



Support Development Associates LLC

Person centered thinking coaches: an overview 2012

The following is intended to help those who are selecting person centered thinking coaches. It is not a complete description of the efforts of the coaches or the support they receive. Please contact your SDA representative or call the number below.

Who are person centered thinking coaches?

Person centered thinking coaches are people already employed by the organization who have been selected by their organization to -

- Lead the implementation of person centered thinking skills –
 - Demonstrate how the person centered thinking skills work and
 - Support the skills in becoming habit
- Make changes that improve quality of life for those who use the services and those who provide the services –
 - Make the changes that can be made without permission or altering policies, procedures, or structures (level 1)
 - Identify those changes that need to be made but require permission or a change in policies, procedures, or structures (level 2)
- Support the development of a positive organizational culture characterized by -
 - Partnership
 - Learning
 - Accountability
- Learn what is working within the organization, needs to stay the same and be celebrated; and what is not working and needs to change.

Who should be in the first group to be selected to be person centered thinking coaches?

Anyone who is being considered to become a person centered thinking coaches must have completed the 2 day person centered thinking training. Coaches play a central role in going from skill exposure, to competence, to having skills that are embedded in day to day practice. Selecting the right people and then supporting them in their work is crucial. These efforts must start with success. Begin with a small group who have –

- Gift
- Passion
- Opportunity

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The first group of coaches should be people who have a gift for the work. Look for the “naturals”, people who did very well in the person centered thinking skill training. Look for those who can see how they can use the skills. When we say they need passion we mean that they see the connection between the skills and improving people’s lives and they find it doable and exciting. They should have ordinary opportunities to use the skills. They should be able to see this as a way of making positive changes in people’s lives by changing how they do their work; they should see this as a real example of the cliché work smarter, not harder. They need to be people whose day to day responsibilities include opportunities to use the skills. These people will be found among front line managers, interested professionals, and those who do support coordination/case management.

What about senior/middle managers and direct support professionals as coaches?

Having a few middle and/or senior managers serve as coaches (and simultaneously as leaders) is a good idea. But only a few middle/senior managers should be among the first group of coaches. The majority of the coaches should be people who have day to day contact with the people who use services.

Experienced direct support professionals, who are “opinion molders”, have done well as coaches. But others have found that coaching their peers is difficult. They are challenged by their co-workers as to why they are “better than” and find the role very awkward. It becomes particularly difficult if they have a manager who needs coaching but doesn’t recognize the need. Direct support professionals who have management responsibilities work well as coaches.

Time commitment

Coaches need to –

- Complete the 2 day person centered thinking training (before being a coach)
- Actively participate in –
 - A coaches orientation day
 - Every other month all day coaches support days
 - Every other month all day leaders and coaches meetings

Other things to keep in mind

Coaches need and receive regular, ongoing support.

There is a coaches support group that meets for 1 day every other month where coaches -

- Share what they are learning and trying
- Share and report on what is working and not working in their efforts
- Have opportunities to learn and practice skills
- Learn from and support each other
- Have opportunities for renewal

Coaches need to be comfortable with using the skills before helping others learn the skills.

Expectations for the spreading the use of the skills need to take into account the need for each coach to become competent and confident in skill use before asking them to “coach” the skill. Coaches need safe places to learn and practice skills that they are not comfortable or confident in. This is one of the functions of the coaches support group.

The number of coaches should grow over time.

Eventually you want all front line managers, all clinicians, all support coordinators/care managers, and all professionals to see being a person centered thinking coach as a part of their role, their everyday work. It also means that those who are leading this effort have to plan for the expansion of the coaches group over time.

Start with success.

As the first coaches are selected, think about where success is easiest, the most likely. Coaches work in a context and you want the environment to support the efforts. As coaches become competent and confident they can address more challenging issues. But it is unfair (and rarely successful) to have coaches “manage up”. If the problem in a setting is the leadership a coach who is supervised by the leader is unlikely to make a change and likely to experience cynical discontent.

No isolated coaches.

When the first coaches begin their work it will feel awkward. Most people need support as they build confidence and competence. Having other coaches that they can talk with during their everyday interactions is very helpful. Avoid the temptation of having one coach in each area unless there is contact within the course of their day to day work.

Coaches make level 1 changes, but not level 2 changes.

It is important to remember that coaches can and will make level 1 changes, but once all of the available level 1 changes are made, senior managers have to make the level 2 changes that create the next generation of level 1 opportunities. Coaches must feel listened to and see that what they say makes a difference. There must be structured ways for senior managers to hear the learning from coaches and senior managers must act on that learning.