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individual coaching & coaching development

## Currents in Coaching Research Newsletter

### Coaching Procrastinators: A cognitive-behavioral approach

Procrastination is so common that it may not even be recognized as a particular issue to be addressed in coaching. Nonetheless, many coaches encounter clients who complain of time management challenges that- with some exploration- turn out to be matters of procrastination. Some clients can come out and directly admit that they procrastinate to the point of discomfort; others delay such admissions until they are unavoidable. Coaches Dorota Karas and Marcantonio M. Spada sought to test the efficacy of a cognitive-behavioral approach to working with procrastinating clients and they documented the results of their case series study.

#### *What the researchers did*

The authors applied cognitive-behavioral principles and practices in the development of a coaching intervention directed at reducing decisional and behavioral procrastination. The article defines procrastination as "the intentional delay in the initiation or completion of important tasks to the point of discomfort" (p.44) and cites the results of other studies in the impact of cognitive-behavioral coaching (CBC), noting the absence of studies specific to the effects on procrastination.

The consistent with key principles of CBC, the intervention addressed six areas: (1) enhancing motivation to change; (2) goal-setting; (3) monitoring progress; (4) time management; (5) disputing unrealistic beliefs; (6) relapse prevention. The authors' tested the hypothesis that "coaching would bring significant reduction in procrastination at post-coaching and follow up" (p.45).

Seven participants (six females, one male) were selected through an open recruitment process. The average age of the group was 26.9 years old. None had a history of cognitive-behavioral therapy or cognitive-behavioral coaching and none had a history of diagnosis of either Axis 1 or Axis 2 (DSM) disorders. The selected individuals participated in a total of ten sessions with a coach, The first four of these were designed as non-intervention sessions. The 15-minute periods with the coach were spent completing baseline measures. These consisted of two standardized instruments: the Decisional Procrastination Scale (DPS), which measures how respondents handle making conflicts in decision making, and the General Procrastination Scale (GPS) which examines procrastination behaviors. The intention of the first four non-intervention sessions was to stabilize the baseline. Following these four sessions, each participant met with a coach weekly for no more than an hour.

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### Researcher's Haiku

Bursting in bright hues  
Splashing colors all about  
Autumn leaves must fall

*unknown*

(Readers are invited to e-mail their researcher's haiku - original or otherwise-for inclusion in future issues. Your feedback on this issue is welcome, too!)

### References

Dorota Karas and Marcantonio M. Spada (2009) Brief cognitive-behavioral coaching for procrastination: A case series . Coaching: An International Journal of Theory, Research and Practice. v 2 (1) March 2009. Routledge.

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Outcome measures were taken at the end of the program and again at three and six months after the completion of the program with no further intervention.

Each of the six coaching sessions followed a specific protocol. Session one introduced the cognitive-behavioral paradigm and provided education on the nature of procrastination. Participants were led through a cost-benefit analysis of their procrastination challenges and given a motivational assignment based on the "miracle question" to help develop a positive vision of success. In the second session, the coach helped the client created long-term goals and from these draw out SMART short-term goals. The intention was to increase the client's sense of self-efficacy. The assignment following this session entailed tracking time use with a blank schedule. The third and fourth sessions introduced task priorities, creating daily to-do lists and monitoring self-talk and cognitive scripts. In session five, coaches helped clients challenge unhelpful thinking and replace these through cognitive restructuring exercises. Session six was focused on providing the tools for preventing relapse and for maintaining the use of learned tools and strategies.

#### *What the researchers found*

Using single case analysis (each participant served as his/her own control) of the pre/post measures, the authors demonstrated a stability across baseline scores on both measures, suggesting that changes over the course of the study were due to the invention rather than "spontaneous recovery from procrastination" (p.48). Furthermore, each of the seven participants showed "substantial and relatively rapid reductions" on each of the two assessment instruments over the course of coaching which was maintained at follow-up. Conversion of values shows an improvement of 70.3% and 56.9% on the DPS and GPS respectively. Post-coaching scores for the participants were well below the average for a British, non-clinical population.

Based on these results, the authors propose that CBC is an effective invention for procrastination. Notwithstanding the small sample size and gender imbalance and the need for caution in using a self-report instrument, the authors suggest that further evaluation of using a CBC to address this issue is warranted.

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