

LEVELS OF SOPHISTICATION IN STRENGTHS COACHING

Level 1: Identify and Use

Here, the coach uses a formal or informal method of identifying client strengths. Once identified, the coaching conversation involves a discussion of how to apply a particular strength to a problem at hand or using a strength in a novel way.

Main Themes:

- Understanding Self
- Improving Vocabulary
- Permission to focus on strengths
- Developing strategies for strengths use

Advantages: Feels good to the client bc it discusses a positive aspect of the client; May identify a resource the client has overlooked

Criticism: Too often relies on formal assessment and misses many client strengths; a myopic focus on "top 5"; There is no ready justification for why a "new way" is superior to "the current way;" and-- most importantly-- too often focuses on the problem at hand rather than the development of the strength as a whole-- that is, building the client's capacity to solve ALL problems.

Examples of Level 1 Coaching Questions:

- How could you use X strengths in a new way?
- How can you use X strength to address this problem?
- How could you use X strength more?
- What are your top 5 strengths?

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Level 2: Name, Claim, Aim

Here, the coach identifies the strengths but then spends extra time exploring the degree to which the strengths fit, how they manifest, etc. Thereafter, the conversation turns to aiming the strengths. This might include using the strength (at all), using it more, or using it in tandem with other strengths.

Main Themes:

- Valuing and identifying with strengths
- Appreciation of personal uniqueness of strengths
- Permission to focus on strengths
- Appreciation of the opportunities and limitations of strengths

Advantages: Relies somewhat less on "coach expertise" and gives the client a great seat at the table; has a greater appreciation of individual differences in the ways that people react to strengths language; Has relatively more options for "aiming" strengths

Criticism: Takes longer because of the "claim" conversation; Can inadvertently create the expectation of success ("Hey! You're using your strengths! It'll probably work because they are strengths!")

Examples of Level 2 Coaching Questions:

- To what extent do you identify with this strength?
- How do your strengths support or conflict with the strengths of others on your team?
- How is strength X different for you than it might be for someone else who has it?
- What will you have to do to make certain that this strength is used as beneficially as possible?
- What impact do you desire when you use this strength?

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Level 3: Test and Learn

The coach and client identify strengths, as above. There is a heavy assumption that strengths are highly contextual. This means that 1) each strength might show up differently for each person, 2) that they might use the strength differently in various situations, or that 3) it might be wise to use the strength less or not at all. The focus is on developing a practical understanding of strengths-- their nature and optimal deployment across problems and situations.

Main Themes:

- The optimal deployment of strengths in a given situation
- Developing the wisdom to be able to discern when and how to use strengths best
- Acknowledgment that strengths should sometimes be used less or not at all
- Cultivating the mindset that strengths evolve over time through intentional effort

Advantages: Treats strengths use as an experiment with no expectations of success; Heavy focus on situational appropriateness of strengths (especially by looking at the social impact of strengths); positions strengths as qualities to be developed rather than traits to be relied upon.

Criticism: Can be time-consuming; Can replace client's more urgent goals with a less-urgent focus on capacity building; Can be complicated and therefore requires a high level of coaching skill and psychological mindedness.

Examples of Level 3 Coaching Questions:

- When you use X strength, how the various people on your team react?
- What might happen if you eased your foot off the gas pedal regarding this strength?
- How does X strength show up at home versus work?
- How has X strength changed over the last few years?