

LIFE COACHING

CETIFICATE COURSE



PROBLEM SOLVING

FIFTY QUESTIONS FOR FINDING YOUR PASSION & PURPOSE IN LIFE

People's effectiveness in life is determined by their outlook. Many people's perspectives in life are problem focused rather than solution focussed, meaning they concentrate on what they don't have rather than what they do. When our outlook on life is solution based, we don't have the time to focus on what we don't have because our energy is directed towards getting what we want or need.

This workbook isn't about positive thinking: whilst positive talking and mantras can make people feel better, they're not enough to get people results. However, defeat is never permanent unless you allow it to be so: results depend upon attitude and volition. When you have a positive attitude, you will recognise failure for the impostor that it is and realise that it is really a learning experience, a valuable lesson that will help you succeed with the next attempt. If you approach obstacles and setbacks with a positive attitude, you will be surprised how quickly you can turn defeat into victory.

Sometimes the greatest problems we have in life aren't then situations or circumstances we're in or the people we have in our life but the way that we feel about these things. Effective life coaches require an effective problem-solving process which is where the Problem-solving process and Gerard Egan's Skilled Helper Model comes in.

THE PROBLEM SOLVING PROCESS

1. Define the Problem

If a client is coming to us with problems, we need to give them the time and space to explain their problems before we step in and help them realise that it's not that they have problems but rather that they don't have solutions. We help our clients define their problems by asking challenging questions such as:

- Why is the problem a problem?
- What effect does this problem have on your life?
- What is the specific problem (honestly)?
- When is the problem at its worst?
- When is the problem not a problem?
- Who or what is involved in the problem?

It may also help to categorise the problem. Common categories of issues clients will come to you with include: Family and relationships, loss, isolation or loneliness, work-related issues, study-related stress, stress, divorce and separation, unemployment, harassment and bullying, living circumstances, finances, legal issues, alcohol and drug-related issues, physical or mental illness, and low self-esteem and confidence.

If your client has multiple problems, you need to encourage them to choose only one of them which they wish to start working on right away. The problems you should be encouraging your client to work on first are the ones which they feel they don't have any control over - they may be tempted to pick an 'easier' problem to manage first so challenge them to grab the bull by the horns and go for the problem which is controlling them.



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Finally, write out a clear problem statement which summarises the problem and makes it easier to focus on.

ANALYSING THE PROBLEM

Analysing the problem involves us working with our clients to identify how the problem is manifesting itself in their life, what parts of their life it isn't unfolding in and who the problem is impacting (if anyone).

Questions which are useful for analysing a problem include:

- What proof do you have that the problem is real?
- How often does the problem occur?
- How does the problem show itself?
- What's driving the problem?
- Why does this problem bother you?
- How severe is the problem according to your perspective? How severe do others consider it?
- How important to you perceive the problem? How about others?
- When and where did the problem occur, or when did it become significant?

IDENTIFY SOLUTIONS

People are very good at defining their problems but less comfortable at coming up with solutions. This is because they're in a mindset of focussing on what they don't want rather than what they do want because it's easier and familiar. Without focussing on what they want they have no goal and therefore cannot identify solutions.

We as life coaches need to help our clients feel empowered by encouraging them to come up with multiple solutions for a single problem. Some people are reluctant to think up solutions because they're self-conscious of sounding silly or naive, but at this stage, all we want them to do is think about solutions rather than actually how they're going to solve their problem. Encourage your clients to write down at least ten solutions, no matter how silly or impractical they are (and they don't need to stop at just ten!)

CHOOSING A SOLUTION

At this stage, we now work with our clients to evaluate the list of potential solutions they came up with and decide which one is best. The easiest first step is to eliminate ideas which are too hard or involve things you can't control, and then merge any duplicate ideas (or those so similar they might as well be duplicates).

The things which are beneficial and helpful to us in life are oftentimes the things we find difficult to do, but it's important to remind our clients that there's a difference in things which are difficult and things which are impossible.



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In order to find out which solution is the best for your client, you can test its suitability by asking the following questions:

- Will this idea/solution be good for me? Will it benefit me?
- Will this idea/solution be good for other people? Will it benefit others?
- How much time and effort will this idea/solution require?
- What will the costs and benefits of this idea/solution be?
- How does this idea/solution fit in with my other goals and commitments?
- What resources do I need to make this idea/solution happen?
- What do I need to learn to make this idea/solution happen?

If your client is still debating between a few remaining possible solutions, it may be helpful to draw out the solutions on a graph which shows its advantages against its disadvantages and compare the graphs against one another.

ADVANTAGES:

BENIFITS:

**MY POTENTIAL
SOLUTION**

DISADVANTAGES:

COSTS:



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Finally, ask your client to write a statement that summarises the best solution for their problem.

- My specific problem is:
- The solution statement for my problem is:
- The reason why I need to resolve my problem is:

PLAN OF ACTION

Once they've decided on their solution and written it down, it's time to write a plan of action with our client in order to hold them accountable. People who know where they are going in life always achieve far greater success than those who merely drift through life expecting circumstances to create opportunities for them.

Successful people create their own opportunities by focusing on goals with an intensity that borders on obsession. In this way, every action moves them toward their goal.

Writing a plan of action requires a client to define and detail the specific steps they need to take in order to make the solution work.

