Creating Action

Let’s get moving into action
Let’s get moving into action
If your life’s too slow, no satisfaction
Find something out there, there’s an attraction
If you hesitate now, that’s a subtraction
So let’s get moving girl into action
From the song ‘Into Action’ by Tim Armstrong

The lyrics above to Tim Armstrong’s song, nicely explain the meaning of creating action. If you don’t take action then there is no satisfaction, even a subtraction. Movement created by taking action creates a momentum and this in turn shifts us out of our current situation. This movement, shifts the energy in our bodies and helps to even change our perspective. This is very apparent when having to make a decision. Remember a time when you had to make an important decision. You probably weighed up all the information, went back and forth, weren’t sure which way to go forward or which decision to make. Whilst this was going on you may have felt a great level of anxiety, not knowing what the future held for you until you made your decision. Finally the time comes when a decision must be made. You choose and in that moment, you take a big breathe and release all the anxiety and feel relieved. This is the beauty of creating action. It moves you to a new space, time, and journey.

Creating action is not always easy. However it is critical to our feeling of success and achievement. Action is doing. It is experiencing something. Action is an opportunity for you to experience something new, to learn. Action is about your development, the growth of you as a person. To take action is like a plant growing. If the plant doesn’t grow, it dies. How many times have you observed people who are not passionate about life, who are not happy in life? At some point in time these people chose not to grow, to stop developing themselves, to stop taking action. Now you can see the results of this. Taking action can be fearful as there is uncertainty around taking action and you won’t know where you are moving to or what the ‘other side’ of taking the action will bring you. So the choice is to either never know and to stay still or to take the action and to create the life you want, to grow and develop & learn and blossom, like the flowers on a healthy beautiful tree.
To create action requires personal discipline. The result of this personal discipline is success and personal achievement. There are times when we may be tired or other events are happening in our life that distract us. It is at this moment in time that you need to get focused again. Loss of focus means loss of action.

Let's look at a case study to understand the importance of creating action. Peter was working in a large furniture store as the manager. He had a background in accounting and managed several staff. He loved managing a business and had many business colleagues that he regularly networked with. He volunteered to be on the board of the local hospital and was very active in this role. He was highly regarded in the community in which he lived. He was married and had two children and had recently purchased a new home, that he was repaying. One day a colleague of his mentioned a new role for a manager in the hospital. The person they were looking for had to have good accounting skills and managerial skills. Peter's experience of being on the board meant that he knew the business well. The hospital administration spoke to Peter and suggested that he apply for the position as he was highly regarded and would most likely be successful in his application given his skills and board responsibilities and involvement. Peter went away and spoke to his wife about the job opportunity. This was exactly the career direction that he wanted to go in. This would really challenge him and stretch him in his development as a manager. However he also knew that there was not as much job security in this role as the hospital was vulnerable to government funding changes. His wife outlined how they had just purchased a new home and that their children were now going to school and that although the new job would give them extra revenue, the job security was a concern. Peter weighed this all up. He knew his current role really well and was highly respected by his staff. A change this big would have many ramifications on his family and his life.

He would have to work longer hours in getting up to speed with the new job, it was a much bigger job in terms of responsibilities and skill.

After much deliberation, Peter decided it was safer and easier to stick to what he knew rather than make such a big change. The job security also concerned him and as he made his final decision not to apply for the new job, he felt a feeling of sadness overwhelm him. Over the next few years, Peter lost motivation and gradually started to loss confidence. His decision to stay in what he knew meant that he also had resigned himself to not having to learn or stretch himself any more. His disappointment at not taking the job and facing his fears around it, had left him in a still place.
As the years passed, so too did the security around the furniture business until finally the store closed. Peter found himself looking for work and resorted to asking a friend to help him. His confidence in finding a new job was very low and he chose to help out his friend in business instead of taking on a new career challenge. The new role with his friend required less skill and slowly overtime Peter became dependent on his friend to provide him with work. Peter didn’t participate in any courses, didn’t develop himself in any new way. He stopped his community involvement and his enthusiasm slowly faded. He didn’t enjoy his job but he didn’t feel he could find another job or had the confidence to go in search of one.

