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Coaching and Occupational Therapy

As we learn more and more about coaching, it seems clear that coaching has much to offer OT. This article will briefly explore the nature of coaching and possible ways it could integrate with OT.

Coaching is difficult to define as it is as broad as it is deep. Many people talk about GROW (a well known coaching model) but there is much, much more to the world of coaching. In a purist sense coaching is about transformation not just changing your life and setting goals. An experienced coach has many models, tools, techniques and processes with which to help their client transform or change.

A workable definition we could use at this point is given by Whitmore (2002): “Coaching is unlocking a person’s potential to maximise their performance.” He continues that the goal of a coach is to “build awareness, responsibility and self-belief”.

As you read this and more about coaching, you may hear yourself say “but that’s what OTs do” or “That’s what OT is about!”. In essence there is similarity between the philosophies of OT and coaching but the tools and techniques are different.

Another definition of life coaching could be: “An enquiry into life” (unreferenced source). All enquiries involve asking questions, being curious, thinking differently, raising awareness and generating more questions! Other types of enquiry include scientific research, counselling, market research, think-tanks, inquests etc.

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Occupational Therapist’s who coach

Find out how coaching and O.T. can “fit” together and how OT’s can use coaching in their day to day work with clients, patients and colleagues.

Coaching for OT’s

Find out how coaching has helped OT’s start their own businesses, develop projects, reduce stress at work, or just reignite their passion for OT.

There are many ways of taking the "best bits" from coaching and integrating the knowledge and learning of coaching into OT practice:

- OT's may train as professional coaches e.g. in private practice
- Coaching is "done" alongside traditional OT activities
- Coaching skills are used as an approach within an OT model or framework

How does "coaching" fit within an OT model?

The Model of Human Occupation (Kielhofner 2002) conceptualises humans as open systems. The volition, habituation and performance components all interrelate within the physical and social environment. Change within one part affects all parts of the system and the environment. Using coaching processes and skills we can see that all parts of the human system can be accessed.

Volition: Personal causation, values, interests

Examples of coaching processes which access this sub system include:

- Values elicitation (Whitworth et al 2005)
- Work Values Assessment Tool (Foster-Turner 2006)
- Tackling limiting beliefs and Gremlins (various)

Habituation: Habits, roles

There are many coaching processes which access this subsystem including:

- Balance coaching, Work Life Balance Tool (Foster-Turner 2006), Wheel of Life
- Choosing who to be. Different "resourceful selves"
- Disney Strategy (critic, dreamer, realist)
- Modelling (NLP)

Performance capacity:

Coaching processes include:

- Goal setting. Funnelling goals.
- Drawing goals; now and future
- Ideal model/ ideal job/ ideal day
- Time line

(There are many, many more coaching tools! This is just an illustration)

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Due to the dynamic, interrelated nature of people, the environment will naturally change and respond. Coaching can also be used to address environmental concerns: human and non-human.

The **Kawa** (river) model (Iwama 2006) is a more recent OT model which has been developed in response to the need for a more culturally sensitive model which incorporates Eastern beliefs and philosophies. When we first learned about the Kawa model we were impressed by the use of the metaphor of a person's life as a river. In this model, the flow of life or energy is affected by various elements: rocks "Iwa" (circumstances or impediments to life flow eg illness, injury, impairment), driftwood "Ryuboku" (personal attributes and resources eg values, character, personality etc), river walls and bottom (environment). In this model "Sukima" is the space between these obstructions - the place where life energy still flows: the promise and place for OT to take place and coaching too?

What excites us is that in "Co-active Coaching" by Whitworth et al (2005) they use a similar metaphor and diagram of a river with rocks, which they use to illustrate coaching issues.

Essentially coaching works in a "hands off" way to improve the flow of a person's life by working to reduce obstacles such as limiting beliefs, conflict of values, motivational problems, confidence, etc.

Conclusion

Just as an OT may use CBT (Cognitive Behavioural Therapy) or counselling skills with a client, coaching can also be used within an OT model as a legitimate tool.

To learn more about coaching and OT you might want to consider attending one of our workshops.

Please email for dates and locations of the workshop jen@otcoach.com and sign up for the otcoach newsletter to keep up to date with events and news.

References

Iwama M K (2006) *The Kawa Model: Culturally Relevant Occupational Therapy* (1st Edn) Churchill Livingstone Elsevier

Kielhofner G (2005) *The Model of Human Occupation* (3rd Edn) Lippincott, Williams and Wilkins

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Whitworth L, Kimsey-House H, Sandahl P (2005): *Co-Active Coaching: New Skills for Coaching People Towards Success in Work and Life* (2nd edn). Davies- Black Publishing, US.

Whitmore J (2002): *Coaching for Performance: GROWing People, Performance and Purpose* (3rd edn). Nicholas Brealey, London.

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