

Support Coaching



**What You Can Do to Help Others
Get Stronger for Life and Work**

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Introduction

Strong for Performance is an online virtual coaching service for people who are working to become more effective in life and work.

In the program, learners are encouraged to connect with people like you who care about their success. These helpful individuals are called “support coaches” and are a part of the learner’s “Coaching Network.”

Any caring individual can be a support coach—mentors, managers, colleagues, friends, family members—not just people in a coaching profession, such as counselors, trainers, human resource professionals, or executive coaches.

Refer to this book often as you interact with learners. Like the people you’re helping, the more you use the skills, the more effective a support coach you’ll become.

1

Your Support Coaching Role

Coaching isn't just what professional coaches do. All kinds of people can get involved in helping others improve the way they do things.

- Managers and supervisors
- Co-workers
- Mentors
- Trainers
- Advisors
- Family
- Friends



Since you're reading this now, you may be one of these "support coaches." That means you care about the people you know who are trying to improve, and you want to help.

Changing a behavior pattern takes work. So it helps immensely when people have the active support of someone like you, who...

- Cares enough to make regular contact
- Encourages them to stay the course, and
- Can be trusted to keep what is said confidential

This chapter is the first of several that will help you do things like:

- Listen to what people say about their efforts to make changes
- Give specific feedback
- Suggest ways to improve
- Help them stay focused on improving
- Remind them to put into practice—over and over—what they're learning
- Encourage them when they forget or make mistakes
- Guide them to learn from their experiences
- Share your own experiences and knowledge of resources

These are simply the kinds of things you already do in caring relationships. The brief chapters will give you tips on how to do them even more effectively in a coaching role.

The final chapter, “Hold Them Accountable,” is for the person designated as “accountability coach,” who meets regularly with participants to check whether they actually did what they committed to do. The accountability coach could be one of the support coaches, the person’s manager, an executive coach, an instructor or a human resource professional.

You and other support coaches are helpful resources for learners in their “Coaching Network.” ***Strong for Performance*** makes it easy for you to be effective in this coaching role.

The best approach for learners is to use the content in ***Strong for Performance*** to focus on a specific skill and apply it at work and at home. Then, after reflecting on the experience with the purpose of becoming more effective, they return to the content in the program for more tips and repeat the cycle of focus, action and reflection.

So as you support people who are trying to improve, encourage them to access their ***Strong for Performance*** accounts often to stay focused, put desired behaviors into practice, and identify lessons from their experiences. To become familiar with how the program works, refer to Chapter 2.

2

Focus, Action, Reflection - How *Strong for Performance* Works



The purpose of *Strong for Performance* is to help people put new skills into practice, so that over time they eventually ingrain these skills as permanent habits.

You already know how skill-building works. It takes practice, practice, practice—lots of repetitions of applying desired behaviors in life or work until they become automatic.

Each repetition involves three steps:

1. **Focus**
2. **Action**
3. **Reflection**

The tool that engages them in this process is *Strong for Performance*.

Focus

The first step is “Focus.” The program requires them to focus on just one topic at a time. In this example, the current focus is “Listening.”

The reason for spending time in the program is to review content about this single skill element, looking for an idea, tip or technique that the learner can apply in the real world. In this example, they choose to watch one of the videos about Listening, called “Check to Be Sure You Understand.”

The video is less than two minutes long, but one of the ideas presented is that a good listener pays attention to both verbal and nonverbal expressions.

After getting a useful suggestion, the learner then uses the exercise to go from idea to action.

He saves the exercise and shares it with his accountability coach and maybe other support coaches.

After using ***Strong for Performance*** for only a few minutes, he's now ready to leave the program to apply his take-away idea on the job.

Action

In the normal course of a busy day, an individual will consciously look for an opportunity to implement their Planned Action, applying what they learned about listening.

This is how a person ingrains a better way of doing something—by consciously remembering to do it right, over and over, until it becomes a habit.

Reflection

To internalize learning from this experience, the learner will then return to the program to do a “Reflection” exercise. He answers five questions that coach him to analyze the experience in order to draw lessons from it, ending with a commitment to apply the desired behavior again.

After responding to the questions, the learner then saves the exercise and shares it with their accountability coach and support coaches by clicking “Request Input.”

Once again, this step requires only a few minutes in the program.

When a learner shares an exercise and request your input, you'll receive an email with the request and a link. The link takes you to a web page where you can enter your comments.

The “Reflection Exercise” completes the cycle of Focus, Action and Reflection. Learning what to do, then practicing the behavior on the job, followed by learning from the experience is what we refer to as a “rep,” or repetition of the desired behavior. As in building any skill, it takes many reps to make a skill an automatic behavior pattern.

To continue building a skill, learners have more options. They can discuss with their accountability coach what they learned and what to do next. Or they could choose to access more content to get another tip. Or if they already know what they want to try next, they could exit the program and implement this action.

It will take many cycles or “reps” of Focus, Action and Reflection to establish the desired behavior as an automatic habit, which is the ultimate goal.



