Promoting Change Through a Lens of Personal History: Part 3—Motivation & Self-Efficacy

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Previously, we have explored the importance of creating trust with your client (in-group membership) and the roles schemas play in coaching. Now that the client feels safe and secure and has explored new schemas with a plan for action, it's time to get off the sofa and act.

Talk is cheap. Action takes more energy, and many barriers to action can pop up. An individual may fear the unknown or have a fear of rejection or failure. They may feel powerless or generally unmotivated. This is often where people get stuck.

Researchers Edward Deci and Richard Ryan spent many years exploring motivation. The model they came up with places motivation into one of three categories: intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation and amotivation. Individuals who are intrinsically motivated will naturally feed off challenging tasks. Doing the task is, in and of itself, rewarding to these individuals. One can simply lie back and watch them fly off to wherever they discover they need to go. Extrinsically motivated individuals require some external goal or force to motivate them to action. It is likely more difficult to get extrinsically motivated individuals moving since they require constant care and feeding. Lastly, the amotivated ones are not motivated by either internal or external rewards. They simply lack motivation altogether.

A few simple questions can help you determine how your client is motivated. Perhaps you ask about the most difficult goal they attained and then follow up with a question about why they wanted to reach that goal. Find out what drove them to do this. The intrinsically motivated individuals will talk about challenges, feelings of success and other factors internal to them. Extrinsically motivated individuals may talk about working for a reward like money, besting a peer in a contest, or some other external stimuli. Of course, you'll be able to find the amotivated people pretty quickly since they will struggle to give examples of challenging goals they have attained.

An important and related construct is that of self-efficacy. Psychologist Albert Bandura championed this concept that individuals high in self-efficacy feel confident that they will be able to undertake actions needed to attain certain goals. Note that self-efficacy is not necessarily confidence that the goals will be attained, but rather confidence that actions will be taken that could lead toward attaining the goals.

Once again, questions can provide insights regarding the client's sense of self-efficacy. These may be something along the line of, "How confident are you that you can carry out your proposed actions this week?" or "How certain do you feel you can take the first step forward on your proposal this week?" Of course, helping your client manage this progress and holding them accountable provide a good framework within which to keep the focus on moving forward.

Understanding these three fundamental concepts, in-groups/out-groups, schemas, and motivation, should enhance the effectiveness of your coaching. Remember that building trust and intimacy with your client is a deepening of the sense of an in-group, reinforcing a feeling of safety and security. Exploring a client's current schemas and encouraging them to explore new ones can make the landscape of possible solutions appear much more expansive. And finally, investigating how motivated your client seems to be, or how confident he or she is to carry out the necessary actions, can play an important role in how successful they are at attaining the goals they set forth.

Calls to Action

- Do you see yourself as primarily intrinsically motivated, extrinsically motivated or amotivated?
- As you reflect on coaching clients who you now understand as being amotivated, how did the engagements work out and what ultimately got them moving if they were able to do so?
- What are some ways you have tapped into a client's intrinsic motivation?

Further Reading

Bandura, A. (1977). Self-efficacy: Toward a unifying theory of behavioral change. *Psychological Review*, 84(2), 191-215.

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