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Coach Yourself to Win

7 Steps to Breakthrough Performance on the Job and in Your Life

Howard M. Guttman • McGraw-Hill © 2010 • 272 pages

Leadership / Coaching

Take-Aways

- Planning long-term behavioral change is not hard, but making and maintaining the actual change is difficult.
- Why you act a certain way is beside the point. Focus on “how you behave.”
- You can make a fundamental change by following a seven-step self-coaching plan.
- First, make sure you are ready, willing and “self-coachable.”
- Second, identify a specific intention about exactly what behavior to change and how.
- Third, recruit a mentor, or guide, and the people who will form your “circle of support.”
- Fourth, secure objective feedback from them about your behavior.
- Fifth, review this input, analyze it and learn from it.
- Sixth, develop a plan to transform your behavior; then implement it.
- Seventh, monitor how well you do and “recalibrate” your plan if necessary. Celebrate your success.

Recommendation

Some motivational authors claim that their books, with their snappy covers and glowing recommendations, can change your life – even if their content is as insubstantial as a summer breeze. In contrast, Howard M. Guttman provides a steady stream of valuable content that can help you make your life better. A respected executive coaching expert, Guttman presents seven easy-to-follow steps you can use to coach yourself to achieve lasting positive behavioral change. He delivers invaluable knowledge, wisdom, savvy tips and practical expertise as he explains how to apply proven executive coaching principles to modify your behavior and achieve a happier, more productive life. *getAbstract* recommends this completely useful self-coaching guide. It will be worth far more than its cover price if you practice its principles.

Summary

Do You Really Want to Change?

When it comes to changing behavior, making a resolution to change is easy, but sustaining actual change is remarkably difficult because behavior is habitual.

While people often want to transform their bad behavior, some find it impossible. For instance, people know smoking is dangerous. Yet they keep puffing; smoking kills 438,000 Americans annually.

“Most of us are capable of moving from where we are now to a brighter future.”

Nevertheless, many people do accomplish “lasting behavioral change.” often using these relevant change principles:

- **“People can and do make – and remake – themselves”** – For proof, visit any Alcoholics Anonymous meeting.
- **“Change begins with making choices”** – You control your behavior. Lasting change requires you to choose the conduct that you want.
- **“Behavior is what counts”** – Why you act a certain way is beside the point. Focus on “how you behave.”
- **“Self-coaching can help you achieve lasting behavior change”** – Executive coaching works. Self-coaching is merely a variant of executive coaching.
- **“Self-coaching begins with the thought: ‘Yes, I can’”** – Believe in yourself, and all things become possible.

The Seven Steps

For self-coaching to work you need verifiable data built on other people’s objective opinions to help you evaluate where you are and where you want to go.

“If you aren’t willing – deep down and for real – to make profound changes in yourself, you are not a candidate for self-coaching.”

You'll need a personal guide or mentor who can help you stay on the right track, and a readiness to expand out of your personal comfort zone.

If you truly are ready to change your behavior and to remake yourself, follow the seven steps of the “self-coaching process”:

Step 1 – “Determine Your Self-Coachability”

Changing your behavior requires a leap of faith, a belief that real change is within your reach. To determine if you are self-coachable, ask yourself: “Am I able, ready and willing to permanently change my behavior?” The answer to this complex question demands determined thought and serious consciousness-raising. Ask yourself if you can change – most people can if they want, though some must face internal demons that hamper change. Do you have the psychological flexibility, strength and will to change? Can you do whatever is required? As you answer these questions, accept the fact that you must take responsibility for yourself and your intended behavioral change. And you need to be able to accept objective feedback as a valuable gift, not as some kind of a threat.

“The whole premise of executive coaching is that people are 100% accountable for their behavior.”

Behavioral change requires you to “reframe your ‘stories.’” Stop buying into self-defeating narratives like “I can’t quit smoking; I’ll gain weight,” or “I’ll never be able to get a promotion,” or “I can’t stand up to my husband; he’s got a violent temper.” Avoid self-defeating, self-deflating statements, like: “It’s not possible.” “It’s too hard.” “I’m not ready yet – maybe next year.” “I have too many things to do right now.” The negative stories that you tell yourself affect how you see the world and how you act. They become “core limiting beliefs.”