Peter’s story is not uncommon. The choice he made many years ago was made around creating safety and fear of change. His wife was also fearful of the changes a new career would bring. Peter stopped taking action, Peter stopped learning, Peter stopped developing himself, Peter stopped growing.

Success

- Success is the achievement of the things in life we are passionate about.
- Success is not what we have been told or instructed to believe.
- Success is personal and can only be achieved when measured against the goals we have set for ourselves.
- Success is a change in the way we view life.
- Success is moving forward.
- Success feels great.

Self Application

Creating action can be challenging – what next step to take, how to take it, etc. Let’s go through a process to get you into action.

- You are sitting in a café drinking coffee and it is five years from now. You pick up a newspaper and read a story about yourself. What does the story say? What have you achieved, what are you known for? Draw or write what you see.
- List all the things you have achieved by this time?
- How are you feeling now that you have achieved these goals? Can you visualise yourself?
- What are you most passionate about?
- Write a list of the top 5 things you have achieved.
- Prioritize this list. What is number one all the way to five?
Under each item identify 5 steps you could take to begin to achieve this goal?
Share this information with someone you trust and who will support you.
Tell your support person how you want them to support you in achieving these 5 steps and 5 goals.
What is the first step or action you need to take now to achieve these goals?

After you have gone through this process you may observe an increase in energy in your body. It is very exciting to be thinking about moving forward, achieving the vision you have just created. There will be times along the way on your journey to achieving your vision where you feel as though you have lost sight of it. Think back to the energy levels you had and the feelings you had at the moment in creating your vision and getting clear about it. Think about the first action steps you took and what you have achieved so far. Acknowledge your achievements. Bring yourself back to the moment of energy positively flowing through you, the excitement rising again. Exercise, meditate, do yoga, or whatever you need to do to bring yourself back to this moment of energy and focus. Think about what you have already achieved and what you are grateful for. Notice how you are now feeling. You will notice that your energy has gone from an inward reflecting, perhaps even negative self talk conversation to an outward focus. This shift in energy will propel you forward and you then need to work out what is your next action step.

**Reflection**

1. Describe a time when you felt like you were really moving forward. What did you put in place in your life to create this?
2. What supports do you have in your life to achieve your goals and to keep you moving forward?
3. You have completed the action process above, how are you feeling?

**Coaching Application**

Coaching is about being in action. The client has hired us because they want to move forward and they want change to get results. As a coach we cannot do it for them. But what we can do is enthuse them into wanting to take action and then support them to take the many small steps that will make it happen.

Ideally, your client will come to coaching prepared to generate his or her own action. The very act of seeking out the services of a coach often indicates they are ready for some
change in their lives. Many clients will come into the coaching session with a plan of action and a strategy. Many will have thought of the steps they need to take to make progress or may ask you for suggestions about how they can move forward. The main service these clients ask from you is to listen, ask questions to help them to clarify their plans and to acknowledge their development.

Other clients may find it more difficult to move into action and may lean on you a little more in the process. When clients don’t generate their own action, you can ask them some Motion Questions to encourage movement. Here are some examples of a Motion Question:

- What’s the first step you need to take?
- What would someone, who is fearless, do about this?
- What needs to happen now?
- What would it make sense to do now?
- Can you come up with some action steps to take this week?
- What is the risk involved in this if you do not do it?
- What is stopping you from moving forward?

Inviting a Client to Act

As the client is discussing an issue, many suggestions for possible action will come to you. Try to hold off on providing suggestions. There may be many possible ways to move forward and, one thing we know for sure is that the one the client comes up with him or herself is the one they are most likely to follow through on. This can be a real challenge for a new coach, particularly if they have come from a previous career, such as consulting, counselling or management, where they are expected to come up with suggestions. If this is the case for you, you may need to develop a strategy for holding back on suggestions. If you feel a suggestion coming on, try counting to 5. More often than not, if we give clients the space, and ask the right questions, they will make their own action suggestions.

If, however, the client indicates that they want to move forward, but don’t come up with a suggestion for action, particularly if it is coming to the end of the session, you may need to provide a little more “scaffolding”. A gentle way to do this with the client is by invitation. As a coach, you may say: “I invite you to take half a day out of your schedule this week to finish setting up your home office. Do you think you want to do that?”

