

The Value of Discerning Emotional versus Strategic Responses

Coaching with Awareness

Performance Management is a vital process that drives organizational growth as well as individual development. Defined as a systematic and continuous process of identifying, measuring, and reflecting on the qualitative and quantitative data of implementation of key initiatives aligned to the priorities and goals of the organization, it fosters continuous improvement across an organization. Embracing this process with a positive mindset can transform challenges into opportunities, ultimately leading to a more motivated and successful organization.

Without a doubt, performance management can be a challenging process for executives, often initially triggering a wide range of emotions as organizational performance data is surfaced and reviewed. The emotions presented are often similar to the stages of grief: **Denial**, **Anger**, **Bargaining**, **Depression**, and **Acceptance**. This tool aims to guide executive coaches in recognizing and addressing these emotional stages, enhancing the effectiveness of their coaching.

It is important to remember that these stages are not linear, and an executive may revisit previous stages, necessitating adaptive coaching strategies.

Structure

1. Assessment

Goal: Understand the executive's current performance and emotional state related to data and evidence being surfaced.

2. Identification of Stages

Goal: Discern which stage(s) of the grief process the executive may be experiencing related to the data, evidence, and information being reviewed.

Stages:

- Denial
- Anger
- Bargaining
- Depression
- Acceptance
- Strategic Action

3. Adaptive Coaching Strategies

Goal: Tailor coaching approaches based on the executive's emotional stage.

Actions:

- Use guiding questions to facilitate reflection.
- Provide support and pivot strategies as needed.

Stages of Grief



Guiding Coaching Questions

The following sample questions serve as a resource to support clients through emotional stages and transition them to a strategic, actionable stage, thereby adding value to the subsequent steps of the performance management process. The executive coach must exercise discernment to identify transitions between and within stages.

Denial Stage

- What specific feedback or data are you finding difficult to accept, and why?
- How do you think this situation is affecting your team and the overall organization?
- What would be the first step you could take to address this issue if you were to acknowledge it fully?
- Can you identify any potential benefits or opportunities that might come from facing this challenge head-on?

Anger Stage

- What specific aspects of the situation are causing you the most frustration or anger?
- How is your frustration or anger impacting your decision-making and interactions with your team?
- What underlying concerns or fears related to this data might be contributing to your feelings of anger?
- How might you channel this energy into constructive actions that address the root causes of your frustration?
 - What next step might you take?
- How might waiting until tomorrow (or another date) to further consider next steps impact your vision for the process?

Bargaining Stage

- What compromises or deals are you considering, and how realistic are they in addressing the core issues?
- How might these potential bargains impact your long-term goals and the organization's success?
- What are the underlying concerns or fears driving your desire to make these bargains?
- How might we develop strategic actions that address your concerns while moving the organization forward?

Depression Stage

- What specific aspects of the data are weighing most heavily on you right now?
- Can you recall a time when you successfully overcame a similar challenge? What steps did you take?
- What small, manageable actions might you take to start feeling more in control and positive about the situation?
- Who in your support network can you lean on for encouragement and assistance during this time?
- How might I best support you through this challenging information?

Acceptance Stage

- How might you leverage this feedback to achieve your goals?
- Now that you've reached a point of acceptance, what is the first actionable step you can take to address the current challenges?
- How can you leverage the insights gained from this experience to inform your strategic decisions moving forward?
- What specific goals do you want to set to ensure progress and accountability in this new phase?
- How might you communicate your acceptance and new strategic direction to your team to inspire and motivate them?
- What have you learned about yourself and this organization through this process?

Conclusion

Effectively coaching executives through performance management is enhanced by a nuanced awareness of the emotional stages akin to grief. By recognizing and discerning these stages within clients, and employing adaptive coaching strategies, a coach is able to provide the support needed for executives to navigate their performance challenges effectively. This tool, with its guiding questions, serves as a roadmap for executive coaches to enhance their practice and facilitate meaningful growth in their clients.