Cognitive Behavioural Coaching in Practice explores various aspects of coaching from within a cognitive behavioural framework. Michael Neenan and Stephen Palmer bring together experts in the field to discuss topics including:

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- stress
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- self-esteem
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This highly practical book is illustrated throughout with lengthy coach–coachee dialogues that include a commentary of the aims of the coach during the session. It will be essential reading for both trainees and professional coaches whether or not they have a background in psychology. It will also be useful for therapists, counsellors and psychologists who want to use coaching in their everyday practice.

Michael Neenan is Associate Director of the Centre for Stress Management, London, an accredited cognitive behavioural therapist and author (with Windy Dryden) of Life Coaching: A Cognitive- Behavioural Approach.

Stephen Palmer is Honorary Professor of Psychology at City University and Director of its Coaching Psychology Unit. He is Founder Director of the Centre for Coaching, London, UK.
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dedications</td>
<td>vii</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Editors and contributors</td>
<td>ix</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preface</td>
<td>xiii</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreword</td>
<td>xv</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ANTHONY M. GRANT</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MICHAEL NEENAN AND STEPHEN PALMER</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Understanding and tackling procrastination</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MICHAEL NEENAN</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Motivational interviewing</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TIM ANSTISS and JONATHAN PASSMORE</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Enhancing the coaching alliance and relationship</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ALANNA O’BROIN and STEPHEN PALMER</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Socratic questioning</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MICHAEL NEENAN</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Struggles with low self-esteem: Teaching self-acceptance</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STEPHEN PALMER and HELEN WILLIAMS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Understanding and developing resilience</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MICHAEL NEENAN and WINDY DRYDEN</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter</td>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Stress and performance coaching</td>
<td>153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>KRISTINA GYLLENSTEN and STEPHEN PALMER</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Mindfulness based cognitive behavioural coaching</td>
<td>179</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PATRIZIA COLLARD and GLADEANA MCMAHON</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Developing a coaching culture at work</td>
<td>203</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ALISON WHYBROW and SIOBHAIN O’RIORDAN</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Afterword</td>
<td>237</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Appendices</td>
<td>239</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Web resources and training institutes</td>
<td>244</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Index</td>
<td>247</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Dedications

To my wonderful son, Laurence

To my father, Ronald Palmer (1930–2011)

Michael

Stephen
Editors

**Michael Neenan** is Associate Director, Centre for Coaching and Centre for Stress Management, Blackheath, London, UK. He has a private practice as a therapist, coach and supervisor. He also runs resilience-building programmes for various companies. Michael, along with several others, developed cognitive behavioural coaching (CBC) – adapting the empirically driven cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) for the coaching world. His books include (with Windy Dryden) *Life Coaching: A Cognitive Behavioural Approach* (2002), *Cognitive Therapy in a Nutshell* and *Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy in a Nutshell* (2011, 2nd editions). The book he had the most pleasure writing was *Developing Resilience: A Cognitive Behavioural Approach* (2009).

**Stephen Palmer** is Founder Director of the Centre for Coaching, London, UK and Managing Director of the International Academy for Professional Development. He is an Honorary Professor of Psychology at City University London and Founder Director of their Coaching Psychology Unit. He is Honorary President of the International Society for Coaching Psychology and was the first Honorary President of the Association for Coaching and the first Chair of the British Psychological Society Special Group in Coaching Psychology. He is the UK Coordinating Co-editor of the *International Coaching Psychology Review* and Executive Editor of *Coaching: An International Journal of Theory, Research and Practice*. He has authored or edited

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**Tim Anstiss** is a medical doctor specialising in health and well-being improvement, motivational interviewing and behavioural medicine. A former international pole vaulter and decathlete, Tim has a Diploma in Occupational Medicine, a masters degree in sports medicine and is a member of the Faculty of Sports and Exercise Medicine.

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**Windy Dryden** is Professor of Psychotherapeutic Studies at Goldsmiths College, University of London and is the author of many books, including *Coping with Life’s Challenges: Moving on from Adversity* (Sheldon Press, 2010).