The wonderful aspect of setting up an invitation for your client to take action, is that there is no pressure or obligation for them to accept your invitation. You are simply offering the
invitation to expand their vision and to trust them to choose whatever is best for them. Ultimately, they make the choice. If they choose not to take up the invitation, that is fine and you shouldn’t push them. Ideally they will make the invitation their own. For example “I don’t really have a half day, but I could work on it between 7 and 8 each morning this week until it’s done.” Frequently, making an invitation supports the choice for the client and they take up the opportunity.

Gaining a Commitment

We tend to avoid making commitments to ourselves, or others, unless we absolutely have to do so. Alternatively we make them too easily and then let them slip if they become inconvenient. For example, “I promise to eat less ice cream!” Unfortunately, when we avoid making promises, or we take promises lightly, this allows our personal forms of sabotage to come to the surface, like laziness or procrastination. Once this cycle begins, it becomes difficult to get out of the habit or produce results.

Making commitments creates a great structure for causing things to really happen. By making a commitment, you are holding yourself responsible and accountable to take a specific action to produce a given result. By encouraging clients to make commitments to you and themselves, you will assist them to create shifts in their lives, to change their behaviour and achieve their desired goals. Be impeccable with your word and encourage clients to be impeccable with their word.

A suggestion for action becomes a commitment once the specifics are tied down. Just requesting someone to be in action is not specific enough. As their coach, we must clarify the action expected and when it is expected to happen. This level of specificity may be the very thing missing for your clients to move forward. You can do this by simply asking further questions. For example, when they say: “Okay, I’ll talk to my boss,” you might ask, “When will you do that?” When they say: “All right, I’ll make more sales calls this week,” you might ask, “How many will you make?” When they say, “I’ll have to be better at going to the gym,” you might ask, “How many times will you commit to going to the gym in the next 30 days?”

It’s important not to push the client into a commitment that they don’t really want. It is much more powerful for a client to keep their word than to set grandiose goals. If a client says, “Okay I’ll commit to going to the gym three times this week” and you really think they could manage five times, let it go. Their commitment won’t work if they are driven by guilt. Their commitment also wont work if the coach owns or takes responsibility for the commitment.
This is the sensitive fine line that a coach must operate within, on one hand enthusing the client and supporting them in moving forward and creating the action but on the other hand not taking on the responsibility of the action if the client is resisting. Every coach wants their client to feel great and to move forward to achieve what they have set out, but it is the client's life and a coach will only get caught up in a client's life if they have lost sight of their own actions.

**Failure to Act**

If you find that the client is not willing to take action, or that they commit to action but then don't follow through, then there may be something blocking them from wanting to move forward. They may not be ready for the next step. When this happens, talk with your client to find out what is holding them back. Perhaps they have Underlying Beliefs (UB) that are interfering with their stated commitments. They might even have a UB which says: “this coaching thing is not going to work, its easier to just drift”. Perhaps you are inadvertently pushing them in directions that are not right for them, or not challenging them enough, or not recognizing and acknowledging the significant but small steps that they are making. A good question to ask them would be: “What’s the best way that I can support you now to move into action?”

**When the Past Clouds the Future**

Each of us remembers certain events in our past as big dramatic stories of our lives. We often focus on why we are in our current situation and provide all the details leading to this situation. The implication is often that the state we are in now is an inevitable result of past actions and activities. Unfortunately the next logical step in this mode of thinking is that things have to stay the way they are and can’t change for the better.

Your client may want to provide you with a lot of details about the major events of their lives. For example, in order to discuss looking for more fulfillment in their work, they may feel the need to tell you how they got into their current job, why they are in this particular job and what main obstacles have prevented them from moving beyond the present job. Sometimes these stories provide an important context for the client to orient themselves and you to their future plans. However, sometimes they are a way of restricting forward movement. If a client is talking about the past, be alert enough to determine if the client is stuck there or not.

Sometimes, looking back at the past may be the very thing which is preventing the client from moving forward.
When your client relates their story, keep in mind that the information you are receiving may be a mixture of both facts and personal interpretation. Specifically, when it comes to listening to all the reasons why they are at a certain point in their life, bear in mind that the client has developed their story to explain the way things are now. While all of the reasons feel “real” to the client, they have all been constructed after the event. Contrary to popular belief, hindsight is not 20/20! We all look at the story of our past through the window of our present circumstances.

