Making Change Stick: Making Change Stick: The Role of Follow Through in Executive Coaching

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A Puzzle:
- Why is change so hard to maintain? Why doesn’t change stick?
- Lot’s of examples: Practicing a new behavior (backsliding), Dieting!, Time management systems – “falling off the wagon”
- In this talk we’ll look at what contributes to this pattern, and how coaches can help create sustainable change

Seven Models of Change
1. Linear Change
2. Competing Commitments
3. Social Influence
4. Punctuated equilibrium
5. Momentum (vicious or virtuous cycles)
6. Force field analysis
7. Internalization

Linear Change
- Learning to play sport or musical instrument
- Improvement is gradual, continuous
- “Practice makes perfect”
- Learning as skill or knowledge acquisition

Competing Commitments
- Robert Kegan and Lisa Lahey
- Explains why people don’t change
- Assumes we hold competing commitments to both change and NOT change
- Getting unstuck involves surfacing hidden competing commitments and deep assumptions they are based on

Social Influence
- Assumes people are influenced by social and physical environment
- Change involves arranging external factors to maximize positive influence
- Often accompanied by behavioristic view of learning as positive/negative conditioning
- Arranging environment to support change involves manipulating positive and negative reinforcers
**Punctuated Equilibrium (Evolution)**
- Views personality as complex system
- Assumes self system seeks equilibrium
- Change occurs when equilibrium disturbed in such a way that return to earlier level not possible
- Forces individual to seek new level of equilibrium at higher level of complexity
- Implicit in stage theories of development
- Assumes behavior changes stem from fundamental shifts in internal mental structures

**Internalization**
- New behavior often fragile and easily extinguished
- Important to build lots of structure and external reinforcers early on to support change
- Sustainable change is product of internalization so they behavior is not longer dependent on external reinforcers
- Some approaches (12 step programs) assume sustaining change will ALWAYS require external structures and is never fully internalized

**Momentum**
- Behavior change as series of cycles that repeat over time in ways that can amplify or extinguish the original force for change
- Systems perspective
- Vicious or virtuous cycles
- Implicit in solution-oriented strategy of “do one small thing different”
- Strategy is to do things that create a positive momentum for change – snowball effect

**What Contributes to Sustainability of Change?**
- Motivation
- The changed behavior is being positively reinforced and this outweighs any negative consequences
- Existence of external structures that support change
- Real time feedback
- Access to help
- Opportunity to help others with similar issue

**Force Field Analysis**
- Kurt Lewin
- Change is product of forces acting on an individual to behavior in a certain way
- Forces can be external, internal or both

**Motivation**
- How motivated is individual to make change?
- Experience of failure, loss, pain often strengthens motivation to change
- “Hitting bottom” in AA
- Low motivation predicts change will be temporary at best
Positive Reinforcers
- Aspects of the environment that reward the new behavior
- Sustainable change requires positive reinforcement (and absence of negative reinforcers)

Opportunity to Help and Be Helped
- Access to help when missing the mark
- Opportunities to help others change similar behavior
  - Genius of Bill W and AA
  - Teaching others strengthens internal motivation to sustain own change
  - Also helps shift IDENTITY – a new story about oneself that supports and sustains the change

Structure to support change
- Structure that pulls for and shapes behavior toward desired change
- Social influences – colleagues, peers, friends, family who will support the change
- Compensation and other reward systems
- Accountability

Applying Theory to Practice
- Coach, coachee, organization as potential partners in change
- Each has role in sustaining change
- Change models can help us generate strategies to sustain change

Feedback
- Ongoing, regular and direct
- Let’s individual know when on track and when off track re: new behavior
- Feedback itself as positive or negative reinforcer

What the Coach Can Do
- Increase client motivation by linking change to client goal
- Encourage small steps (virtuous cycle)
- Surface competing commitments to get unstuck
- Change environment to support change
- Encourage client to solicit ongoing feedback
- Help client find positive model
- Help set realistic expectations
What Coach Can Do (cont’d)

- Work with client to establish structures, resources, system to support change after the coaching engagement ends
- Involve family system when possible
- Don’t front-end load engagement at expense of follow up sessions

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\text{CHANGE} = \text{Insight} \times \text{Motivation} + \text{Support} + \text{Challenge} + \text{Accountability} \quad (J. Harnden, Competing forces)
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What the Client Can Do

- Stay focused on vision of change (motivation)
- Continue making small changes even when don’t feel like it
- Solicit real-time feedback
- Leverage friends and family
- Self-compassion and realistic expectations
- Explore competing commitments
- Permission to ask for help
- Look for role models
- Find someone to pass on what you’ve learned to

What the Manager Can Do

- Call out and reinforce positive changes even if small
- Reward positive behavior change
- Hold individual accountable for maintaining change
- Give immediate feedback, positive or negative
- Be available to coach & support
- Be open to own competing commitments @ the behavior change
- Create opportunities for direct report to practice new behavior
- Regular check-in meetings to gauge progress

What HR can Do

- Structure coaching engagements to include:
  1. Accountability
  2. Periodic check-in meetings with coach, client, manager, HR
  3. Long enough timeframe to monitor progress and work through regressive episode
  4. Support system after coaching ends
  5. Hold clients accountable for change
- Example: Fidelity Investments ELP Program

Mistakes to Avoid!

- Insight alone will produce change
- Brief coaching without ongoing support
- Failure to anticipate countervailing forces in Environment
- Prematurely assuming change has been internalized & declaring premature victory
- Colluding with client to think substantial changes have been made when no one else does

Finally: The BIG Picture

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<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Executive Coaching Engagement</th>
<th>Sustainability</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Beginning</td>
<td>Middle</td>
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