**Kristina Gyllensten** is a registered counselling psychologist, a chartered psychologist, a CBT psychotherapist and coach. She is Honorary Research Fellow and Deputy Director of the Coaching Psychology Unit, City University London. Her particular interests are workplace stress, stress management and cognitive therapy and coaching, on which she has co-authored a number of articles and chapters.

**Gladeana McMahon** holds a range of qualifications as a therapist and coach and is Life Fellow and Chair of the Association for Coaching, UK. She is also a fellow, accredited coach and therapist with a range of professional bodies (info@gladeanamcmahon.com).
Alanna O’Broin is an executive coach. Formerly an investment analyst and Fund Manager, Alanna is a chartered and registered psychologist. She has a private coaching and therapy practice, and is conducting doctorate research on the coaching relationship, on which she has published a number of co-authored articles and book chapters. Alanna is an International Board Member of *Coaching: An International Journal of Theory, Research and Practice*.

Siobhain O’Riordan is a trainer, examiner and supervisor on graduate/postgraduate coaching and coaching psychology programmes. She is an Honorary Research Fellow and Deputy Director of the Coaching Psychology Unit at City University London and Editor of *The Coaching Psychologist*. She is Chair of the International Society for Coaching Psychology.

Jonathan Passmore is an executive coach, trainer and coach supervisor. He has worked in the public, voluntary and private sectors including for PricewaterhouseCoopers and IBM Business Consulting. Jonathan has published 30 coaching research papers, 14 books and delivered over 90 coaching conference papers around the world. He received the Association of Coaching Global Award in 2010 for his work in coaching research and practice.

Alison Whybrow has a strong coaching practice and partners with organisations keen to use coaching to shift business performance and culture. Alison is a key contributor to a Masters programme in Professional Coaching Practice and supervises the practice of Coaches and Coaching Psychologists. Alison is a speaker and writer, having published a number of papers and chapters in the field of coaching and coaching psychology. Alison edited the *Handbook in Coaching Psychology* (with Palmer, 2007). Alison is a Chartered and Registered Psychologist.

Helen Williams is a coaching psychologist specialising in solution focused cognitive behavioural coaching. She gained 10 years of commercial experience working with SHL, and has since co-authored several publications on coaching in organisations and cognitive behavioural coaching.
You can guess that with the recent success story of cognitive behavioural therapy it was almost inevitable that it would start to be adapted and applied to other fields such as coaching. Yet that is a myth and not the reality. Going back to the 1980s cognitive behavioural and rational emotive therapy was not particularly popular and was still slowly building up an evidence base. However, practitioners who also worked in organisations as trainers or consultants saw its great potential to help employees manage stress, enhance performance and increase resilience or hardiness. From the mid-1980s the co-editors of this book were adapting the cognitive behavioural approach for use in the UK workplace and subsequently in New Zealand. It certainly needed adapting because often therapeutic terminology was rejected by course delegates. The approach was used in group and one-to-one work.

But there was a catch. The research into the application of cognitive behavioural therapy to a range of clinical disorders raced ahead in the 1990s whilst research into the use of the cognitive behavioural approach in non-clinical settings such as the workplace for coaching or training purposes was almost non-existent. Only in the last 10 years has the research into the cognitive behavioural approach being used beyond the therapeutic arena really started to gain momentum and gradually an evidence base is building up, underpinning its use in coaching at work as well as personal coaching.
This book brings together authors who are experienced practitioners, some of whom are researchers too. We would like to take this opportunity to thank them for the insights they have shared with us. We hope that this book helps to inform cognitive behavioural coaching practice.

Michael Neenan
Stephen Palmer
Coaching is inevitably a goal-directed activity. Clients come to see coaches because they want to achieve certain goals in their work or personal lives. In essence, regardless of the coach’s preferred theoretical or explanatory framework, the coach’s role is to help clients identify their preferred outcome and to facilitate the development of a self-regulatory process that will help the client move towards that outcome, helping the client delineate specific action steps and then helping them monitor, evaluate and, if necessary, change their actions in order to make better progress towards their goals – a straightforward process of goal-directed self-regulation.