When your client is talking to you and you feel they are getting stuck in the past, you can use a number of techniques to shift their thinking forward. A gentle way to do so is to wait for them to pause and simply ask a question. “So then how would you like it to look?” “What would you like in your life right now?” Often this will do the job. Another question is “What have you learnt about yourself from this past experience?” and “How can you apply that learning to the current situation?”

If your client chooses to keep dwelling in the explanations of the past rather than answering your questions about the future, persist with helping them change their focus. Be open and clear with your client about the coaching methodology. Educate them that coaching is action based and present-future focused and help them to discern when they are operating in this mode and when they are slipping back.

**Focusing on Strengths**

Unfortunately in life there are some people only too willing to focus on weaknesses and shortcomings and precious few willing to focus on strengths. Some people mistakenly think that the goal of life is to beaver away at shortcomings, all the while denying themselves the opportunity to shine. Others think that it is their role in life to point out the shortcomings in others. These people have accepted the myth of “constructive criticism”. The reality is that “constructive criticism” is never constructive at all. We have also become trained in believing that knowing someone’s weaknesses is the way to help them develop and grow. We ask people to make their weaknesses strengths and we even believe at times that we should be good at everything – no weaknesses. This perspective is damaging. Every person has strengths that are unique to them. It is what makes them special. To build on these strengths is to grow their uniqueness.

Here’s an important coaching secret: what we focus on grows. If we focus on our strengths,
they will take us to great places, if we focus on our weaknesses, they will dominate our lives and prevent us from moving forward. One of the best ways to move someone into action is to focus on their strengths and to acknowledge them. A client’s weaknesses are only ever an issue if they prevent him or her from building on their strengths. We all have weaknesses - however, unless they prevent us from achieving our goals, they are not worth the focus of a coaching session. In fact, they are not worth focusing on at all.

Did you know that the writer F. Scott Fitzgerald was a terrible speller? No? It didn’t prevent him from writing The Great Gatsby, one of the most important novels in American literature, read by millions the world over. So why would you know about it? It simply doesn’t matter. If Fitzgerald had focused on overcoming his spelling, instead of on writing novels, what a waste to the world (and to himself) this would have been.

Ask the client if they can re-frame their weakness (i.e. see it in a different way). Don’t let a client’s weakness (or perceived weakness) stand in the way of their action.

Setting Goals
Anyone who has accomplished anything worthwhile has consciously or unconsciously followed through on a goal. Goals have the power to keep us focused on a purpose. They support us through difficult times when it may be tempting to give up. Goals “push” us to stay focused so we can achieve them. One of the ways that a coach can support a client to remain in action is by supporting them to set and achieve goals. A person who wants to get the most out of life often has a number of goals simmering at the same time, in their personal and business life.

The extent to which clients set goals and the level of detail of those goals varies enormously. Some people have a very general sense or vision of the direction that they want their lives to go and want support in making very short term goals that head them in that general direction. Other people respond well to elaborate goals and plans with detailed milestones and points of accountability leading for 5 or 10 years into the future. Whatever the structure or form the goal takes, a coach can provide a level of support and accountability that a client would otherwise not have.

Goals and values
As coaches, we support our clients in creating value-based goals. Before any goals can be set, the client must first determine what their values are. Orienting the goals around the
client’s values will make them compelling and will pull the client forward. Most of us live full and busy lives with competing demands for our precious time and energy. We need to prioritise so that only those things that really matter get our full energy. By creating goals based on our values we ensure the optimal return on our investment of time and energy, because our success will be in the areas that matter the most to us.

There are many reasons why people make goals for themselves that are not aligned with their values or are not as closely aligned with their values as other goals. A common reason is pressure from others such as family and friends. An example of this is the person who feels pressure to pursue a particular career because other members of the family are in that profession, or it has a high status in their family and the community. Or the person who feels compelled to take on a family business or farm or to marry early.

