

Coaching: From GROW to Gestalt

The GROW model of coaching, popularised by Sir John Whitmore¹ in 2002, has become a very commonly used approach. It advocates a four-stage questioning process: Goals e.g. what does the client want to get out of this session? Reality e.g. what is stopping the client currently? Options e.g. what can the client do as a first step? Will e.g. what will the client achieve before the next session? The GROW model is a simple, clear, practical way to start coaching. However, it presents a narrow view of the world being past and future focused and not encouraging the client to experience what is going on in the now. It also encourages the coach to ask neutral questions but not to interact authentically, for example there is little opportunity to challenge the client's view of reality. By contrast, Gestalt Therapy² helps clients focus on the present moment and understand what is really happening in their lives at this time, rather than seeing their world through the lens of past experience. Clients are encouraged to experience the present moment by, for example, talking directly to their inner critic and inner coach rather than talking about past situations. Using the gestalt process in coaching, clients can learn to see how their own focus of perception, thought patterns and behaviours are blocking their ability to live a rich and meaningful life. Two case studies using this approach to executive coaching were presented at the NZ Psychological Conference in September 2018: one involving a military officer and the second a partner from a large professional services firm. Both clients made considerable progress by better understanding how their well-entrenched perceptions and thought patterns were creating unhappiness and dysfunction in their lives. The gestalt approach to executive coaching offers an alternative, more present-moment approach that can be used once coaches have mastered the GROW model.

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¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/GROW_model

² http://www.gestaltinstitute.ge/nav/word_pdf/biblioteka/Gestalt%20Therapy;%20A%20Guide%20to%20Contemporary%20Practice.pdf