Clearly, in order for clients to create purposeful, positive change – real and lasting change – the client needs to have the thoughts, feelings and behaviours that can best support them in making such changes. It is also important that the environment or context supports these changes, and it is the role of the coach to help the client to design or structure these domains accordingly.

This, then, is the very core of the coaching process. It is also the core of the cognitive behavioural approach, and is why the cognitive behavioural approach is fundamental to coaching.

Indeed, virtually every aspect of coaching can be clearly and concisely explained in cognitive behavioural terms: from the notion of goals being internalised representations of desired states or outcomes (Austin and Vancouver, 1996),
to the psychological and behavioural processes associated with the self-control required for purposeful positive change (Carver and Scheier, 1998), to the constructs of hope and pathways thinking (Snyder, Rand and Sigmon, 2002), resilience (Maddi, 2005), self-concordance (Sheldon, 2004) and self-reflection and insight (Grant, Franklin and Langford, 2002) – all essentially cognitive behavioural constructs.

There is little doubt that, besides being a comprehensive ‘biopsychosocial’ theory of human behaviour (Froggatt, 2006), cognitive behavioural theory can provide a wide range of useful and effective techniques for changing thoughts, feelings and behaviours. Indeed, there is a wealth of research attesting to the effectiveness of the cognitive behavioural approach in a wide range of domains, primarily with clinical or counselling populations and to a lesser extent in relation to sports, health and work related issues – and much of that research, theory and practice has great relevance for the goal and solution orientation of the coaching enterprise.

The challenge for coaches who wish to utilise the existing evidence base accumulated in the cognitive behavioural tradition is to be able to express and use these concepts in a non-pathological fashion – in a way that resonates for coaching clients, in a way that is constructive and positive, rather than in a way that focuses on repairing or fixing dysfunctionality. When this is done well, when coaching clients learn to constructively view their thinking from different perspectives and work with a well-trained cognitive behavioural coach to develop insight and greater behavioural choice, then grand things can happen. Indeed, there is now a growing body of coaching-specific research indicating that cognitive behavioural approaches to coaching are highly effective, not just at facilitating goal attainment but also in enhancing resilience, well-being and insight (Grant, Passmore, Cavanagh and Parker, 2010).

Evidence based coaching is becoming a reality, and this book marks an important milestone in helping coaches
and clients alike to develop a greater understanding of the cognitive behavioural approach to coaching. Enjoy!

Anthony M. Grant  
Director, Coaching Psychology Unit  
School of Psychology  
University of Sydney

References


These seem to be the boom years for coaching: growing media interest in the subject; increasing use of coaching for personal, professional and organisational growth; and the rush of people wanting to train as coaches. Coaching has definitely passed the fad phase of its existence (The Economist in 2003 stated that ‘having an executive coach is all the rage’) and has established itself as an enduring resource for personal and professional development: ‘Executive coaching during this period [from the first edition of the book in 2001] has grown and become mainstream in many business sectors worldwide. Coach-training organizations have also grown and thrived across the globe. It looks like coaching is here to stay’ (Peltier, 2010: xv). Many of the coaching approaches are adaptations of psychological models used in therapy, such as psychodynamic, cognitive behavioural, person-centred, solution-focused and gestalt. Our coaching focus is a cognitive behavioural one. Cognitive behavioural coaching (CBC) derives from the work of two leading cognitive behavioural theorists, researchers and therapists: Aaron Beck, who founded cognitive therapy (CT), and Albert Ellis, who developed rational emotive behavioural therapy (REBT). Collectively, these two approaches come under the banner of cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT). We would define 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.