Another reason why people make goals for themselves that are not aligned with their values is social pressure from peers. Perhaps they move in a social circle where everyone has a particular type of house or car, or perhaps a holiday house. All of a sudden they find themselves working towards a goal of buying a new house without ever thinking about whether this is what they really want in their lives, or whether it aligns with their values. This misalignment can present itself in two ways. Firstly they can achieve the goal and then be left wondering why it doesn’t make them as happy as they thought it might. Alternatively, it can manifest itself as setting goals that are never achieved. For example, a client can say that his goal is to buy a more prestigious property but then spend all his spare money on other things. Not achieving the goal can then damage the client’s self esteem, making it harder for him to set more meaningful goals in the future.

A common reason why people make goals is because its ‘the right thing to do.” This is why giving up smoking and going to the gym appear so frequently on lists of New Year’s resolution. These are both admirable goals and, if pursued for the right reasons, will reap rewards. However, making a goal because it is expected of you is unlikely to result in success. Staying motivated and committed will be difficult if your goal is not aligned with your values. You will be far more likely to succeed in a goal that helps you to be aligned with your better self, and which supports your vision of the way the world should be. These sorts of goals will not only be more achievable, but will bring the most lasting joy.

Creating a Process
Once a client is in a place where they want to begin setting goals, there are any number of
tools, systems and strategies that you can provide for them to plan and document their goals. It’s important that whatever process you offer that it supports the client and doesn’t drive them in a direction of its own making. A process or system has values attached to it so ensure the values are aligned with the client. New Year’s resolutions are built around a particular belief and if your client doesn’t hold this belief then they will not create goals around this time. As with all techniques there is, of course, no hard and fast rule. Making and keeping goals is an art rather than a science. There are many paths to successful goal achievement.

Although there are many ways to achieve goals, there are a few “tried and true” principles that you can use to support your clients to achieve their goals.

1. **Keep goals up front.** A good question to ask a client when they have developed a set of goals is “How can you keep those goals in sight so that you don’t forget about them”. The client may then choose to write them down, put them in a prominent place or review them daily. They may choose to create an “affirmation” or positive statement about each goal that they repeat to themselves each morning.

2. **Be on the lookout for goal hijackers.** Goals and actions must work together. If a client has a goal of spending more time with his or her family, and they then consider taking on a job that includes huge amounts of interstate travel, then their goal is likely to be hijacked. Keeping goals upfront is a good way for them to avoid this. Another way is for you to ask them: “How will this decision support your goals?” or “Will this take you closer or further from your goals?” Remember the client has every right to put aside goals that no longer serve them. The support you are offering is gently leading them through a thought process which compares their actions to their goals so that they don’t inadvertently sabotage them. If they go through this process, but then choose to let a goal drop away for other reasons, suspend judgement.

3. **Remind the client that goals are a marathon, not a sprint.** Swaying from time to time happens to all of us. It is the journey that counts. One of the reasons why clients shy away from setting goals is that they fear that they will be criticized for not reaching milestones. It’s essential that they know that their coach will never criticize or judge them but will provide support to them when they fall over the inevitable hurdles that get between them and their goals. Setting a combination of short and long term goals is important. Long-term goals provide a vision, short-term steps along the way help us to remain focused and to feel a sense of achievement.
Remember to always look for the acknowledgement – the ways to highlight great things about your client.

4. **Remain flexible.** We shouldn’t encourage clients to be so rigid in reaching goals that they close themselves off from opportunities that suddenly present themselves. As clients achieve success they move from the realm of the “known” and discover things that they “didn’t know they didn’t know”. This new information then impacts on their goals. It is a natural and positive thing for clients to alter goals or to simply let them go. The difference between failure to meet a goal, & simply letting the goal go because it no longer serves us comes back to our values. By keeping focused on a client’s values they can feel free to rework goals when necessary to match their evolving “reality”.

5. **Support:** Some goals can be achieved alone, but some require the support of others. For example, a goal to keep a house more tidy and inviting requires the support of everyone who lives there, not just the client making the goal. Similarly, there are many workplace goals that require the consent of a number of players. When supporting a client to make goals, it is worth asking them whether the goal requires the cooperation of others and helping them to develop strategies to either gain the support of the other players or alternatively to reshape the goal.

6. **Structures:** Clients are much more likely to achieve goals if they have structures in place to support them. When clients are making goals you have two roles. One role is to enthuse them, the other is to make sure that they maximize the chance of success by putting in place structures. Some of the things we can ask are: “What can you put in place to make this goal easier to achieve?”

