

Meet OSKAR

OSKAR is a framework for solution focused coaching: The Solutions Focus originally developed the model for a Coaching for Results programme in Walkers Snackfoods, and it has since proved a versatile and flexible guideline for independent coaches as well as managers working as coaches. It is used in face-to-face and telephone coaching.

OSKAR is an acronym, standing for Outcome, Scaling, Know How, Affirm and Action, Review.

When OSKAR is used as a process, we begin with Outcome. This is the part of the conversation in which the coach discovers what the performer wants.

If there is to be a sequence of coaching sessions, then the Outcome will include discussion of what the performer wants out of the coaching programme; if it is a one-off meeting, then it is useful to discover what the performer wants from that meeting.

1. OUTCOME:

What is the objective of this coaching?

What do you want to achieve today?

What do you want to achieve in the long term?

How will you know this coaching has been of use to you?

2. SCALING:

On a scale of 0 to 10, with 10 representing the Future Perfect, and 0 the worst it has ever been, where are you on that scale today?

You are at n now; what did you do to get this far?

3. KNOW-HOW & RESOURCES:

What helps you perform at n on the scale, rather than 0?

When does the outcome already happen for you - even a little bit?

What did you do to make that happen? How did you do that?

What did you do differently?

4. AFFIRM AND ACTION:

What's already going well?

What is the next small step? What would you like to do personally, straight away?

You are at n now, what would it take to get you to n+1?

5. REVIEW:

What's better? What did you do that made the change happen?

We are sometimes asked if it is possible to coach someone if there is no problem. The answer within solutions focus is a very clear yes. It is only because it is possible to create a solution with no necessary logical connection to a problem that the solution focused approach can create a solution when there is a problem.

The next phase is often Scaling. The point here is for the performer to make a call about where they are on the scale. It gives a sense of objectivity to state a number. There is no need for the coach to argue about the figure. The discussion is about how the performer got that high, and how they might get a step higher – a resourceful discussion about progress.

Scale numbers also open up opportunities for fruitful discussions about differences. We might explore:

- Different figures from different moments in a client's life - "When was it higher?"
- Different scales - perhaps for confidence and for commitment
- Different perspectives - "Where would your customer put you on that scale?"
- Different opinions, particularly with team coaching - "What is Dave seeing to give this an 8, while most of you have given it a 5?"

Once we have established the appropriate scale, we can explore Know How. Our interest is in what works here. And our assumption is that there is a lot of know how around. What can we discover about what the performer knows, what the coach might know, what others can add.

The know how is about what works specifically in relation to the context. It is important that the know how fits – which is why it typically makes sense to start with finding out what the performer knows – as they are likely to have the clearest idea of the issue they are facing and the relevance of any potential know how. Then we might look more widely.

For the performer to remain motivated, it also helps if they find the know how for themselves – even if that means asking for it from the coach or someone else – rather than having it imposed on them (for example by having the coach tell them what to do because the coach knows best).

We want to find out when the solution happens.

- When has the outcome happened already?
- When does the outcome happen in part – even a little bit?
- When have you had experience of something like the outcome?
- When did you achieve similar things before?
- Who else do you know who has achieved this?
- How did they do it?

And we want to find out what qualities and resources are available to help bring about progress.

- What other teams or organisations are good at this kind of thing?
- Where else can you find out more about what you need here?
- What resources are you bringing to the project?
- What qualities and experience do you have that is going to help you here?
- What did you do to make success happen?
- How did you do that? What did you do differently?

In short, the coach asks questions to create a sense of possibility and capability.

Then the coach sifts through the answers so as to be ready to offer Affirms. The coach listens out for examples of what is going well, and what the performer has in his or her arsenal. The best of these can then be mentioned during the course of the conversation.

In the OSKAR process, a good time to reflect these experiences and qualities back to the performer is immediately before asking what action they might take to get closer to their outcome. Hearing about one's relevant, successful experiences and resourceful qualities seems as good a preparation as any for selecting a useful next step.

So the coach summarises what's impressed them so far, then invites the performer to select a small Action. This is something for the performer to do personally, and is usually expressed as something they might do to take them one point up the scale.

"What is the next small step? For you to take personally."

"You are at n now, what would it take to get you to n+1?"

"What's the first thing you will notice that tells you you are one point up the scale?"

The small steps are best based on what works or what is expected to work.

Choose from...

- * The most likely to succeed
- * The easiest
- * A random choice
- * Noticing what works

Choose things...

- * To do tomorrow
- * Concrete
- * Starting, not stopping
- * For the right people

In organisations, people are often used to Action Plans and taking pretty ambitious steps. If such as step or action plan point emerges from the coaching discussion, that is fine. It is not, however, necessary. The small step in solutions-focused coaching is not a goal and not something that the performer will be tested on later. It is better thought of as a moment in a conversation, designating something that might lead to progress, or unblock some stuckness. There is no particular virtue in larger sizes.

Indeed, it can be enough for the 'action' to be along the lines of looking out for progress – a consideration of signs rather than steps. A useful question here is "What will you notice that will tell you you are one step up the scale?"

This is clearly different from typical organisational action planning. There is, of course, a place for action planning and holding people to account for taking actions, (or not taking them) and for their consequences. But that is another matter, perhaps for performance reviews, day-to-day discussions between managers and their reports, and not for OSKAR coaching.

The choice of small step is with the performer, not with the coach, though the coach will have an influence on the choice. Once the performer has a clear sense of what they want to do (or look out for), the main purpose of the coaching session has been achieved.

There may be some checking against the original Platform, and the coach may add further affirms, if appropriate. If, as a coach, you have a concern that the small step is not well-chosen by the performer, you might scale for confidence or commitment.

The 'R' of OSKAR is for Review, and refers to the start of the next session, or the beginning of any subsequent session. (You might also call the checking process at the end of the first session a Review). Our interest in subsequent sessions is in What's better, what progress has been made. It also brings a cycle back to a start, to consider what might be next for the coach and performer to speak about.

What's better?

What did you do that made the change happen?

What effects have the changes had?

What do you think will change next?

The coach keeps the conversation focussed on what works, looking for opportunities to give and share credit, and to find out what the client wants now. If positive results have occurred as a direct result of an action the performer took, that is fine and worthy of congratulation and exploration (Wow, how did you do that?). If the performer changed his or her mind and took actions other than those mentioned in the coaching session, that's fine too. Any progress is welcome, even if it appears to have nothing to do with any action by the performer. Better is better.

It would be a mistake to think that the process itself is the most important thing. While it is generally advisable to stick to a process – particularly while learning enough about it to make it work for you – it is just as important to remain flexible, listening carefully to the answers you are getting, so that you can respond to what's there.

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