

Using Acceptance and Commitment Training in Executive Coaching

Iain McCormick PhD, Executive Coaching Centre
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Seven core ideas of ACT

1. Clean versus dirty thinking – helpful versus unhelpful thinking
2. De-fusion – understanding that the thought is not the event – get some distance from your thoughts
3. Expansion – making room for feelings and urges without suppression
4. Connection – living in the present
5. The observing self – that part of you that knows what you are thinking and feeling
6. Values – what is important to you and how are you living
7. Committed action – the behaviour that leads to a rich and fulfilled life

Evidence for the effectiveness of ACT

A growing body of evidence for the efficacy of ACT (Hayes, Luoma, Bond, Masuda, & Lillis, 2006) in:

- Workplace stress (Bond & Bunce, 2003)
- Psychosis (Bach & Hayes, 2002; Gaudiano & Herbert, 2006)
- Depression (Zettle & Hayes, 1986; Zettle & Rains, 1989; Forman et al., 2007)
- Test anxiety (Zettle, 2003)
- Trichotillomania (Woods, Wetterneck, & Flessner, 2006)
- Epilepsy (Lundgren, 2004)
- Obsessive–compulsive disorder (Twohig, Hayes, & Masuda, 2006)
- Social anxiety disorder (Dalrymple 2007)
- Chronic pain (McCracken & Eccleston, 2006)
- Cigarette smoking cessation (Gifford et al., 2004)
- Diabetes (Gregg, 2004)
- Substance abuse (Hayes, Wilson, et al., 2004).

Case study

- A senior executive whose NEO-PDR personality profile indicated a high score on Emotional Reactions and very high on Work Ethic
- After a small number of one hour sessions which were simply filled with the client ventilating about the current situation, a decision was made to conduct a two-day, sixteen-hour intensive coaching programme based on ACT.

The process

- The first day covered the ACT concepts: clean and dirty thinking, de-fusion, expansion, and mindfulness
- The second day covered identifying values, committed action, learning to say 'no' and delegation
- Follow up sessions with the executive's manager indicated a substantial improvement in mood and productivity at work
- One month and six month follow ups with the client indicated much enhanced family and work relationships as well as considerably better work-life balance
- The client's description of the impact of ACT was 'life changing'.

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