Mastering any kind of skill takes time, effort and patience. Along the way, there’s much you can do to help someone stay on track.

The remaining chapters offer ideas for being an effective support coach.

3

Listen To Understand

The only way for people to improve the way they do something is to put the desired behavior into practice in the real world, over and over, until it becomes a comfortable habit.

This isn't as easy as it sounds, because the old way is already wired in their brain, and if they don't consciously try to do something different, these old habits will automatically kick in.

One of the most effective things you can do when you're helping someone make a change is to *listen*.

Not lecture. Not instruct. Not give advice. Not criticize. Not challenge.

Just listen.

Two things will greatly improve the way you listen.



The most important thing you can do as a listener is to ***check to be sure you understand what people are trying to say***. You do this by paying attention to what they're saying and how they're saying it. When you think you understand some of the message, check it by paraphrasing it in your own words.

- Are you saying that...?
- So what you're getting at is....
- It sounds like you....

The people you're listening to will tell you if you understood correctly.



The second thing is to encourage the speaker to continue. Listening isn't like having a conversation. It's a special interaction in which other people are talking, and you're actively trying to understand what they're saying.

So to get the people you coach to do most of the talking, ask open-ended questions. Questions like these...

- Then what happened?
- Why do you think she did that?
- Tell me more.
- What was the real issue?
- What are some other ways you could have handled the situation?
- Which approach will work best for you?
- How do you feel about that?
- What are your next steps?
- What kind of help do you need?

You see, none of these questions can be answered with a simple word or two. They get a person to talk, to do the kind of thinking that will lead to learning and action.

The key is to recognize when you should be operating in your coaching role and watch for opportunities to listen. When you realize “I need be listening right now,” ***encourage people to say what they need to say, and then check what you think you’re hearing.***

It’s the most powerful thing you can do as a support coach.

4

Give Specific, Encouraging Feedback

People don't see themselves the way others see them. If their behavior is causing problems, they may not realize it.

In ***Strong for Performance***, learners are encouraged to ask for “diagnostic” feedback to discover which area they need to improve. And once they start working on that skill, they can ask for “focused” feedback to check their progress in that area.



Feedback can be:

- Positive—describing a specific behavior and its **positive** impact
- Constructive—describing a specific behavior and its **negative** impact

Many people think that judgments, complaints, criticisms and put-downs are constructive. But these types of comments aren't helpful.

The best feedback...

- Is wanted by the person receiving it
- First, acknowledges what the person has been doing well
- Describes specific behavior—not thoughts, values, traits or intentions
- Is honest – not overstated or understated
- Includes suggestions for performing the skill more effectively
- Expresses confidence that the person can improve



Strong for Performance gives learners an easy way to ask for anonymous feedback. As a support coach, you may get such a request. Giving feedback should take only a few minutes of your time. So in the spirit of being helpful, when you receive a request, ***be sure to reply with your honest opinion and suggestions within 48 hours.***

5

Help Them Stay Focused

As you help people who are trying to establish a new way of doing something, remind them that they're actually rewiring their brain. This process will take patience, persistence and time, because their current way of doing things is already a hard-wired behavior pattern.

That's why it's so hard to break a habit. To replace the familiar pattern with a new one, learners need to rewire their brain. And that takes many repetitions.



Some people may want to make a lot of changes all at once and may be ambitious enough to try. But it's a mistake to address several issues simultaneously.

The key to changing behavior is to concentrate their time and energy on making one change at a time.

While ***Strong for Performance*** has lots of rich content for many different topics, the program keeps learners focused on one area at a time.

One of the most helpful things you can do is to help keep people on track. Here are some ways you can do that:

1. Suggest that they set a goal to ***improve a single skill or behavior pattern***.
2. Remind them to ***regularly log into Strong for Performance to view content about that topic, looking for helpful ideas***.
3. Coach them to ***complete an exercise associated with the content and share it with you***.
4. After they've taken action, encourage them to ***complete a Reflection Exercise***.
5. Ask open-ended questions to get them to ***talk about what happened and what they learned***—and listen to understand.

Be there for the people you're supporting as they repeat the Focus-Action-Reflection cycle. Encourage them to put the skill into practice often until they're having far more successes than setbacks.



When the behavior has become automatic, celebrate their achievement.

6

Guide Them to Take Action

Learning the best way to do something is important, but this is only the first step to improving.

Because ***KNOWING what to do isn't the same as actually DOING it.***

A person can't change behavior for the long term simply by attending a course, reading an article, or watching a video and agreeing with what is presented.

If the people you're coaching really want to ***improve*** a skill, they'll need to ***practice*** it often in the real world.

At first, this will take a conscious effort. And when they do take action, it will probably feel unnatural and awkward. That's why repeating the skill over and over is so important. This is what stimulates the brain to rewire for the new behavior.

As a support coach, one of your roles is to help people go from awkward to competent – where their brain is rewired, and the behavior is easy, comfortable and automatic.

