

Grant, A. M. (2016). What can Sydney tell us about coaching? Research with implications for practice from down under. *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research*, 68(2), 105.

What is a practical theoretical framework for coaching? Does coaching actually *work*? What makes a difference in the coach-coachee relationship? And how can findings from coaching better contribute to a general understanding of psychology? These were the questions that Anthony M. Grant from the Coaching Psychology Unit (CPU) at the University of Sydney sought to answer in an article in the *Consulting Psychology Journal: Research and Practice*. Grant put together the findings from over 150 papers published through the CPU - one of the longest-standing international organizations in the domain of coaching research – in order to provide a broad evidence base in answering these four central questions he posed to readers.

To answer the question of what is a practical theoretical framework for coaching, Grant advocates for a solutions-focused cognitive-behavioral approach (SFCB). SFCB is based on the notion that attaining goals requires centering on the reciprocity that exists between thoughts, feelings, behaviors, and the environment, and orienting coaching toward focusing on strengths and constructing solutions on the basis of these strengths. Grant further observes that SFCB based coaching can be standardized in a straightforward manner, and applied with consistency across different coaching relationships; particularly given that it is largely based on widely validated instruments for measuring phenomena such as resilience, well-being, workplace engagement, anxiety, stress and depression, and self-efficacy.

Addressing the much loftier question of whether coaching actually works, Grant cites research demonstrating that effective coaching facilitates goal attainment and enhances both mental health and quality of life. He then uses evidence from educational and health settings to show how effective coaching can be across a variety of domains; and that it is associated with greater goal attainment and self-reported achievement, increased hope and engagement, decreased levels of self-reported depression, reduced stress and increased resilience, and an increase in constructive leadership. Additionally, coaching is shown to have system-wide benefits, not just benefits to the individual, with those close to someone who'd had a coaching intervention more likely to experience increases in well-being themselves - reflecting a kind of "ripple effect" – as well as benefiting from the coachee's improved quality of communication within their network.

Grant then observes that coaches themselves benefit from receiving coaching; noting that in order to be truly effective, coaches themselves need to remain aware of their own implicit assumptions about their coaching models and practices, as well as those of their clients. Coaches participating in an extensive coaching intervention were found to have reduced anxiety, increased goal attainment, enhanced cognitive resilience, and higher levels of self-insight. Finally, when asked open-endedly about what additional areas of their lives had benefited from coaching, coachees stated that they had better work-life balance, better relationships with family, less stress and more calm, a greater sense of purpose in life, greater awareness of personal values, and better feelings about themselves and life in general.

Grant then illustrates how professional expertise makes a qualitative difference in coaching engagements, pointing to research which demonstrates that coachees involved in professional coaching relationships tended to be more engaged in the coaching process itself, and reported greater goal commitment, goal progression, and overall well-being. He then notes that coaching needs to be solution-focused as opposed to problem-focused; with the former increasing self-efficacy and self-insight, as well as improving the coachee's understanding of the nature of the problem, and the latter impairing these benefits and compromising goal attainment. Finally, Grant assessed how the findings from coaching research can better contribute to a general understanding of psychology in the "real world". He writes that coaching can increase solution-focused thinking; reduce anxiety, stress, and depression; increase self-efficacy and resilience; increase proactivity; increase hope and well-being; and increase self-insight — even when these benefits are not the main goals of the coaching intervention.

In concluding the paper, Grant speaks to the notion that coaching can no longer be reasonably seen as a "fad", but is rather steeped in a strong, growing evidence base derived from multiple methodologies and streams of evidence, as well as different, often complementary theoretical frameworks. As well as giving firmer grounding to coaching itself, the steady accumulation of evidence to support the efficacy and promise of coaching also makes important contributions to the performance and well-being of individuals and organizations, and a larger conversation about human psychology.