from 1-10 as you inhale in and exhale out. Remember to exhale a bit longer than you inhale. You can repeat this as many times as you like.

Now ask yourself the following questions:

- What have I learned today?
- What have I done well that I could be proud of?
- What have I found challenging? How can I best deal with that?
- When I had that great (coaching) conversation, who was I being?
- Who do I need to ‘be’ in order to experience a great (coaching) conversation?
- How am I being different when I adopt a coaching stance?

In order to build awareness for the other person, you need to be in a space where you are fully aware and present with the person and their story. A good coach makes use of pauses and silence, creating space for whatever comes up for the person.

Keep reflecting back at regular intervals what you think you have been hearing e.g. “you said you did... Could you say a bit more? I heard you say... Is that correct?”

- Who would be surprised to hear that?
- Who would not be surprised to hear that?

(N.B There are more questions in the section on Powerful questions)



Part 4 – Coaching essentials/toolkit

Goal-setting and action planning using “GROW”

People do not normally come to us with a specific goal in mind. They come to us because they are struggling in one way or another, needing help and guidance. They may be clear as to what they do not want i.e. their problems, but often they find it hard to consider what it was that they really wanted instead of the problem and how to move towards that desired outcome.

A coach works with whatever the person brings to the conversation and through a process of inquiry helps the person become aware of what they want and ways of achieving this.

In this section we will consider goal setting using the GROW framework (adapted from Whitmore, 2010) that takes into consideration the current situation for the person, their desired outcome, different options available and action planning.

The acronym GROW stands for Goal, Reality, Options and Way forward. (It helps to make notes and keep records of these goal setting sessions/ conversations)

G = Goal

Questions to aid reflection while setting goals.

What do you want specifically?

Most people set goals that can be quite non-specific and phrased in the negative e.g. ‘I want to lose some weight.’ Encourage people to set goals in the positive and to be as specific as possible e.g. ‘I want to weigh 60 kilos and lead a healthy life by 1st of June.’

Why do you want it (this goal)?

This is to find out how important achieving the goal is for the person. If the coach can support the person to find a big enough “Why” i.e. reason for wanting to achieve the goal, the chances of the person taking consistent actions will increase. Coaches need to explore this as best as they can.

Is this a realistic goal? Please give me your reasons.

How would you know that you have achieved your goal? What would you hear/ what would you see/ how would you feel?

This is an inquiry that allows people to have more clarity about their goals and to envisage what will be different when they finally achieve them.

How much control/ influence do you have over achieving the goal?

Someone might set a goal that requires someone else changing or doing things a certain way. That wouldn't work as they have very limited influence (if any) over the other person's actions. The more control the person has over achieving their goal, the higher the chances of achieving it. If the person has little or no control, they could with the help of their coach seek to redefine the goal such that they now feel more in control. For example, rather than "I want my friend to stop drinking", a realistic goal might be "I want to support my friend to stop drinking".

What positive impact will it have in your life?

What are the downsides of achieving the goal? What can you do about it?

When setting goals people think

mostly of the positive impact. Let us take an example of a person wanting a promotion at work and setting that as a goal. The downside could be that the promotion involves longer and more hectic working hours compared to their current job. It could also involve travelling away from home frequently and hence missing out on family time. The implications these might have on the person's life is important to consider at the time of goal setting.

R = Reality

Exploring the current situation.

What is happening? What action have you taken on this so far? What were the effects of that action? Given that this is your current reality what would be a more realistic goal to start off with?

Although the acronym starts with 'G' i.e. goals, most of the time it might seem more appropriate to start off the process by understanding the current situation i.e. 'reality' and then setting a goal.

O = Options

Alternative strategies or courses of action.

What are the options available for you to move forward? What else? What are the pros and cons of each option?

There is never just one possible way to move towards a goal. Think about the possible options in each individual situation depending on the circumstances and resources available to each person.

W = Way forward

This is the action planning part.

What needs to be done, when, by whom and does the coachee demonstrate the 'willingness' to do it?

What will you do? Will this action meet your goal? What obstacles might you face? How can you deal with these in advance? Rate on a 1–10 scale the degree of certainty you have that you will take action.

Ask the person to commit to a maximum of three small action steps they could take in the next 24 hours that will take the person closer to their goal. This could be something as simple as buying a personal journal, making a phone call, buying a healthy eating recipe book, etc.

Why is this important?

When we set a goal, it is crucial that we take a small action straight away. This motivates us to take action and reinforce our positive behaviour. If we leave it too long, it is likely that we will find excuses for not needing to take any action.