The central message of the cognitive behavioural approach is usually traced back to the Stoic philosophers, Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius, but a modern source will do equally well: ‘The meaning of things lies not in things...
themselves, but in our attitudes towards them’ (Antoine de Saint Exupéry, French writer and aviator, 1900–1944). By exploring our attitudes to events rather than focusing excessively on the events themselves, we can understand better why we react in some of the self- and goal-defeating ways that we do. Through this exploration, we can learn to widen our perspective in order to see that there are more productive ways of dealing with our difficulties and reaching our goals. Auerbach (2006: 103) states that a cognitive coach is ‘a thought partner. As a thought partner, I help my clients think with more depth, greater clarity, and less distortion – a cognitive process. Coaching is largely a cognitive method’ but, as he elaborates, emotions are not neglected in this process and without a solid working alliance cognitive methods alone will not usually have much positive effect on the coachee.

Coaching and CBT have the same aim: problem resolution – closing the performance gap in coaching and the amelioration of unhelpful thoughts, feelings and behaviours in CBT. Other similarities between CBC and CBT include: staying mainly in the here and now to understand coachees’ presenting issues and then moving towards the future to help them achieve their goals (not all therapies are backward-looking, as many coaching books claim); setting an agenda in each session; encouraging belief and behaviour change; carrying out and reviewing between-session goal-oriented tasks; seeing the relationship as a collaborative partnership in problem-solving and resilience-building; and helping to foster an experimental approach to change. The ultimate aim of CBC and CBT is to help people to become their own self-coach or therapist.

A key difference between CBC and CBT is that people seeking coaching usually focus on achieving personal and/or professional fulfilment, not on psychological difficulties that significantly impair their well-being or functioning. However, some research studies ‘have found that between 25 and 50% of those seeking coaching have clinically significant levels of anxiety, stress, or depression’ (Grant, 2009: 97), therefore emotional problems may get in the way of coaching (Dryden, 2011). With their understanding and treatment of psychological disorders, cognitive behavioural therapists
who have moved into coaching, after a period of transitional training (Auerbach, 2001; Sperry, 2004), would be more likely than coaches without a background in mental health to recognise when it would be appropriate to refer a coachee for therapy.

We believe that some distinctions between therapy and coaching are overstated – therapy often gets dismissed as just repairing weakness and dysfunction, while coaching is focused on unlocking potential, improving performance, enhancing well-being and delivering results. A client who comes to therapy for help with their panic attacks or obsessive– compulsive disorder is seeking results (overcoming the problem), which will lead to enhanced well-being, improved performance at work or home and unlock some of the potential previously inhibited by the problem. Indeed, from a CBT perspective, when clients are gaining in confidence as a self-therapist (i.e. independent problem-solver), the therapist then conceptualises their role as more of a coach supporting clients’ self-directing learning. Therefore, promoting coaching does not have to be carried out at the expense of diminishing what therapy has to offer.

CBT’s emphasis (or, more accurately, Beck’s cognitive therapy) ‘on empirical research, its theoretical base, and its coherence as a therapeutic intervention have meant that, at this stage, it is better validated as an effective treatment for a range of disorders than any other psychological therapy’ (Bennett-Levy, Butler, Fennell, Hackman, Mueller and Westbrook, 2004: 2; Salkovskis, 1996). Does the success of CBT in treating clinical problems translate into similar success in coaching with individuals focused on personal and professional development? This is an important question. Over a decade ago it was a leap of faith for practitioners who had adapted the cognitive behavioural approach to the field of coaching as little research had been undertaken. However, since 2001, researchers have been building up an evidence base for cognitive behavioural and solution-focused cognitive behavioural coaching. The research indicates that the approach reduces:

- anxiety;
- stress;
COGNITIVE BEHAVIOURAL COACHING IN PRACTICE

- depression;
- perfectionism;
- self-handicapping.

The approach has also been found to enhance:

- goal-striving;
- well-being;
- hope;
- resilience;
- cognitive hardiness;
- sales performance;
- core self-evaluation;
- ‘significant’ personal and professional value;
- global self-rating of performance;
- emotional management.