7. **Phrase goals in the positive, instead of the negative.** Clients will have much more success in achieving goals if they feel that they are being pulled towards something positive rather than pushing themselves away from something negative. There are a number of ways that you can support them to work for what they want, not for what they want to leave behind. One strategy is using positive language to mirror the client’s language. For example, if a client says, “I want to leave my dull and unrewarding job and get a better one”, you could respond, “OK, what kind of job would make you feel fulfilled and excited to get up each day for work”.

8. **Negotiate accountability.** Some clients want you to be a strong accountability
partner. They expect you to remember their goals and to question them about milestones. Other clients may find this intrusive. They may want to only discuss goals with you in their own time and may not want to return to them with you at all if things are going well. It's important to negotiate the level of accountability they require. A coach should never assume that their role is to hold someone to account for goals unless the client specifically requests this. If a client is discussing goals, or has asked you to look over their goals, a good question to ask is “How can I best support you to achieve these goals?” or “Would you like me to be an accountability partner for these goals? How would you see that working?”

9. Often we get locked into a goal, feeling perhaps that the goal is “a must have.” If we do not achieve the goal we may feel like a failure. Here is your opportunity, as a coach, to re-frame the situation so the client can go for the goal, but not get locked into it. Your clients will be free to set much bigger and higher goals with a relaxed state of mind. If your client focuses only on the end result they will miss the journey. They won’t be present and as a result may not notice that they need to alter the route they are taking and adjust the goal.

10. Celebrate! It is so important to celebrate the achievement of goals. Celebrate the achievement with your client and encourage them to celebrate their achievements. Encourage them to celebrate the small steps. A powerful question to ask a client is “How are you going to celebrate reaching this magnificent goal?”

Recognizing Action

Remaining in action is a fundamental of coaching. At the beginning of the relationship, it is important to make it clear to the client that you expect them to be in action. It’s important, however, that you take your cue from the client in regard to how much action is enough. As a client works towards their goals, what might seem to you to be a small step could be a huge leap for him or her. A shift in thinking could be the most substantial achievement that the client makes in a year. Alternatively, steps that you consider challenging, the client may move through easily. In order for movement to be sustainable, the client needs to move at a pace that is challenging but manageable for them.

When it comes to action, the three most powerful tools are acknowledgement, acknowledgement & acknowledgement! Also acknowledgement is essential. And did I mention how important acknowledgement is? Get the picture? The most powerful way to
encourage action is to acknowledge it when it occurs. Simply by pointing out how far a client has come, or how well aligned their actions are, can be a fantastic motivator to continue in their path of growth. People often don’t realise how far they have come until it is pointed out to them. This is a powerful service offered by the coach.

You may be the only person in the client’s life who acknowledges their growth. You may be the only person who knows about their most important goals. Having someone acknowledge how far they have come can make the journey seem light and full of joy and ensure that the client gets the very most out of the coaching relationship.

Reflection

1. What is the role of Action in coaching?
2. What do you think are the advantages of asking clients for specifics of their actions?
3. Think about a goal that you have set for yourself in the past that you achieved. What were the factors that allowed you to achieve that goal?
4. What role does acknowledgement play in taking action? the most powerful results.

Enhancing strengths

The next step is to take is to support the client to discover their personal strengths. Most people are aware of their weaknesses, but have not thought too much about their strengths. They may even take their strengths for granted; or believe that because they are good at something, so is everyone else. This may then lead them to assume that their strengths are not really special.

You can coach clients in creating a Strengths Inventory by brainstorming with them what their strengths are. A client may not be able to articulate all their strengths right away, but you may be able to help them. During the coaching process, notice when the client demonstrates a strength and point it out.

As the client proceeds to create action in their life it will be important to draw on the strengths they have when things become difficult. In the process of working on their action plan, the client may forget what their strengths are if the process becomes difficult or discouraging. As the coach, it is up to you to remind the client that they have the power within themselves to complete what they desire. Support the client to draw upon their strengths in order to move forward. During this process of awareness and growth for the client, the techniques of encouragement and endorsement will be invaluable for the coach.
The client will need to be acknowledged for the steps they are taking and encouraged to continue on the path.

