

Identifying work-based skills

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Purpose

People often have difficulty knowing the skills they use in their work – they take what they do well for granted. This is a problem when they need to sell their skills to others, for example in appraisals or job interviews. This exercise helps to raise the client's awareness of their skills and provides them with a 'skills vocabulary'. If relevant, the skills can then be looked at to identify 'transferable skills' – those that could apply in a different role. Additionally, it builds confidence in what the client does well, particularly useful if the need for the audit is an enforced job change, or where confidence has been knocked.

Description

The client describes something they do well at work. The coach, through questioning and feedback, elicits the skills used to achieve this. This passes on the technique to the client, who can repeat it, perhaps with friends/colleagues, with other relevant activities from current and/or past jobs, to give a full skills audit. This can be checked out at a further coaching session.

Process

Start by asking the client to identify something in their work experience that they feel they did particularly well or

consider an achievement. Write this up in the centre of a flip chart. Your role is then to ask questions and give feedback on the skills you can see. Useful questions/feedback includes:

- What exactly did you do?
- Tell me more about that.
- How do you know you did it well?
- So that means you . . . [e.g. were good at getting agreement between people with very different backgrounds]?
- It sounds as if you were . . . [e.g. using meeting deadline skills there]?

The coach writes up skills and evidence as they emerge, creating a ‘spider’ diagram. Alternatively, it can be recorded as: ‘What I did’ on the left hand side of the page; and ‘Skills’ and ‘Evidence’ (as in ‘how do you know you did it well’) on the top and bottom halves of the right hand side of the page. This can be repeated with other achievements if there is time.

Your key role is to constantly feedback positive outcomes, the skills you see that helped to accomplish this, creating positive energy and taking the client beyond ‘this is what I did’. Either you or your client can write. Many clients find it difficult to think at this level and write at the same time, so it may be more helpful if you do.

The main purpose is to pass on a way of thinking to your client, so that they can then do a more thorough skills audit, maybe with the support of friends/colleagues, going over any of their past/present jobs that may be relevant. Structured paper work for this with headings for each chosen task – ‘What exactly did you do?’, “How do you know you did it well?”, “What skills did you use?” – can be useful.

Pitfalls

Some people have real difficulty applying the word ‘skill’ to anything that is not really exceptional. It helps then to avoid words like ‘achievement’ and to find words that they can accept.