

# Coaching for Success Through Skills Assessments

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## Why Use Assessments in Your Coaching Practice

Coaching for personal growth and development is a hot topic. Especially as people are learning to navigate a new reality during the pandemic. Our social constructs are out of sync, making our inner compasses feel skewed. The need for skilled coaches with a full tool bag to help individuals and organizations get back on track is stronger than ever. As an *Excellence Coach*, I find that using skills assessment tools is one of the greatest strengths for an effective coaching contract for three reasons.

The first reason I advocate the use of an assessment tool is to allow the client to self-assess the skills they have. What is important in the dialogue that follows is that the scores are a step removed from the individual – the coaching conversation is about the scores, not the person. This takes the pressure off the conversation and helps strengthen the coaching relationship because it is not an assessment of the quality of the person, merely a skills assessment. By talking about the scores as a snapshot on that day, at that moment, the conversation is easily framed around which skills they would like to strengthen and steers clear of any perceived personal flaws that would need to be defended. The coaching dialogue becomes a conversation about the document and a shared planning of what the client wants to work on.

The second advantage to using an assessment tool is accountability and success tracking. Assessments can be retaken at any time and the client is able to see progress over time. Without an assessment tool it is difficult to determine the impact or success of the coaching sessions. Without an assessment the client may perceive their work with you as successful if they are in a good mood, or have had a good week, or strong sales numbers. However, through use of an assessment tool, there is an objective measure of their growth regardless of how other things are unfolding in their life.

What I have found as a third advantage is that using an assessment tool generally leads to longer coaching contracts, too. Because the client can see their growth in the scores, they begin to look for other skills they want to develop with you. Their recorded successes also lead to referrals as they share the change in their scores with others – and everyone shares their successes!

## Selecting an Assessment Tool

With so many choices on the market it is hard to know which assessments are best to represent your coaching style and meet the client's needs. I am a strong proponent of evidenced-based practices and often tout the adage of being *research based, data driven, and results oriented* to describe my professional nature. It is important to research assessment tools that you clearly understand and are comfortable administering and interpreting with the client.

The first consideration is whether your client is soliciting services for personal or professional growth. Personal growth may be due to some struggle that they are seeking resiliency skills to better cope.

Personal growth may also come from a need to learn better self-awareness, communication, or empathy skills to improve relationships and confidence. Though many of the skills someone may seek coaching for benefit their personal lives, those same skills will greatly enhance their professional lives. One of the most profound insights I gleaned as a coach is hearing people question if the assessment I have given them should be answered based on their personal life or their professional life. As a coach, I feel that with strong emotional intelligence skills they should be answered the same – or applicable across all situations.

A professional coaching opportunity may have a specific request to help improve customer service or sales ability. However, sometimes executive coaching is the goal and leadership skills or team building skills are needed. It is not uncommon to have a highly successful employee promoted due to their personal performance only to find they do not know how to develop success in others or lead a team. This is where leadership or executive coaching can become a valuable asset to the organization. The cost of developing those skills in an already talented individual is more cost effective to the organization than losing that employee through frustration or dropped performance because they had been promoted above their skills level. As a coach, I find it much easier to develop leadership skills in a talented employee than to develop talent in a new employee.

Another coaching opportunity that has recently gained momentum is educational coaching. This is a culmination of personal and professional development with a wide impact in both higher and K-12 education settings. Especially during the pandemic, the social – emotional learning (SEL) of all students has become a forefront conversation as schools begin to reopen. But the emotional wellbeing of the faculty and staff are just as important. I also carry the belief that it is not reasonable to ask teachers to develop SEL if they are not emotionally trained to do so. To me, it is like asking an English teacher to cover a Math class. We would not do that without providing some sort of proficiency for the English teacher before stepping into the Math classroom, so why would we not develop our teacher's emotional intelligence first, then let them teach the students?

## **How To Use an Assessment in Your Coaching Practice**

So, by now, I am sure you are asking yourself, “Where can I find one of these assessments? Which one should I use?” I am glad you asked! There are many on the market and each one serves different purposes. It is important to find ones that you understand and can explain, but also serve the needs of the clients. One that I use a lot for coaching individuals is a transformative emotional intelligence assessment called the Skills for Career and Life Effectiveness (SCALE) assessment (Nelson & Low, 2019). Though they have a suite of assessments I find this one to be applicable to most people across most industries and is available online for convenience. This is additionally impacted by the need to offer virtual coaching during the pandemic.

In my coaching practice, I like to have my client take the SCALE assessment and then we just talk about the results. Remember, we are having a conversation about the results, not about the person. I explain what the scores indicate and, together, we come up with an overall interpretation of the report. Coaching is a self-guided process; we are just the facilitators of their growth after they choose what they want to work on. The next step is to have the client pick one to three skills they want to work on. It is my experience that they cannot really work on one emotional intelligence skill without impacting others, so I ask them to pick the one they have the most interest in developing. I also share that the one they pick

needs to have the most meaning to them, not necessarily the one that is the lowest of their scores. Having meaningful choices in the process further deepens the coaching relationship and the likelihood of successful growth. From this decision point I am able to help the client design an action plan to help them meet their goal with checkpoints along the way – meaning additional assessments to see how their scores are changing.

## **Key Takeaways from Coaching with Assessments**

Some quick takeaways from this process are to remember that the assessment piece is a coaching tool that give a discussion point that is non-judgmental for the client, allows the process to remain client directed, and a big factor in developing the coach-client relationship. The use of an assessment tool provides accountability and progress monitoring to make space for long term coaching and referrals because their success is documented. There are different assessment tools that can be employed depending on whether you are coaching individuals professionally or personally and across many industries, including education. Though there are many assessment options available, know your tools. Pick one, or some, that are meaningful to your client and you are able to explain in a credible way. Also, be mindful to choose a vetted assessment tool to ensure better results for your clients and credibility for you as a coach. Finally, everything you do with your client should be based on their results and personal goals. As you develop the action plan with your client, the goals, objectives, and growth measures should be crafted around their skills development as evidenced by their assessment.

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## **About the Author**

Dr. Kimberly Davis, Founder and Principal of Top Performance Leadership Group, LLC, serves as a public-school district administrator while speaking, publishing, coaching, and consulting business and educational organizations. She is further credentialed as an Appreciative Inquiry Facilitator and a Transformative Emotional Intelligence (TEI) coach. Her most recent projects and publications can be found on her website [www.MotivatingExcellence.com](http://www.MotivatingExcellence.com) and she can be reached at [Kim@MotivatingExcellence.com](mailto:Kim@MotivatingExcellence.com) or via phone at 361-259-2225 (Texas) or 479-685-2197 (Arkansas)

## **Reference**

Nelson, D. B., & Low, G. R. (2019). *The SCALE®—Skills for Career and Life Effectiveness*. The Skills for Career and Life Effectiveness Assessment. <https://doscale.com/>