Focusing on a client’s weaknesses doesn’t support them in moving forward, however, it is important to be aware of them so that they don’t get in the way. It is more effective for clients to think in terms of “distractions”, “barriers” and “roadblocks” rather than “weaknesses”. The term “weakness” implies an inherent flaw in a person’s make-up. The terms “distraction”, “barrier” and “roadblock”, on the other hand refer to short-term situations. They don’t sound immovable. They sound manageable. They are not general statements about the person. They only exist in relation to the person’s strengths.

The problem with a traditional analysis of “strengths and weaknesses” is that it gives weaknesses the same status as strengths and implies that people should be working on them simultaneously. In the clients mind, however, any focus on weakness is bound to amplify it. People will remember criticism long after they have forgotten praise. Research indicates that when asked to recall important emotional events, people will remember four negative ones for every positive one. (Roberts, et al, 2006) What this means is that in a traditional analysis of strengths and weaknesses, clients are getting four times as much information focus on weakness as strength! As coaches we need to provide a counterbalance to this negativity.

A more constructive approach is to ask client to focus on their strengths and set goals that build on their strengths. Only after their strengths are thoroughly explored should the focus turn to distractions, barriers and roadblocks. Have the client tell you three things that may create a distraction, or even a roadblock, as they move along their action path. For example, if a client wants their working life to be more peaceful, a distraction may be:

- Being chronically late
- Clutter
- Draining relationships

Often, what supports a client to take action are not the things they add to their life, but rather the things they take away from their life. Be prepared to coach the client in creating an action plan to remove what is getting in their way and preventing them from being successful. By removing the roadblocks – before they create a problem – this will help them in the long run. Ask the client to think about strategies that can remove the barriers. You can also ask them how you should coach them when these obstacles do appear. This will create a structure for providing powerful coaching.
Gathering resources to support the action

Setting up structures to support the actions that need to be taken will be an important step in the process of achieving goals. To be successful in the process, the client will benefit by preparing ahead of time before setting out on their journey. Coach the client in creating a list of what they will need to do, both internally and externally, to prepare for the journey. This may include aspects such as creating time every day for meditation, writing a journal or exercising. It may also include getting their finances in order, or creating a strong support system.

**Goal-setting** – Often people think that goal setting is the end of the action process. On the contrary, it is only the beginning. Once the goals are established, the client will need to create an action plan in order to reach the desired goal. One goal may have many sub-goals that need to be accomplished before achieving the final desired result. Creating an action plan supports the client to develop a strong structure with which to work.

**Prevent slipping into old patterns** – As the client proceeds into the path of creating their desired goals, temptation might slip in and the client may take a few steps backwards before moving forwards. If this happens, understand that this is normal. There are many reasons why people fear success and unconsciously sabotage their own development. This is normal human behaviour. As a coach, this situation provides you with the opportunity to acknowledge the client for the work they have done so far. It also provides you with the opportunity to encourage the client to keep moving forward despite the difficulty.

A common pattern of development is for clients to quickly achieve their initial goals and to then have a setback. This is often because the first goals they achieve are more obvious and therefore more achievable. As they develop, clients may then move on to tackle more significant goals. These goals may be blocked by more entrenched behaviors. At this point, the client needs a lot of encouragement and needs to be enthused into maintaining their progress, even if this progress is slow. It is important to acknowledge the client's efforts in maintaining a forward focus, even if you are not seeing a lot of action.

**Creating an action plan** – Once the client works through the process and has established the goals that enthuse them – that they feel passionate about – it is time to create an action plan. This plan will create a structure for the client to work with. By creating an action plan, the client will have a road map to follow, as well as a process to track successes and
challenges. This action plan is a powerful tool for coaching since it allows the client to actually track their progress and visually see the benefit of the coaching process.

**Positive affirmations** – Positive affirmations are powerful statements for the mind. They can be useful for moving someone into action. They have a tendency to create what one really wants. The process of writing down affirmations is liberating, easy and usually effective. This process requires us to simply say a positive phrase repeatedly. This can be done in front of a mirror, by writing them down, or by simply saying the affirmation out loud or silently anywhere.

