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## Entrevista com Dr. Stephen Palmer: o desenvolvimento do *coaching* cognitivo comportamental

### *Interview with Stephen Palmer: the development of cognitive behavioural coaching*

#### RESUMO

Stephen Palmer, PhD, é diretor do *Centre for Coaching* do *Centre for Stress Management* em Londres, Inglaterra. Ele é diretor da Unidade de Psicologia do *Coaching da City University* London e do *adSapiens*, Gothenburg, Suécia. É também diretor honorário da Unidade de Psicologia do *Coaching* do Instituto de Psiquiatria da Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro. Tem formação clínica em Terapia Cognitivo Comportamental e atua como Supervisor em *coaching*, com certificação pela *International Society for Coaching Psychology* (ISCP), da qual é atualmente presidente. Dr. Palmer escreveu/editou mais de 40 livros. O *coaching* cognitivo comportamental é uma abordagem de *coaching* baseada nos princípios teóricos da Terapia Cognitivo Comportamental, desenvolvendo técnicas específicas para promover e facilitar processos de mudança e a obtenção de metas específicas. Diversas evidências científicas demonstram a eficácia da abordagem do *Coaching* Cognitivo Comportamental (CCC) nas diversas esferas de aplicação do *coaching*, como o *coaching* pessoal, corporativo, de saúde etc. A presente entrevista tem como objetivo familiarizar o leitor da Revista Brasileira de Terapias Cognitivas com os princípios e aplicações do CCC e divulgar esta área do conhecimento no país.

**Palavras-chave:** *coaching* cognitivo comportamental; *coaching*; modelo cognitivo.

#### ABSTRACT

Stephen Palmer PhD is Director of the Centre for Coaching, and the Centre for Stress Management, London, UK. He is Director of the Coaching Psychology Unit at City University London and a Director of *adSapiens*, Gothenburg, Sweden. He is also Honorary Consultant Director of the Coaching Psychology Unit at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. He is an Accredited Cognitive Behavioural Therapist and Coach. He is President of the International Society for Coaching Psychology and former President of the Association for Coaching. He has written/edited 40 books. The Cognitive Behavioral Coaching (CBC) is based on the theoretical principles of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, developing specific techniques to promote and facilitate change processes and specific goals achievement. Abounding scientific evidence currently demonstrate the efficacy of the Cognitive Behavioural Coaching (CCC) approach in the various spheres of application of coaching, as life coaching, as well as executive and health coaching. This interview aims to familiarize the reader with the principles and applications of CBC and disseminate this possible application of cognitive behavioral principles in Brazil.

**Keywords:** *coaching*; cognitive behavioural coaching; cognitive model.

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## INTRODUÇÃO

*Coaching*, de uma forma geral, caracteriza-se por um processo de aprendizagem e desenvolvimento de competências comportamentais, psicológicas e emocionais, direcionando o indivíduo a alcançar metas, solucionar problemas e superar barreiras e limitações. O coach é o profissional especializado em conduzir o processo de *coaching*, sendo um facilitador que fornece suporte contínuo para o cliente desenhar um plano de ação eficiente em direção a uma meta específica (Palmer & Szymanska, 2007). É importante destacar, ainda, que o alcance desta meta, em geral, requer o desenvolvimento de novos padrões cognitivos e comportamentais. Uma grande diferença entre o *coaching* e a psicoterapia é que, no *coaching*, o cliente (*coachee*) é necessariamente alguém sem psicopatologia, que reúne de fato as condições para realizar a mudança, mas que precisa de ajuda para o processo de implementação da mesma.

O *coaching* cognitivo comportamental é uma abordagem de *coaching* baseada nos princípios teóricos da Terapia Cognitivo Comportamental, desenvolvendo técnicas específicas para promover e facilitar processos de mudança e a obtenção de metas específicas (Grant, 2003). Diversas evidências científicas demonstram a eficácia da abordagem do *Coaching* Cognitivo Comportamental (CCC) nas diversas esferas de aplicação do *coaching*, como o coaching pessoal, corporativo, de saúde etc (Grant, Curtayne & Burton, 2009; Grbcic & Palmer, 2007).