The research has included qualitative, quantitative and single-case design studies (Beddoes-Jones and Miller, 2007; Grant, 2001, 2003, 2008; Grant, Curtayne and Burton, 2009; Green, Oades and Grant, 2006; Gyllensten, Palmer, Nilsson, Regnér and Frodi, 2010; Kearns, Forbes and Gardiner, 2007; Kearns, Gardiner and Marshall, 2008; Libri and Kemp, 2006; Spence and Grant, 2007) and manualised coaching programmes have been developed and researched (Grant and Greene, 2001; Grbcic and Palmer, 2007; Greene and Grant, 2003). Practitioners have been writing about CBC for some years and have focused on the theory and practice, illustrating various models, techniques and strategies applied to life and workplace coaching (e.g. Anderson, 2002; Ducharme, 2004; Edgerton and Palmer, 2005; Ellam and Palmer, 2006; Good, Yeganeh and Yeganeh, 2010; Neenan and Palmer, 2001; Neenan and Dryden, 2002; Palmer, 2007; Palmer and Gyllensten, 2008; Palmer and Szymanska, 2007; Williams and Palmer, 2010; Williams, Edgerton and Palmer, 2010).

 Practitioners have also adapted the cognitive behavioural frameworks and models such as SPACE and PRACTICE to different cultures and languages by working with their colleagues in other countries (e.g. Dias, Edgerton and Palmer, 2010; Dias, Gandos, Nardi and Palmer, 2011; Syrek-Kosowska,
Edgerton and Palmer, 2010). For example, in Brazil SPACE becomes FACES and in Poland it becomes SFERA, whereas PRACTICE becomes POSTURA or POSITIVO in Brazil and Portugal. This is an important development because often coaching frameworks have been translated into other languages and acronyms such as GROW or SPACE, which are supposed to represent the model, become meaningless and no longer an aide-memoire for the coach or coachee.

So, what has CBC got to offer? In Chapter 1, Neenan examines a rational emotive behavioural approach to tackling procrastination and shows how the coach moves between the psychological and practical aspects of problem-solving. Although the reader can dip into any chapter of this book that interests them, for readers who are relatively new to CBC this chapter would be a good starting point because it covers the basic approach. Anstiss and Passmore in Chapter 2 look at how, among other things, motivational interviewing (MI) can ‘roll with resistance’ to change in order to help the person become more motivated to improve performance. Miller and Rollnick (2009) describe MI as ‘a collaborative, person-centered form of guiding to elicit and strengthen motivation for change’ (p. 137). This method or tool may be necessary at the beginning stage of CBC if a coachee is reluctant to move forward, even though at one level they want to move forward. In Chapter 3, O’Broin and Palmer consider ways to enhance the coaching relationship by discussing the published research on the subject and what can be learnt from sports coaching and psychology. Neenan in Chapter 4 focuses on Socratic questioning and asks if its essential purpose is to point coachees in predetermined directions or foster new and surprising possibilities, and he stresses the importance of asking good questions because questioning is the major part of a coach’s verbal activity. In Chapter 5, Palmer and Williams focus on the major drawback of raising low self-esteem – it still makes a person’s worth conditional upon achieving a desirable outcome – and propose, as an alternative, teaching unconditional self-acceptance whereby the performance is decoupled from the self. Neenan and Dryden in Chapter 6 look at resilience: what it is, the attributes that underpin it and some of the ideas that undermine resilience building.
In Chapter 7, Gyllensten and Palmer discuss using coaching to tackle stress and enhance performance, particularly highlighting stress theory and practice. In Chapter 8, Collard and McMahon show how CBC is fused with mindfulness meditation (i.e. purposeful, non-judgemental attention to being in the present moment) and how this approach is applied to people whose difficulties do not fall within medical or therapy contexts. In the final chapter, based on their research, Whybrow and O’Riordan explore to what extent companies are using coaching to improve performance and engagement among employees.