“Stories are designed to lock us into our comfort zone. They keep us from making tough choices and the changes they represent.”

Replace them with new, positive statements that will benefit you. For example, if you have been telling yourself that you are too busy and stressed to go back to college, replace that lament with: “Going back to school is my number one priority.”

If you truly are ready to change, write down your intention, the benefits you’ll derive from changing and the most desirable outcome. Your self-coaching success hinges on your willingness to change and your resolve not to let anything or anyone undermine your efforts. This includes avoiding insidious self-sabotage. The most credible way to measure change is your long-term “observable behavior.” Behavioral change matters only if you sustain it.

Step 2 – “Select and Commit to an Intention”

Your intention must include “an action, an end result and a time frame,” such as, “lose 30 pounds in six months.” Think carefully about your intention. It will be the road map for your future. Make sure it is realistic. With a solid intention, you can focus on achieving what you want. Every intention includes a

“no-trespassing’ zone.” For example, if you want to write a novel, put your time-wasting television in a no-trespassing zone. Be passionate about your intention. It should be “a must, a gotta have, a categorical imperative.” After you write your intention, let others know about it. Put your intention to change on the record, particularly with people who can provide “moral support, an attentive ear...feedback” and “personal experience in achieving this intention.” Straying from the path of your intention becomes harder when you have publicly included other people. In as much detail as possible, imagine how your life will be different after you change your behavior. Make these images an internal movie in your mind. Watch it repeatedly so it becomes more and more real to you.

“Unless you are willing to reframe your stories, you will never get ‘unstuck’ from your current situation.”

Once you have a firm intention, plan your initial step. If your goal is to return to college, go to your local university and pick up a class schedule for the upcoming semester. Begin a journal and record every action you take, no matter how minor, to realize your intention. Pay no mind to the “deadly inner voices” that can sabotage you.

“In the self-coaching arena, early and frequent reassessments (and, if indicated, recalibrations) are even more important than they are in executive coaching.”

These could be:

- **“The Inner Critic** – ‘You want to go to college? With the grades you got in high school?’”
- **“The Cynic** – ‘You’ve never been able to stop drinking. What makes you think you’ll do it this time?’”
- **“The Procrastinator** – ‘I’ll just finish this one pack before I quit’.”
- **“The Rationalizer** – ‘I didn’t want dessert, but it would have been rude to refuse’.”

Step 3 – “Identify Your Guide and Circle of Support”

Changing your behavior by using this self-coaching process requires regular assistance from supportive people. Analyzing your own conduct objectively is difficult. Ask those who know you to handle this important task and to share helpful ideas and perspectives. Your family and friends can lend valuable moral support as you change. Most essentially, you need a guide or mentor to assist you. This person will play a major role in your self-coaching and growth.

“If only you could just snap your fingers and, presto, begin behaving differently. But reality doesn’t work that way.”

Among other responsibilities, your guide will help you develop an actual plan for change. Recruit someone you respect and with whom you feel comfortable, someone positive who can help you explore all your success options. Of course, your guide must have the time and willingness to back you up and give you advice on what to do. Your mentor will ask you questions (but won’t answer them) and will make you think. Your guide is your sounding board, not your echo.

“Change brings uncertainty. And uncertainty can be scary.”

Also, develop a circle of support among your friends or associates to assist you constantly on the difficult journey of personal change. A good guide exemplifies the type of individuals you want in your circle of support. Select people who truly care about you and who will be honest with you. Your guide and your circle of support must hold you responsible for your own success.