O *coaching* cognitivo comportamental (CCC) é um processo de autoconhecimento e desenvolvimento de recursos do indivíduo por intermédio de sessões programadas e estruturadas cujas técnicas são baseadas na abordagem cognitivo-comportamental do problema trazido pelo *coachee*. O CCC busca modificar padrões específicos de comportamentos insatisfatórios que impedem o indivíduo de realizar planos e obter sucesso (Palmer, 2007). Estratégias com CCC tem obtido resultados reconhecidos na alteração de comportamentos não saudáveis, como: tabagismo, obesidade, relacionamentos difíceis, estagnação no trabalho, entre outros. Assim, o CCC é uma derivação do modelo cognitivo-comportamental que tem sido aplicado com sucesso para modificação de padrões disfuncionais em uma série de situações que transcendem o âmbito da psicoterapia (Green, Oades & Grant, 2006). Esta entrevista tem como objetivos familiarizar o leitor da Revista Brasileira de Terapias Cognitivas com os princípios e aplicações do CCC e divulgar esta área do conhecimento no país.

### 1. WHAT IS YOUR DEFINITION OF COACHING AND HOW DO YOU FIND IT CAN BE HELPFUL?

There are quite a few different definitions or descriptions of coaching. It depends on which one you are considering. In the facilitation approach, the coach or coaching psychologist facilitates the *coachee* in achieving their realistic goals whereas the instructional approach, takes more of teaching model.

Often I have found that coaches using the latter approach have tended to come from the sporting field. Depending upon your background, it can influence how you describe coaching.

Michael Neenan and I define Cognitive Behavioural Coaching (CBC) as:

A collaborative, goal-directed endeavour using multimodal learning methods to help individuals develop their capabilities and remove any psychological blocks that interfere with this process. (Neenan and Palmer, 2012:1).

One of the key aspects of coaching is that many well-known people across the world have a coach, a wellbeing coach and/or a sports coach. It means that coaching has become more acceptable for anybody to have a coach as well. This is in contrast to seeing a therapist about a problem. In many cultures, including the British culture, if you are seeing a therapist, you don't normally share that with your colleagues and friends, or even your family sometimes. Sadly there is still an element of embarrassment and shame associated with receiving therapy in many cultures. However, coaching is usually viewed positively (see Gyllensten, Palmer & Farrants, 2005).

### 2. WHAT ARE THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE COGNITIVE BEHAVIOURAL APPROACH TO THE COACHING PRACTICE?

I would say that the cognitive behavioural approach has made a huge contribution to coaching practice. On the top of my list is that the solution-focused cognitive behavioral models have added to the evidence base for the effectiveness of coaching. Research has focused on a number of different areas including self-acceptance and self-esteem, stress, performance anxiety, depression, perfectionism, procrastination, emotional control, resilience and wellbeing (eg. Grant, 2003, 2008; Grant, Curtayne & Burton, 2009; Grbcic & Palmer, 2007; Green, Oades, & Grant, 2006; Gyllensten, Palmer, Nilsson, Regnér & Frodi, 2010; Kearns, Forbes, & Gardiner, 2007; Kearns, Gardiner, & Marshall, 2008; Libri, & Kemp, 2006; Spence, & Grant, 2007). This highlights how evidence based cognitive behavioural coaching could be used for a wide range of issues. There has also been research focusing on the coach-coachee relationship (for overview see O'Broin & Palmer, 2012).

### 3. HOW IS COGNITIVE BEHAVIOURAL COACHING PRACTICE INFORMED BY RESEARCH AND WHY IS THAT DESIRABLE?

Over a decade ago, when Michael Neenan, Gladeana McMahon and I were introducing Cognitive behavioural Coaching (CBC) to the UK (see Neenan & Palmer, 2001) we knew from our coaching practice that it worked, but there was a lack of published empirical evidence that demonstrated that it was effective. The good news is that since then researchers have built up the evidence base which is now reflected in cognitive behavioral coaching books (eg Neenan and Palmer, 2012).

Many other coaching approaches have published few research papers. The approaches are often intuition-based instead of evidence-based.