Initially, people may find it hard to engage in this whole process. The more they engage in these coaching conversations the easier they will find it over time. It will give them a sense of hope, direction and achievement.

Other considerations for goal setting:

- Break down the goal into mini goals or milestones that need to be achieved over a period of time. E.g. If someone sets a goal of weighing 70 kilos in six months and their current weight is 77 kilos, they could look at breaking it down to what their monthly target needs to be and work towards that.
- Start with a simple goal. Once this is accomplished, work on bigger goals.
- Motivation to keep taking action needs to be reinforced. Incorporate ways to encourage action-taking behaviour and the setting of achievement milestones. For example, ask the person how they could reward themselves after achieving each milestone. It could be something simple like going for a meal out. If it seems reasonable, ask them to put it down in writing and remind them to reward themselves each time they achieve each milestone to celebrate their success.



- It is okay for people not to achieve their goals. It is important to reinforce the message that as long as the coachee took action and learnt something from the process, it was well worth the effort.
- Set another small but meaningful goal when the person is ready.
- Throughout this process it is important to have ongoing coaching conversations and to make it possible for the person to access the coach for support, should they need it.

Some powerful questions used in coaching

Questions to find out about a person's strengths

- What motivates you? What brings a smile?
- Can you tell me a story of when you felt proud of yourself no matter how trivial you consider it? What traits did you display then?
- What inner qualities do you think you have that make you likeable?

Questions to find out about a person's values

- What's important to you in the context of (work/relationship/family/health)? What else?
- What do you value in life? What does that do for you?
- What will having a (job/partner/children/car) give you that you don't otherwise have?
- What are you currently doing to honour your core values?
- What makes you really happy?

Questions that aid self reflection

- What are you putting up with that you would like to change?
- What would you gain/lose by doing/saying that?
- If you had no fear, what would you ideally do in this situation?
- If you were to take 5% more responsibility in your life what would you do differently?
- What would you see if you no longer had this problem?
- What are you holding on to that you no longer need?
- What do you focus your attention and energy on?
- What would the consequences of that be for you or for others?
- If the problem had a positive impact on you, what would it be?

- What power does the problem have over you? What tricks does it play on you?

Questions that promote hope

- What power do you have over the problem?
- Can you recall a time when hope made itself known to you?
- Who else would know that this type of hope is important to you?
- What were your discoveries about hope that made a difference?
- What's it like hearing yourself talking about hope in this way?
- What is hope telling you about your next step?

Questions about leading a meaningful life

- What would give your life more meaning? Tell me more about it
- Or, can you be more specific?

Other questions to clarify:

- What else?
- How can I best coach you?
- I don't know what to ask you. What is the best question to ask you now?
- What do you mean by that specifically?

Part 5 – Coaching challenges

Attachment to the desired outcome for the person

There can be a temptation for the coach to fix problems and to want to generate results for the person. We may find ourselves giving advice about what people should do.

Indeed many coachees might expect the coach to fix their problem and there could be a general expectation that professionals have to improve things for people who use their services. In most situations this may indeed be the case. There is a perceived value in this and nothing wrong with it. However this is not coaching. When taking a coaching stance, professionals need to let go of their attachment to ‘their’ desired outcome for the person. Otherwise, they could end up doing the ‘fixing’ for the coachee and in so doing take away the person’s sense of control or achievement.

Notice when you are in a ‘problem solving’ and ‘advice giving’ mode and when you are in a ‘shared inquiry’ mode.

Having ‘enough’ time

Everyone has limited time and there always seems to be too much to do. As a professional, you may increasingly find yourself going through a mental checklist of things to do when you are with someone – e.g. do a CPA review, update risk assessment, arrange visits, review care plan etc. You may feel that you hardly have any time to ‘do’ coaching. It is important to remind yourself the following –

When you are being a coach, it doesn’t matter what you are doing. You could still take a coaching stance, irrespective of the task in hand, or the time restriction.

Where people are in their recovery journey

Some commonly encountered issues in mental health:

- Person unwell and/or detained and not wanting to engage.
- Person engaging but chaotic lifestyle choices perceived as hindering recovery.
- Person is perceived as very demanding and exhausting all resources but not taking responsibility.

Some people might start off unwilling or unable to engage in a coaching conversation. As they advance in their recovery journey this could well change over time. The coach has no idea what the coachee might bring up in a coaching conversation and so needs to be open to possibilities.

The coach might assume that the person is not ready for a coaching conversation, that the conversation would not lead anywhere. This might be a correct assumption but it doesn't matter if the conversation doesn't lead anywhere. If we can suspend our judgements about the person and whether or not they are 'coachable', we might have amazing conversations with them.

