

# Coaching Skills for Blueprint Competencies 1-2-3

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## Abstract

The Blueprint continues to grow in popularity world wide as an effective tool for helping people discover, learn, create and map out their life work design. It does this by guiding people how to develop their core competencies in the critical areas so that they are ready to engage and plan for their career choice. Since this program is based on a personal growth and enrichment process, the purpose of this brief is to provide a set of coaching tools for the career coach. The value of coaching tools are that they will help the career coach better connect with each client. And better coach their clients as they navigate the personal growth journey the Blueprint will guide them through.

*“One learns people through the heart, not the eyes or the intellect.” – Mark Twain*

## Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to provide a set of skills to assist Blueprint facilitators be more effective. The skill set I am going to recommend comes from coaching, which is one of the newest and fastest growing professional fields. The skill of coaching is based on advanced communications: learning from the client how to most effectively communicate with them, so that the coach is better able to help them explore information through their preferences. By adding these basic coaching skills to the Blueprint delivery, the coach will be improving the success of delivering the important messages taught in this program. It is important to make the point that this brief is written on the assumption that the career coach is fully aware and understands the Blueprint program. The Blueprint is the result of a joint effort and partnership between Canadian and American Career Resource Network. For more information on the Blueprint please visit [www.blueprint4life.ca](http://www.blueprint4life.ca).

## What Career Coaches Know For a Fact!

Career counsellors are well aware of the fact that when a person is struggling with education level and academic failure, addictions, family functioning or economic stability, their future may be comprised and/or limited in potential. At the root of many of these challenges will be low self-esteem. Not only does self-esteem impact the mind, it can impact a person's overall health.

There is direct connection between low self-esteem and a weakened immune system (Hewlett 2001).

It is understood that a person with a low self-esteem has a deficit, which can greatly impact their potential for employability. In a society where work is a primary benchmark for individual self-esteem and standard of living, it is clear that the first three Blueprint competencies are critical for a person's future employability. The *APA Monitor*, October 1999 issue, reported in its feature article that 80% of all employees have home issues, and that it is critical to help them balance the expectations of life both at home and at work.

When one is lacking a positive self-image, positive interpersonal skills, and ability to adapt to change, their potential for success can be greatly compromised. I see the need for a large portion of the population to participate in the development of the three competencies, which fall under the Blueprint heading Personal Management. The Blueprint makes it clear that these three competencies provide a person with the needed foundation for success personally, and set the stage for fulfilling their career aspirations. The motivation for this article is to provide career counsellors with introductory coaching assessment suggestions and tools for improving communications when delivering the Blueprint program.

Blueprint Competencies Learning Model – The four parts of this learning model are: 1) acquisition, 2) applications, 3) personalization, and 4) actualization. Each Blueprint competency is taught using this learning progression taxonomy. The model indicates that all learning starts at Number 1, and moves to the right to Number 4. The goal is mastery. Since learning is an individual process, each person will move through the stages of learning at different speeds.

The Blueprint is an excellent program, however, as with any program its success will depend a great deal on the presenters. Excellence in instruction requires that the presenter is able to personalize the curriculum to each participant's needs, as everyone learns a little differently. Understanding the Blueprint may not be enough. Coaching is about improving communications and closing the gaps. All presenters will need to have outstanding coaching skills to close the gaps so that the Blueprint program can be personalized.

### **Coaching Assessment Considerations**

Coaching assessment will increase your awareness and understanding of each individual's differences. My belief is the Blueprint is not a canned program. I also believe it can and must be a program that comes alive for each person.

This section is intended only to be an introduction and/or reminder of some very important components. It is important to learn about each participant, to increase the ability to tailor the program. Below I will point out seven different core considerations that I recommend the practitioner learn more about.

These kinds of tools are not to be clinical in terms of formal assessment. They are intended for discovery and learning for both the participant and the learner, with the outcome of how the

facilitator can better serve their clients. Below are seven areas that I have found to be invaluable. I have also included links to Web sites that can provide some user-friendly tools.