Affirmations are also a good tool to use when negative self-talk creeps in. Whenever you catch yourself saying something negative, like, “I can’t do this,” or “I am stupid,” change the negative self-talk into a positive message by using a positive affirmation. Unfortunately, in our world we are inundated with negative messages. Whenever you turn on a television you encounter unrealistic images about what people should look like, how many material things they should have and what their relationships should be like. If you don't meet these ideals the message is clear: you are not attractive enough, you don't have enough material things and your relationships are inadequate. It's important to have strategies to counter this avalanche of negativity. Positive affirmations are useful to remind you of the “reality” of your life and to brush away doubts.

Have the client come up with several affirmations that will support them in moving forward. Also, have them write it down and place the affirmation(s) where they are visible to the eye. A fridge door or bathroom mirror work well. You may also request that the client write down their affirmations every day. This is an excellent way to create focus in the right direction.

**Focusing on solutions** – When creating action, it is more useful to focus on the solution rather than on the problem. That doesn't mean the problem is to be ignored. It just doesn't become the focus of the process itself. What is more important than the problem is to discover what will solve it. Once we figure out what works, then the solution is to do more of that. If we discover what does not work, than figure out what needs to change and do that instead. Coaching is about taking action and moving forward. As long as we focus on the solution, we will continue to move forward. The key to moving forward and staying focused on solutions is to understand that once you know what works, do more of it. When you discover something that doesn't work, do something different. Doing the same thing over and over and expecting to get different results is fruitless.
Build on past successes – One of the most powerful tools to use in coaching is to build on past successes. Reminding the client of past successes can provide a shift in perspective. It also allows the client to recall moments when they were successful. By anchoring on to this past experience, the client can tap into the success and use it to keep them focused.

A tool for tapping into past successes is to create a Success Life Line. Have the client draw a line on a piece of paper. At the left side of the line, have them write the date when they were born. Starting from the left side and working toward the right, have them write the date and a short statement of every success they have had since then. For example, winning a spelling bee contest, graduating from school, or having a baby. These are all examples of when they completed something successfully.

Once the client has completed the Success Life Line have them write down what strengths they used to achieve this success. This will help develop their inventory of strengths. It will also provide a real life example of when they used those strengths. Whenever the client becomes discouraged they can review their success life line and tap into the power of that moment to gain encouragement.

Create a list of encouraging role models – Support your client by discovering who their role models are and why. This will help the client decide how they want their own life to be and what it will take to create what they really desire. Role models can be very powerful in providing courage and inspiration to follow through with those things that we might not otherwise think we can possibly do. Role models let us know what is possible for us. If they can do it, so can we.

If your client does not have any role models whom they admire, then challenge them to find them. Request that they go to the library or the internet to do some research. Ask your client to find biographies or autobiographies of five people that have qualities that they admire. Once they have their list, request that they write a short description of the role model’s life. Then have them write down the qualities they admire in the role models and which qualities they wish to emulate. These role models can be from someone who is alive, deceased, someone they know, or someone famous and notable.

Enlist the help of a support team – As the client begins to take action, they will need the help of a support team. This team will consist of people they can depend on to keep them moving forward. As their coach, you are automatically on their support team. However, this is not enough. The client only spends a short amount of time with their coach each week.
Therefore, in order to have success in this process, the client must surround themselves with people that are going to be helpful and encouraging.

In addition to spending more time with people that are positive and supportive, the client will also want to manage their relationship with negative non-supporting people. This may mean either decreasing the time they spend with non-supporting people, or, if this is not possible, putting boundaries in place about when, how and for how long they interact. This most likely will be a difficult step for the client to take. Nevertheless, it will become easier as the client begins to realize the positive changes that begin to take place in their life along with the action steps they take.

Creating action is about setting up a good solid structure for the purpose of moving your client forward. As a coach, you can help your client achieve what they desire by simply creating action.

Reflection

1. Reflect on your own experience: How have you felt when others have encouraged you to take action when you doubted your strength, or ability in a specific area?
2. What are your top 10 strengths? How do these support you in your development of your coaching practice?
3. Think of one goal that you will have for the next month. This may be a self-contained goal, or it could be part of something much bigger – like setting up your business! What structures do you need to put in place to enable you to achieve your goal?
4. Make a list of five people that you most admire and describe why you like them. What are the attributes that you want to make your own?
5. Who is on your support team? Is it big enough? Are there others you need to engage with more to support you in achieving your goals?