

GROW Model

Authored by
mohammad looti

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The GROW model (or process) is a technique for problem solving or goal setting. It was developed in the United Kingdom and was used extensively in the corporate coaching market in the late 1980s and 1990s.

There have been many claims to authorship of GROW as a way of achieving goals and solving problems. While no one person can be clearly identified as the originator Graham Alexander, Alan Fine and Sir John Whitmore, who are well known in the world of coaching, made significant contributions. Max Landsberg also describes GROW in his book *The Tao of Coaching*

GROW is very well known in the business arena but it also has many applications in everyday life. The particular value of GROW is that it provides an effective, structured methodology which both helps set goals effectively and is a problem solving process.

It can be used by anyone without special training. While there are many methodologies that can be used to address problems, the value of GROW is that it is easily understood, straightforward to apply and very thorough. In addition it is possible to apply it to a large variety of issues in a very effective way.

Stages of GROW

There are a number of different versions of the GROW model. This version presents one view of the stages but there are others. The 'O' in this version has two meanings.

G - Goal This is the end point, where the client wants to be. The goal has to be defined in such a way that it is very clear to the client when they have achieved it.

R - Reality This is how far the client is away from their goal. If the client were to look at all the steps they need to take in order to achieve the goal, the Reality would be the number of those steps they have completed so far.

O - Obstacles There will be Obstacles stopping the client getting from where they are now to where they want to go. If there were no Obstacles the client would already have reached their goal. Options Once Obstacles have been identified the client need to find ways of dealing with them if they are to make progress. These are the Options.

W - Way Forward The Options then need to be converted into action steps which will take the client to their goal. These are the Way Forward.

As with many simple principles any user of GROW can apply a great deal of skill and knowledge at each stage but the basic process remains as written above. There are numerous questions which the coach could use at any point and part of the skill of the coach is to know which questions to use and how much detail to uncover.

This is a very simple example of using the GROW model to achieve a goal.

This example deals with weight loss. The client wants: 'To bring my weight down to 120 pounds in three months and keep it down'.

That is their Goal. The GROW approach would then be to establish the Reality by stating what their weight is now. The coach would then ask awareness questions to deepen understanding of what is happening when the client tries to lose weight, thus identifying the Obstacles. These questions could include:

When you have been able to lose weight - what made the difference?

What is the difference between the times you are able to keep weight off and the times when you put it on again?

What would have to change for you to be sure you could lose the weight and keep it off?

If the client genuinely answers these questions they will discover new information about what works and does not work for them in terms of weight loss, and create some potential for change. It then becomes possible to create some strategies or Options which get around the Obstacles. These could include looking at which diets or exercise regimes work best, or finding a specific type of support. Once the client knows the strategies that are likely to work they can establish a Way Forward which involves taking action steps. This is where they commit to what they will do in the short term to put the strategies into effect. For instance, one action might be asking a particular person for support, and another might be to buy a different selection of foods.

The same principles can be applied whatever goal or problem the client has. GROW can be used on technical problems, issues regarding processes, strategy questions, interpersonal issues and many more. Almost any situation where there is something to be achieved and there is an Obstacle can be tackled with GROW. The model can also be used by a group who are all working on the same problem or goal.

The GROW principle and the Inner Game

GROW was developed out of the Inner Game theory developed by Timothy Gallwey, Gallwey was a tennis coach who noticed that he could often see what a player was doing incorrectly but that simply telling them what they should be doing did not bring about lasting change.

This is often illustrated by the example of a player who does not keep their eye on the ball. Most coaches would give instructions such as: 'Keep your eye on the ball' to try and correct this. The problem with this sort of instruction is that a player will be able to follow it for a short while but be unable to keep it in the front of their minds in the long term. This means that progress was slow. The result was that coaches and players grew increasingly frustrated at the slowness of progress but no one had better system of coaching.

So one day, instead of giving an instruction, Gallwey asked the player to say 'bounce' out loud

when the ball bounced and 'hit' out loud when they hit it

The result was that the players started to improve without a lot of effort because they were keeping their eye on the ball. But because of the way the instruction was given they did not have a voice in their heads saying 'I must keep my eye on the ball.' They were simply playing a simple game while they were playing tennis. Once Gallwey saw how play could be improved in this way he stopped giving instructions and started asking questions that would help the player discover for himself what worked and what needed to change. This was the birth of the Inner Game.

The basic methodology of GROW came out of Gallwey's work with tennis players. For example the first stage in this process would be to set a target which the player wanted to achieve. For example if a player wanted to improve his first serve Gallwey would ask how many first serves out of ten they would like to get in. This was the target or goal.

The Reality would be defined by asking the player to serve 10 balls and seeing how many first serves went in.

Gallwey would then ask awareness raising questions such as What do you notice you are doing differently when you the ball goes in or out? This would enable the player to discover for themselves what they were changing about their mind and body when the serve went in or out. They had then defined their Obstacles and Options. They therefore learnt for themselves what they had to change in order to meet their serving targets and they had a clear Way Forward.

From Gallwey's experience with tennis players it is possible to define a number of learning principles which can be applied to any learning situation whether sport based or not. For example:

In most learning situations the learner is rarely focused on what is happening during the process. But if they focus their attention on a relevant aspect of what is actually happening during the process, rather than what they 'should' be doing or trying to get it 'right' they will make progress much faster.

Learning happens best when the learner is focused on the present. If they are focused on the present they will not struggle to prove or remember something but rather make discoveries as they go along.

If the learner is trying to look good or using a lot of unfocused effort they will interfere with the learning process. The less interference with their learning, the faster they progress.

Coaches using the Inner Game soon realised they could apply the principles in other learning situations. GROW was developed as a structured framework to use the Inner Game principles to achieve goals. The originators saw that, just as in sport, many individuals were struggling to achieve goals because they were not learning from experience and were not aware of the knowledge within themselves that would help them.