Whatever people bring or don't bring to the conversation is fine.

As a recovery coach, we need to be able to embrace the uncertainty – of not knowing what the outcome of a coaching conversation would be and still carry on adopting a coaching stance.

Part 6 – Summary

In this booklet we have looked at taking a coaching approach in mental health practice. This is about empowering individuals to generate their own solutions to problems and taking small but consistent steps towards self-management. Some may already be using this approach and wish to look at new ways of developing these skills further. For others, the approach described here will be relatively new. Like any new approach, it needs to be given time and practice. It is not important to ‘get it right’ and generate positive outcomes every time.

I would encourage you to make a personal commitment to adopt a coaching stance today. You owe it to yourself and the people you serve.



Appendix

Example of a coaching conversation

Coach- Hi Mary, how are you today?

Mary- Not good. I have been pretty stressed lately.

Coach- I am sorry to hear that. Would you like to tell me a bit more?

Mary- There are so many things happening all the time. I just don't know what to do.

Mary goes on to describe different things that she was finding stressful. She broke up with her partner of five years a few months ago and is struggling to cope. She is not sleeping well and a close friend of hers has been unwell and in hospital. The coach asked a few more questions and thought that Mary was going through a mild depression.

1st approach

Coach- Mary, looks like you are going through a difficult time. Shall I make an appointment for you to meet up with your doctor?

Mary- I am not sure what the doctor can do for me.

Coach- Well Mary I am worried that you may be getting depressed again. The doctor could review your medications.

Mary- I don't want any change in my medications.

Coach- It will still be good to see your doctor, don't you think?

Mary- ...maybe

Coach- Good, in that case I am going to call his secretary and arrange an appointment for you.

2nd approach

Coach- Mary, if you could change the way you are feeling at the moment, how would you rather feel?

Mary- I want to feel less stressed and overwhelmed.

Coach- Could you re-phrase this in the positive? Language is very powerful

and I want you to describe how you would rather feel.

Mary- okay I want to feel calmer and relaxed despite everything else that seems to be going on.

Coach- Tell me what needs to happen in order for you to feel calmer?

Mary- Life is pretty stressful at the moment. If I had a better grip on things I would feel calmer.

Coach- Of the three things you mentioned that are troubling you at the moment, which one do you think is the most important to get a grip on?

Mary- I am concerned about my friend's health.

Coach- What needs to happen in order for you to feel less concerned?

Mary- I really don't know. She is doing all the right things but the doctors haven't figured out what is wrong with her yet. I want to help her during this difficult time but don't know how to.

Coach- It is difficult isn't it? How is she taking it?

Mary- Oh she is worried too but doesn't want to admit it.

Coach- What is within your control that you could do to support your friend?

Mary- I guess I just need to be with her and give her time.

Coach- And how might you go about doing this?

Mary- I have been dreading to call her for some time. Maybe I can just give her a ring and arrange to meet up. But I don't know what to say?

Coach- What is it that you think she wants to hear from you?

Mary- I don't know really. Maybe I can just be there for her. Maybe I don't need to say much, just listen to whatever she needs to say.

Coach- You started off by saying that you are concerned about her health. Would reaching out to her and connecting with her make you less concerned?

Mary- Not really. However my avoiding contact has not worked either and I am more worried as I don't know how she is taking it.

Coach- You said you were feeling overwhelmed already? What is it you need to do so that you can be there for your friend and at the same time not feel overwhelmed by her experiences?

Mary- I need to look after my own health.

Coach- Okay, and how would you do so?

Mary- I used to like going out for long walks. When I am out and connecting with nature, I feel at peace.

Coach- Good. Is this something you want to start doing again?

Mary- I guess I ought to.

Coach- Well you do have a choice – you can choose not to do it but feel stressed or you could start doing it again and feel more at ease. What would

you choose?

Mary- I think my friend needs me and in order for me to be supportive, I need to do it.

Coach- What else could you do?

Mary- I haven't been to my yoga class for a while. I could do that too.

Coach- That's great! Would it be useful for you to meet up with your doctor too?

Mary- I don't think so – not at the moment, I think.

Coach- okay. But if you feel it could be helpful, you can of course always go to see your doctor. Let's come back to how we started off this conversation. You said you were feeling quite overwhelmed and stressed. How are you feeling at the moment?

Mary- Funnily enough, talking to you has helped. I feel I have a few things I could do differently and feel slightly more in control. Thank you.

Coach- That's good to know, Mary. I will meet up with you again in a week's time and we can talk about how you have been getting on.

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