One thing you can do is ask learners to complete exercises related to their topic in ***Strong for Performance*** and share them with you. Notice which actions they committed to take within the next 48 hours. Ask for clarification when you need to.

Then encourage them to apply their planned actions in their life and work.

Taking action is where the action is. To change their behavior, they gotta do the reps.



7

Offer Encouragement

Initial attempts to change a behavior can be discouraging. Old habits kick in automatically, so it takes a conscious effort to try something different.



In a busy life, it's easy for people to forget what they planned to do. Even if they remember to try, their initial efforts may not get the results they hoped for.

This can be disheartening. The danger is that the people you're coaching will want to give up. This is the "crunch point." As their coach, you need to encourage them to keep trying.

Here are some of the best ways to offer encouragement:

- ***Listen to understand*** their feelings of frustration. Reasoning, criticizing or giving advice may cause a negative reaction.
- ***Acknowledge*** that what they're doing is difficult and ***reassure*** them that initial failures are a natural part of change.
- ***Remind them of their strengths and past successes.*** When discouraged, people tend to focus mainly on their discouragement. Help them remember the positives.
- ***Ask what kind of support they need.*** Let them know you're there to help any way you can.

The idea is to help people stick with it. They need to keep trying, even though the early going is rough. The more often they make a conscious effort, the easier it will get. Encourage them to continue applying the skill, and eventually they will have more successes. If they keep trying, in time the brain cells involved in the skill will connect into a circuit and insulate, and the new way will kick in automatically.



8

Help Them Learn From Experience

Experience really is the best teacher.

But people don't always *learn* from their experiences. It's possible to have dozens of experiences every day. To capture the lessons from these situations, people have to consciously think about what happened and why. If they don't, little, if anything will be learned, and they'll be more likely to repeat their mistakes.



Consciously learning from experience not only helps people stay on track and do what works, it actually accelerates the skill development process.

The Reflection Exercise in ***Strong for Performance*** asks these five questions to help people learn from their experiences.

- What happened and how did you feel about it?
- Why did it happen that way?
- What were the consequences?
- How would you handle a similar situation in the future?
- What will you do in the next 48 hours to implement this lesson?

As you stay in touch with the people you're helping, ask them to ***complete a Reflection Exercise*** after they implement a planned action. Then ask them to ***share the exercise with you*** so you can give your input. Help them ***decide what they'll put into practice next***.

A Reflection Exercise completes a cycle of Focus, Action and Reflection. Afterward, encourage learners to start another cycle with a different skill.

Continue to help them learn from their experiences until the desired behavior becomes an automatic habit.



Also, you can ***share your own stories about what has worked for you and why, or about your mistakes and what you learned from them.***

Your experiences have value. Include enough detail that the story is interesting and makes sense—what happened, why it happened and what you learned from it. But keep it brief. Support coaching is about the other person, after all.

And if you know of any related articles, videos or books, recommend these, too. You never know when a certain insight will make a huge difference to someone trying to make a change.

9

Hold Them Accountable

Changing behavior can be hard because it involves going against the grain of established habits. Habits are driven by circuits in the brain, which were created by countless repetitions of behavior over the years. To change, people have to rewire their brains.



It's a challenging process, because people might let the old habit kick in, or they'll make mistakes and get discouraged. The danger is that they'll give up before they ingrain the new skill. Your goal as accountability coach is to keep them on track.

Accountability motivates people to do the hard things while making a change. Accountability is a key element of the best weight loss and other change programs. It inspires people in all walks of life to adopt new behavior patterns. And it's a key component of the ***Strong for Performance*** system.

The accountability coach is someone who will contact learners regularly and check whether they actually did what they said they would do. This person could be one of the support coaches, a mentor, a friend, a manager, a professional coach, a colleague or an instructor.

If you've been asked to be an accountability coach, discuss with learners how and when you'll make contact. Face-to-face? Phone? Email? Twice a week? Monthly?

Also, ask them what specific actions they'll commit to doing in their work or life—what, when, where, with whom, how much, and so on. Keep a record of these commitments, and when you contact them, ask them how each of these actions worked for them.

Another powerful way to hold people accountable is to ***ask them to share with you their completed Strong for Performance exercises***. Keeping learners in the program will help them get in the routine of doing repetitions of Focus, Action and Reflection.

Respond to each exercise they share with you, ***giving suggestions, insights and encouragement. Keep track of specific actions they commit to, so you can ask them what happened.***

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Denny has been a human resources development professional for over 35 years. All his work has been about pursuing two questions. How do people learn—how does it really happen in the brain? And what can people learn that will make the biggest difference in their work and lives?

Denny has been CEO of Performance Support Systems since 1987. In 1994 he created **20/20 Insight GOLD**, an online multi-source survey platform. Since then it has been used by hundreds of organizations worldwide to assess and develop managers and employees.

Denny is also the creator of **Strong for Performance**, an online coaching and development system for improving core strengths and people skills. Over the years, his programs have helped millions of people grow stronger for the challenges of work and life. These days he spends most of his time writing about personal development, communication skills, core strengths and parenting teens.

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