

## Making Change Stick:

The Role of Follow Through in Executive Coaching

William H. Hodgetts, Ed.D.  
Vice President, Leadership & OD  
Fidelity Investments  
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## Linear Change

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

## 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

## 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

## 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

## 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

$$\text{CHANGE} = \frac{(\text{Insight} + \text{Motivation}) + \text{Support} + \text{Challenge}}{+\text{Accountability}}$$

(J. Harnden) Competing forces

## 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

## 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

## 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

## 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

## Finally: The BIG Picture

