

Mindfulness in coaching: choosing our attitude

Article

Accepted Version

Passmore, J. (2018) Mindfulness in coaching: choosing our attitude. *The Coaching Psychologist*, 14 (1). pp. 48-49. ISSN 1748-1104 Available at <https://centaur.reading.ac.uk/81929/>

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Published version at: <https://shop.bps.org.uk/publications/publication-by-series/the-coaching-psychologist/the-coaching-psychologist-vol-14-no-1-june-2018.html>

Publisher: The British Psychological Society

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Mindfulness in Coaching: Techniques: Choosing our Attitude

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Abstract

This short article focuses on a specific technique: Attitude Choice. The paper is part of a wider series of techniques papers on mindfulness coaching published in *The Coaching Psychologist*. The paper offers a short description of the process and when this technique may be most helpful within a coaching conversation. It builds on the papers in the previous editions of TCP, which have briefly reviewed the science and potential for mindfulness approaches in coaching and other techniques.

As a technique paper, I have deliberately kept the discussion short, but for those interested in the wider evidence behind the application of mindfulness, a more detailed review is included in earlier papers, as well as other techniques which can be used alongside attitude choice (Passmore, 2017a, 2017b and 2017c). For a comprehensive review, readers may wish to review Michael Cavanagh, and Gordon Spence's critical review of the mindfulness literature (Cavanagh & Spence, 2013)

Key words: Mindfulness coaching, meditation, coaching psychology.

Introduction

This paper is one of a series of papers focusing on mindfulness techniques that can be used by coaches with their coachees (Passmore, 2017b; Passmore, 2017c). In this paper the focus is on helping coachees to be more aware of their attitudes through being more mindful, and using this approach to be choiceful in selecting an alternative attitude that would facilitate individual in the tasks they are facing during the day ahead.

Attitudes and work productivity

We can all think of a time, whether we are a psychologist, a professional coach or a passenger on the 'Clapham Omnibus' (Greer, 1932), how our attitude has positively contributed to or adversely effected the performance of a demanding task.

The relationship between our cognitions, our behaviour and our emotions is the very essence of psychology, as well as sitting at the centre of cognitive behavioural approaches to behavioural change.

Some have suggested that mindfulness makes similar links between these three aspects of what it is to be human. However it does so by explicitly bringing these aspects in to the conscious awareness of the coachee. For this reason, mindfulness, and mindful coaching (Hall, 2015) is thus continuing the wider CBT tradition, creating along with approaches such as Acceptance and Commitment Coaching (Anstiss & Blonna, 2015) and Compassionate Mind Coaching, (Anstiss & Gilbert, 2015), collectively creating what could be considered to be a third wave of CBT approaches. These new cognitive behavioural approaches have been shown to be equally effective as other CBT approaches (Hofmann & Asmundson, 2008).

The challenge for coaches is to help coachees to bring their awareness to the attitudes they hold. Secondly, to link this attitude to an awareness of how this influences their performance.

Exercise: Meditation to Actively Choose your Attitude

This exercise can be offered to clients as a meditation to help them connect with themselves and to refocus on what is most important to them, helping them reset their intention for their day, or the next part of their day.

We spend time planning our goals and action; what we want to achieve in a day. This exercise for a mindful meditation offers the opportunity for the individual to reflect and prepare how they want to be; their approach or their “attitude” for the day (or the coming hour).

In undertaking the task it may be helpful for the coachee to start by making goals, objectives or task explicit, as part of their plan for the day.

The exercise is useful because it:

- Helps the coachee to prepare and select the appropriate attitude, for their task.
- Builds consciousness around their being, helping them recognize that attitude, energy and outcomes are connected, and can be influenced.

Here is what you do:

- Invite the coachee to take a few slow breaths
- To focus on themselves, being aware of their body, any bodily sensations or tensions in their body (a 3 minute body scan can help at this point)
- Now invite the coachee to ask who they want to **be**?
 - o What values will inform how they engage with others?
 - o What assumptions do they wish to hold about others' behaviour, or maybe about a specific person's behaviour
 - o How would they like others to describe their attitude or approach
 - o What attitude can best serve the tasks they need to complete?

Conclusion

This technique is short and simple to use, and can be completed in less than 5 minutes in a coaching conversation. It helps to bring the coachees' awareness to the fore and inviting them to make a conscious choice on the attitude which will enable them to best achieve their task or role. In using this practice with clients I have found many find it liberating that they can choose how they think about others or events, and that this choice is within their gift.

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