### **Seven Key Life Management Assessments:**

1. **Assess communication style.** – It is invaluable to be aware of how you naturally communicate, so you can become more aware of your client’s and your own communication styles. Understanding communication styles helps us to be aware that everyone does not communicate the way we do. For more information, I suggest you go to <http://www.ccu.com/>
2. **Assess motivation for change.** – As a model for understanding the stages of motivation, I recommend Prochaska and DiClemente’s six stages of change:
  - a. Precontemplation: not seriously thinking about behavior change
  - b. Contemplation: becoming aware of a risk behavior, and seriously considering changing it
  - c. Preparation: willingness to start to take charge and explore how to change.
  - d. Action and Planning: trying to change by making a plan and taking action.
  - e. Maintenance: continuing changes made in the action stage.
  - f. Termination: motivation is automatic, and the person most likely does not have to think about their motivation anymore; they just do it automatically. For more information, I suggest you go to <http://www.maccac.org/coglinks.htm>.
3. **Assess primary modalities for learning.** – Be aware of the individual’s learning style preference. The three most common learning styles are visual, auditory, and kinesthetic. I suggest you review Quantum Learning, found on the Web at <http://www.learningforum.com/quantum/>.
4. **Assess brain dominance.** – Be aware of brain dominance theory (left- vs. right-brained). This will impact how a person will develop plans, and how they will want to learn. For more information, I suggest you go to <http://www.sil.org/LinguaLinks/LanguageLearning/OtherResources/YorLrnnGStylAndLnggLrnnng/TheBrainDominanceInventory.htm>
5. **Assess locus of control.** – To learn the basics of internal and external locus of control, I recommend you study William Glasser’s *Choice Theory* and Stephen Covey’s *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*. For more information, I suggest you go to <http://www.dushkin.com/connectext/psy/ch11/survey11.mhtml>
6. **Assess intelligence preferences.** – To be aware of this component, I suggest you study Howard Garden’s *Multi-intelligences*. He provides a detailed account of how people can

excel in eight different intelligences, and how this will impact a person's development and learning. Verbal/Linguistic, Body/Kinesthetic, Musical/Rhythmic, Visual/Spatial, Logical/Mathematical, Interpersonal, Intrapersonal and Naturalistic. For more information, I suggest you go to

<http://www.chapman.edu/soe/faculty/piper/cpiper/terlmenu.htm>.

7. **Assess individual's progress in each of the learning taxonomies.** - It is commonly known that the Blueprint has four stages of learning for each competency. I would like to suggest that there are four phases of understanding that will occur in each of the four stages: 1) acquisition, 2) applications, 3) personalization, and 4) actualization.

### **Bandura's Four Stages of Learning:**

1. **Unconscious incompetence** – In this stage, you are not aware of what you do not know. For example, as a university client, I had no idea what calculus was, other than I knew it was a math. For many people, this is the stage of awakening to finding out something is possible.
2. **Conscious incompetence** – You are aware of what learning is, and even know what the outcome is; however, you do not have the skills to get there. For example, you are studying calculus, and realize you do not know what you are doing. This is a frustrating stage of learning, where many people will feel overwhelmed. This is where a great deal of people start when they come to coaching to improve in the areas of leadership, wellness, communication, time management, business planning, etc.
3. **Conscious competence** – This is the stage where the person has the skills they need, though they must really work at it. They are on a quest to obtain more information, and get more practice. Many come to coaching in this stage for help in attaining mastery, keeping their edge, or learning to become a peak performer. Each person will identify a couple of core skills they think they must work on to overcome the limitation or standard they are working at, so that they can raise their own bar of excellence and success.
4. **Unconscious competence** – This is the automatic stage. The new skills and knowledge have been assimilated into the person's life, and they no longer have to think about it. They handle such challenges as customer service, strategic planning, and conflict resolution naturally, and do it very well. The goal of coaching is for a person to move to mastery, and then make the choice to find their next life target of improvement, and work to grow in that area. For more information, I suggest you go to [http://www.dogwoodshelties.net/Dog\\_info/maslow.htm](http://www.dogwoodshelties.net/Dog_info/maslow.htm)

## Coaching Strategies

When coaching people to master the first three competencies, I suggest the following six tools. Please note that these skills can be used in all eleven competencies.