Step 4 – “Solicit Feedback”

Objective feedback is crucial in self-coaching. With the help of your guide and support group, develop a comprehensive questionnaire to elicit the feedback from them that you need to assess your progress. These questions might ask for their assessment of your current situation, how it might change, what’s the major thing you could do on your own behalf and what behavior would indicate success. You may find it helpful to add an explanatory memo to your list of questions. For example, “As I take the next steps toward realizing my intention...your support is going to be crucial. Providing me with honest, thoughtful feedback is one of the most important ways that you can help.” Include guidelines on the type of feedback that you need, specifically information that focuses on your overall behavior, not just one episode or incident. Ask each person to fill out the questionnaire, or meet with each individual one-on-one to discuss his or her answers.

Step 5 – “Analyze and Respond to Feedback”

The way that your mentor and circle of supporters view you may be quite different from how you see yourself, so their feedback may surprise and upset you. Typical reactions include “They’re mistaken” or “That’s not me.” In fact, everyone carries an unrealistic self-image, a construct that psychologists term an “ego ideal.” Thus, objective feedback can be unsettling. Be aware of this as you solicit input, but encourage your guide and supporters to be honest; you want objective, no-holds-barred viewpoints.

“Planning isn’t so much about predicting the future as it is about trying to shape it.”

If you set up face-to-face interviews, use “attending behavior” to help prompt your guide and supporters to cooperate. Having this attitude of attentiveness indicates that you are fully receptive to what they say. For the best results, use the SOLER model: “Sit (or stand) squarely, Open posture, Lean forward, Eye contact” and “Respect” for the other person. Engage in “passive listening,” which means providing enough polite silence for the other person to speak openly and freely. Use “say more”-type responses: “Oh?” “Really?” and “Can you give me an example?” Paraphrasing also works well: “So, what you’re saying is...” and “Let me see if I understand you correctly.” Take notes while the other person discusses your behavior. Work with your mentor to analyze the feedback from your supporters. Seek common themes that recur in their comments about how you act. After this analysis, you and your guide should create a “Personal Development Plan” (PDP) outlining the steps you can take to change your behavior as you wish, a set timeline, a plan for handling possible obstacles and follow-up action steps.

Step 6 – “Develop and Act on a Game Plan”

Revamping your behavior requires having a strong action plan focused on your intention to change. Be realistic and systematic. Complex plans are difficult to follow, so keep yours simple. Include some contingency strategies if things don’t go exactly as hoped. If your intention requires following an intricate

path, break it down into achievable steps. Put everything on paper. Routinely check your premises, goals and action steps. Show your plan to your supporters for input. As you work on your action steps, remember that nothing ever goes exactly as planned. Set SMART goals that are: “Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time-Bounded.” Each goal should include a schedule; a “responsibility statement” outlining what you must accomplish; and a “performance measure” to assess your progress in calculable terms of quantity, quality or cost. Be conscious of “watch-outs,” danger areas that can interfere with your attempts to change. For example, for someone who wants to quit drinking, a bar is a watch-out.

Step 7 – “Track Your Success and Recalibrate”

Accomplishing truly lasting behavioral change generally takes nine to 12 months. During this extended period, getting offtrack somewhere along the line is a possibility. If that happens, it isn’t a defeat; see it, rather, as a small bump in the road. Get up and start again on your journey. Think of any temporary fall as something you will compensate for later. For example, if your plan is to eat healthy foods and lose weight, but you gave in and ate a doughnut during a meeting, adjust your dinner choices to compensate for the extra calories.

“We set goals, we reach, we grasp – and then we fall back on old habits.”

Keep a few rules of the road in mind on your journey of behavioral change: Be prepared for the unexpected. Don’t fret about matters you cannot control, just focus on elements you can manage. Establish a consistent routine. If your plan is not working, change it – that is, recalibrate your action steps. This is essential in self-coaching. If the plan you have is working, keep following it. When you reach your goal of behavioral change, ask your mentor and supporters to verify objectively that you have, in fact, changed as planned. Make sure you celebrate this notable achievement with the people who encouraged you along the way.

About the Author

Howard M. Guttman, the author of *Great Business Teams*, heads Guttman Development Strategies Inc., an executive coaching and management-development training firm.



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