It is worth noting that the CBC approach described in this book is not identical to the Cognitive Coaching™ practised in the United States (see Costa and Garmston, 1997). Cognitive Coaching™ is generally used within the teaching profession whereas CBC is used for a range of issues in a variety of settings and is applied across professions. Cognitive Coaching™ has also built up a good evidence base, which can also inform CBC practice.

Where appropriate, chapters contain an annotated coach–coachee dialogue to make explicit the reasons for the coach’s interventions – to get inside the coach’s mind, so to speak. At the end of each chapter we have included discussion issues to aid personal reflection and debate with colleagues and students. Recommended reading has also been included.

We hope that this book will stimulate your interest in CBC by providing a showcase for the range of issues that this coaching approach deals with.

**Discussion issues**

- Are the boom years for coaching over?
- Is cognitive behavioural coaching identical to cognitive behavioural therapy?
- Are the distinctions between therapy and coaching overstated?
- Does cognitive behavioural coaching offer anything different to other forms of coaching?
References


Recommended reading


Introduction

Coaching aims to bring out the best in people in order to help them achieve their desired goals. While a lot of the coaching literature is full of exciting promises of unleashing your potential, reinventing yourself or living your dream life by implementing dynamic action plans, the ‘unexciting’ side of coaching can involve tackling some of the usual change-blocking problems familiar to therapists, such as perfectionism, procrastination, excessive self-doubt, lack of persistence and self-deprecation. Unless these psychological blocks are overcome, little progress is likely to be made in achieving the person’s coaching goals. Therefore, the coach needs to be competent in addressing both the psychological and practical aspects of change.

A theoretical model for understanding and tackling psychological blocks in general and procrastination in particular is rational emotive behavioural therapy (REBT; Ellis, 1994), founded in 1955 by the late Albert Ellis, an American clinical psychologist. (REBT is one of the approaches within the field of CBT.) A capsule account of the REBT approach follows. The approach proposes that rigid and extreme thinking (irrational beliefs) lies at the core of psychological disturbance. For example, faced with a coachee who is sceptical about the value of coaching, the coach makes himself very anxious and over-prepares for each session by insisting: ‘I must impress her with my skills [rigid belief – why can’t he let the coachee make up her own mind?], because...
if I don’t this will prove I’m an incompetent coach’ (an extreme view of his role to adopt if the coachee is unimpressed). Rigid thinking takes the form, for example, of must, should, have to and got to. Derived from these rigid beliefs are three major and extreme conclusions: awfulising (nothing could be worse and nothing good can come from negative events), low frustration tolerance (LFT; frustration and discomfort are too hard to bear) and depreciation of self and/or others (a person can be given a single global rating [e.g. useless] that defines their essence or worth).

What lies at the core of psychological health is flexible and non-extreme thinking (rational beliefs). Flexible thinking is couched in non-dogmatic preferences, wishes, wants and desires, and flowing from these flexible beliefs are three major non-extreme beliefs: anti-awfulising (things could always be worse and valuable lessons can be learnt from coping with adversity), high frustration tolerance (HFT; frustration and discomfort are worth bearing in order to achieve your goals) and acceptance of self and/or others (individuals are too complex to be given a single global rating but aspects of the person can legitimately be rated, e.g. bad timekeeping doesn’t make you a bad person). The concepts of the REBT approach have been applied for over 30 years to tackling problems in the workplace (DiMattia, 1991; Ellis, 1972; Dryden and Gordon, 1993a) and, more recently, to coaching (Anderson, 2002; Kodish, 2002; Neenan and Dryden, 2002a).

When the REBT approach is used outside of a therapy context it is more advantageous to call it rational emotive behavioural coaching (REBC), although some practitioners prefer to use the shorter name of rational coaching (see Palmer, 2009). REBT terms such as ‘irrational’ and ‘disturbance’ can be reframed as performance-interfering thoughts and/or self-limiting beliefs or any permutation on problematic thinking that coachees are willing to endorse.

What is procrastination?

Procrastination can be described as putting off until later what our better judgement tells us ought (preferably) to be