1. **Metaphors** – Use stories to explain a point. Stories help to move the focus to a neutral topic so that an individual may not feel they are being confronted, which can lower defences, and help them make the needed associations. Lakoff and Johnson 1980 stated “metaphors is not just a matter of language ... on the contrary, human thought processes are largely metaphorical” (p. 6). So if you have a client who is not being responsible; wants everything yesterday; and finds it hard to commit to a process, using the Farming Metaphor could help them understand the importance of time. You could explain that they need to plant the seed of a new behaviour, and nurture it into a crop, which can then be harvested. The power of metaphors is that it helps to dissociate the client, so that as a coach you can make a point covertly, and help the individual make the needed learning connections for their life. It is a wonderful communication tool.
2. **Metacognitions** – core skills needed to develop critical thinking. The most important aspect of this strategy is to help the client to become aware of their own cognitions. For example, when a person is tuned in to, and hears their own thinking, they are metacognitating. If they do not take charge of their own thinking, they are at great risk of not developing the first three core competencies, because they will not have the cognitive ability to believe in their own self-worth and abilities. To promote the skill of becoming aware of one’s own thinking, consider the following ideas. When doing an activity, have the client talk about what is going on internally when they are approaching a task or assignment. Instead of asking what is the right answer, which is an absolute, have them focus on the process and the strategies they are using to come up with an answer. One good question to ask is to give four reasons why something would be the wrong choice. The art of comparisons and critical thinking comes from focusing on not what we think about, but how we come up with what we think about. This also helps the coach to avoid making assumptions and miscommunications of awareness in this process.
3. **Journaling** – Journaling is a very powerful tool for helping people separate facts from opinions. “Using expressive writing reduces intrusive and avoidant thoughts about negative events and improves working memory” (Carpenter 2001, 68). The core components of the first three competencies are very much in line with helping a person learn how to think more effectively. To do this, one must practice working with their thoughts. Using a journal can be a very important tool for personal growth, however, it is important the journal is the correct kind. For example, left-brainers like journals that have structured measures and rigor, while right-brainers will most likely like a blank piece of paper, and be free to do what they want to do daily. They will use it more as a

tool to express thoughts and feelings, like a traditional diary. This an excellent example of the importance of learning your own personal preference.

4. **Power of Questions to Open the Mind** – One of the faults of most teaching is the use of statements. Statements close learning to meet the expectations of the statement. When a leader makes a statement, they are assuming that the client is able to process it from a similar frame of reference. For example, if we say that the key to self-esteem is positive thinking, this may make sense, though it would assume the listener is aware of what positive thinking is, and how to do it. If we were to ask the question, “When does a person know they are using positive thinking?” this would lead them to unfold criteria, and help them assess what information they would need to learn. Use as many questions as you can in the process. What, when, what if, who, how, with, define, explain, break down, describe are but a few examples of leadoff words that help keep the content open and investigative. The purpose of this is again to help expand the client’s ability to think and construct the criteria and integration of the core learnings of their blueprint competencies. This will enhance communications, and not direct them.
5. **Building Effective Communications by Practicing the Five Rs**
  - i. **Rapport** – People must perceive that they are safe. This takes into account the environment, comfort, confidentiality of the conversation, ability to help find common interest and ground, safe non-verbals, and that you are aware of your tone, volume, and pitch.
  - ii. **Respect** – You must come across as non-treating, non-judgmental, open; your language is appropriate, and you are aware of individual differences.
  - iii. **Relationship** – A client must perceive that you are aware of cultural sensitivity issues and multicultural differences and needs.
  - iv. **Role model** – A client must see you as a living model, and practice what you are preaching.
  - v. **Real** – The client must see you as being a genuine and real person, who has empathy, patience, acceptance, and passion for helping others grow.
6. **Three-Step Coaching Model.** When following the format of the Blueprint, there will be times when the client may need additional attention and support. The Blueprint is a guide, and cannot have the solution for every challenge or situation. However, by having a user-friendly coaching model, you will be better able to coach a person back onto their right track.
  - a. **Set Outcomes** – The coach should assist the client to define and agree on very specific outcomes. If a person is having a hard time with some aspect of their personal development, the coach may need to provide additional help outside the Blueprint curriculum.
  - b. **Assess Present Competencies (Knowledge and Skills)** – Once the client has determined their desired outcome, it is important to assess what life skills they may have in place to achieve it. This will determine what they may need to learn.

- c. **Creating an Action Plan and Assessing Risk Management (Always)** – This is the development of a detailed action plan of what the client will do, when they will do it, and how they will do it. The risk management assessment is an extensive measure of the pros and cons of any action(s). The extent of this kind of assessment will depend on the stakes.

## Summary

This brief introduces coaching skills to enhance communications. When communications between the coach and client are effective, the outcome will be a more successful Blueprint program. All learners will be different, and will learn a little differently. When we use coaching skills to improve communications so that we can have more flexibility to adapt the Blueprint to the learner, we help increase the likelihood the learner will move through the first three competencies effectively, and be on their way to employability. These skills are important for all eleven competencies, however, without the first three, the future of the client is going to be challenged.

## References

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