Failure often proves to be an asset, provided our clients know why they failed. There are a few occasions throughout life when most of us experience great flashes of insight, great moments of truth that forever change the course of our lives. Most of those experiences result from spectacular failures, not from outstanding successes. It is from the failures that so chagrined and dismayed us that we learn the most lasting lessons.

Life coaches need to enlighten their clients to the idea of extracting the useful lessons which come from bad or difficult life circumstances and moving past the trauma and hurt they inflict on them. We need to encourage our clients to learn from their failures, forget about the shame and guilt that came from them and move onto better things.

IMPLEMENTATION

The implementation stage is the period between when the plan of action is set to the next session: coaching is a progression, and it's our job to check in on them every session to see how the progress is going. The client will have difficulties along the way which may require us to explore some limiting beliefs with them and challenge them with Socratic questions.

Reviewing the successes, failures and progress a client makes is a crucial part of the problem-solving process. Clients will learn as much from their mistakes as they will from their successes. Before long, tackling problems in this structured way will become second nature to them.



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The following questions are good starting points at the beginning of each session to work out how your client is coming along with the process:

- What part of your plan is working well?
- What part of your plan is not working so well?
- What part of your plan needs to change?
- What is the next step you need to take?

However, if after a number of weeks a client has not taken any action, we have to accept that the client is being unreceptive because they are not ready for change. In these circumstances, we then need to decide as life coaches whether we're going to continue to give our time to someone who isn't ready or willing to change or not.

GERARD EGAN'S SKILLED HELPER MODEL

Exploration - What's going on with you?

We can characterise this stage with the question, "what is going on?" as the life coach is exploring the client's situation. In this stage, a life coach's main task is to find out their client's story and reflect it back to them without judgement.

Exploration helps life coaches build a collaborative relationship with their client who they're committed to helping investigate their situation and uncover the issues that they want to tackle. Exploration (which encompasses defining and analysing the problem) is not only about identifying a client's problems but is also about determining the resources available to them.

To achieve success in this stage, the life coach will need to use excellent active listening skills; develop their rapport with their client; and adopt reflecting, paraphrasing and silence in order to check their understanding. They should also always ask open questions and summarise what they are hearing.

Some open questions you can ask are:

- How do you feel about that?
- What were you thinking?
- What is it like for you?
- What else can you say about that?
- Do you want to say more about that?

Challenge - What do you want instead?

Once we've got to the reason why a client's pain or deficit exists, life coaches can easily shift the conversation away from what the client doesn't want and onto what the client does want. This stage involves shifting a client's existing views one issue at a time by encouraging them to take a different perspective on their situation.



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Because they're so unaccustomed to thinking about what they want rather than what they don't want, clients can be resistant to exploring new perspectives and new possibilities; but it's the job of the life coach to facilitate a much more in-depth and objective understanding of their circumstances.

Life coaches need to intentionally guide the client toward a more rational decision-making process using careful analysis. It can be useful to brainstorm and encourage creative thinking around the issues in order to generate different options when it comes to dealing with certain situations and arriving at goals.

The techniques a life coach can bring to the challenging stage are challenging skills; exploring perspectives; implications; exploration of what's not being said; ownership; patterns and connections; 'shoulds' and 'oughts' and negative, internal criticisms.

To help with this using these kinds of questions can be productive:

- What do you think the situation looks like from their point of view?
- What would they say about all of this?
- Are there any other ways of looking at this?

You may also find challenging your client can be useful, but it's important not to be aggressive or accusatory when doing so. Examples of challenges are:

- You're telling me that you never see your wife, but you've described activities with her regularly in the past week: is it really correct that you're not seeing her?
- Is there anything you've overlooked?
- What precisely about this situation do you consider problematic?

Planning - How will you achieve your goals?

By this stage, we have a good grasp of the pertinent issues and what it is the client needs to deal with. So, now it's time to plan appropriate action by defining goals which can involve changing habits or modifying patterns of relating. The life coach should guide the client through problem-solving and decision-making methods, offering appropriate encouragement and support. The client needs to be able to cope with their current problems whilst also learning new skills. Any action planned at this stage will be based on the thorough exploration and understanding gained in the first two stages.

As with any creative process, when devising potential strategies, ideas can proliferate and topics can start to become less clear as more solutions are suggested. Life coaches will help maintain focus and guide the selection of action plans that are viable for the client: those which meet their needs, match their aspirations and suit the resources available. There is no use deciding on a plan which involves world travel and expensive spas if the client is in financial difficulties!



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The aim of this stage is to enable the client to move from their current situation into one they would prefer. Everyone has a different capacity for change, and while some people love big changes, others will require small baby steps. Creating realistic and achievable goals with time specific objectives can help in this process, along with the encouragement and support of the life coach.

Life coaches can bring many skills in this stage including divergent thinking; goal setting; decision making; problem-solving; evaluation; creative thinking; encouragement of creative thinking; their knowledge of behavioural change and other learning skills.

Some useful questions for this stage are:

- What are the possible solutions to this situation?
- What solution seems best to you?
- What will you achieve if you do this?
- What will you do first and when by?
- What would you ideally want instead?
- What would you be feeling/doing/thinking if...?
- How would life change if this happened?
- What possibilities open up if you do this?



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