#### **4. WHAT YOU CONSIDER TO BE THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN COGNITIVE BEHAVIOURAL THERAPY AND COGNITIVE BEHAVIOURAL COACHING?**

Frequently in the UK, clients get charged more for coaching than for therapy! Putting costs aside, a key issue is that in the field of coaching, you are usually working with well-functioning people. Of course, that's the theory although not always the reality! If you think of Albert Ellis' famous ABC model, 'A' will be activating event; 'B' will be belief, 'C' for consequences, 'D' for disputation, 'E' for effective new approach and 'F' for future focus. In coaching when using this kind of framework, it's different. In coaching the 'A' may not represent an Activating event but it can be 'A' for Awareness of an issue. It may not be activating anything that's triggering an unease. There might be beliefs about it at 'B' and maybe some consequences at 'C'. The 'D' does not need to represent Disputation with well-functioning coachees as often it is more of a 'D' for discussion. Once you bring to the coachees attention their unhelpful or performance interfering thoughts (PITs) and beliefs, then they can often easily just challenge them with little aid of the coach or coaching psychologist. However, when you are dealing with somebody who is quite stressed, anxious or depressed, in terms of information processing theory, their thinking becomes more rigid and in therapy the client (and therapist) may have to work hard to challenge and then subsequently modify the belief so that the alternative becomes more flexible. If the client is not as emotionally disturbed from the beginning, he or she can often change some of their perceptions or beliefs only by discussion. 'D' in coaching can also mean the development of new beliefs or Performance Enhancing Thoughts (PETs). So, in coaching, we can have three D's: discussion, disputation and development. In CBC, the person is not usually coming with a clinical disorder that's needs to be addressed directly within the coaching.

I still think it's important to do a rapid case conceptualization in coaching. You can think of CBC as a dual systems approach with both cognitive issues/interventions and the behavioural aspects of problems which may need behavioural interventions. For example, sometimes coachees have behavioural issues such as wanting to perform better at some task and they may need behavioural practice which may not need any cognitive interventions. There is no point in using unnecessary cognitive techniques (law of parsimony). In effect, we may be using more of the behavioural interventions at times within CBC, as some coachees do not necessarily need to use cognitive techniques, whereas in CBT, because the clients are often presenting clinical disorders, we may have to spend more time on the cognitive aspects which includes tackling intermediate and core beliefs.

Finally, I think it's important to note that the focus of the session maybe different. For example, in CBT the therapist

may focus on addressing the anxiety provoking thoughts with a client who has lost their job and presents with high levels of anxiety. In coaching psychology practice the psychologist may help the coachee with high levels of anxiety to focus on updating their CV and applying for new jobs. This can inject hope. Both approaches may reduce anxiety.

#### **5. HOW COULD CBC SKILLS BE USEFUL FOR A COGNITIVE BEHAVIOURAL THERAPIST?**

To train somebody who has no therapy skills in CBC is sometimes a delight. They can often pick up CBC skills quickly, as they have less well-honed skills to interfere with learning new skills. However, if they are a trained cognitive behavioural therapist or if they are trained as therapists in different approaches, such as psychodynamic or existential approaches, they come with their own skill sets and also their own ideas about how to apply theory or techniques, which can sometimes get in the way of using CBC. For example, a cognitive behavioural therapist may be asking questions that elicit core beliefs when there is no need to when you're dealing with a straightforward behavioural performance issue. Humanistic counsellors usually use person centered skills instead of directly helping the person to examine some of the behaviours and cognitions which need addressing. On the other hand, I still think nearly all therapists can benefit from embracing CBC skills, because it allows them to deal effectively with well-functioning people as well. Cognitive behavioural therapists sometimes end up applying what they have learnt in CBC in their therapeutic clients, as they find it works more effectively than the usual CBT approach.

#### **6. TO WHAT EXTENT DO YOU THINK A COACH NEEDS TO HAVE EXPERTISE IN THE SPECIFIC FIELD IN ORDER TO BE ABLE TO HELP, FOR EXAMPLE, IN EXECUTIVE COACHING OR HEALTH COACHING?**

In the early development of coaching it was considered that as long as you have coaching skills and a coaching framework such as GROW, you could assist executives and managers. However, on some occasions you will find executive or leaders of companies would prefer the practitioner to have some prior experience of their industry. Clearly this experience is perceived positively and gives the practitioner more credibility. This probably helps at the initial chemistry meeting and assists in building the important coach-coachee relationship and alliance. This does not mean that the practitioner will be mentoring. However, I might be coaching an executive or company director and if they wish to focus on developing teams, when appropriate, I may share my experience in this area to demonstrate a particular learning point.

A health and wellbeing coach may not be an experienced health professional although I believe that it is desirable. If coach is not from a health background, then he or she will need supervision from an experienced and qualified a health

professional who preferably is an experienced coach too. Stating the obvious, we don't know what we don't know. When you are a coach dealing with health issues, you may not know when you are getting outside of your area of expertise, and that's why supervision is important.

CBC practitioners often integrate Motivational Interviewing skills within their cognitive behavioural health and wellbeing coaching practice when coachees are ambivalent about focusing on health-related goals (see Miller & Rollnick, 2009).

## 7. HOW IS THE CBC WORK FOR GROUPS SUCH AS WORKING TEAMS OF FAMILIES?

Sometimes when you are coaching young people, it is important to include the parents for some of the sessions as well as long as the coachee thinks it is appropriate. Let me explain, often the parent thinks the young person has or is the problem whereas an outsider like the coach or coaching psychologist sees it is the parents who are largely creating the problem, usually placing unnecessary high expectations and demands upon their son or daughter. For example, when I'm coaching a young person whose parents want him or her to do certain courses at the college or university, I can help the young person to examine different options and tackle possible fears. Although I remain neutral, my client is the young coachee and not necessarily the parents and this can be surprise for the parents. Of course, this depends upon what I've contracted with the group.

## 8. HOW DO YOU THINK CBC ADAPTS INTERNATIONALLY?

CBC seems to adapt cross-culturally very well. When I ran workshops in Beijing, a couple of decades ago, my books had just been translated into Chinese. I was training the counsellors and psychologists in problem solving and rational emotive cognitive behavioural approaches. The practitioners wanted to learn about problemsolving orientation approach of CBC, as it seemed to adapt well to their clients' presenting problem. When I was in China I took the opportunity to investigate what wastraining counsellors were receiving (see Palmer, Ling Gui Rui, & Hou Zhijin, 1998). Some colleagues are using CBC in India and around the world it's becoming very popular. One of the reasons is because the CBC is flexible. Whereas ordinary coaching may be facilitative, CBC is more collaborative, with coach and coachee working together, almost as a team, like in CBT as well. I don't sit there and let coachees flounder, or expect coachees to have answers when there are no answers within their range of experience or knowledge. With their agreement, in a collaborative manner I might share with them a number of suggestions based upon my experience.

Colleagues and I based in different countries such as Brazil, Denmark, Poland and Spain have adapted CBC models such as PRACTICE (Palmer, 2007) and SPACE (Edgerton & Palmer, 2005) into their languages and culture.

My understanding is that these adaptations have been well received. In Spain they have also been adapted for children and young people. For example, in Brazil, SPACE becomes FACES and in Poland it becomes SFERA whereas PRACTICE becomes POSTURA or POSITIVO in Brazil and Portugal. In Denmark PRACTICE becomes PRAKSIS and in Spain PRACTICE becomes IDEACIÓN (see Dias, Edgerton & Palmer, 2010; Dias, Gandos, Nardi & Palmer, 2011; Sánchez-Mora García, Ballabriga, Celaya, Dalmau & Palmer, 2012; Spaten, Imer & Palmer, 2012; Syrek-Kosowska, Edgerton, & Palmer, 2010).

## 9. WHERE DO YOU SEE CBT AND CBC IN THE FUTURE, IN THE NEXT TEN YEARS?

CBT and CBC seems are becoming more and more popular as they evidence-based and effective for a range of issues. Over the past 10 year period Dr Alison Whybrow and I have been undertaking regular surveys of coaching psychologists (eg Palmer & Whybrow, 2007) and our survey last year found that the CBC approach had become the most used approach.

Due to the recession in some countries companies have become very interested in enhancing resilience and performance at work. CBC is well adapted to tackle these issues.

CBC has incorporated ideas and techniques from the strengths based approaches and positive psychology. I suspect that CBT will pick up on these ideas too over the next ten years.

It's been interesting reflecting on the questions you have asked. Thank you for this opportunity.

Note: This interview was first undertaken in person in 23 de março de 2012, in London, UK and completed by email.

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