

Element B: Behavior

A Catalyst for Action

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People take instruments for a variety of reasons, but mostly because they are looking for answers. They want to learn something about themselves, to become more effective, and to improve their skills. They engage in an assessment with a mindset based on a medical model. Something is wrong, they want a diagnosis and a cure; preferably a fast acting, painless, one that tastes good and has no side effects. They look to the instrument and its administrator, i.e. the doctor, to provide the answers.

Many coaches, consultants and trainers oblige their clients and are all too happy to show off their knowledge and insights, impressing their clients with an almost clairvoyant description of who and what they are. While this analysis can be interesting, it rarely results in the kind of long-term sustainable change that people are seeking. The session is interesting and soon forgotten.

Element B is different. Rather than telling people what they are like, the instrument was designed to guide them toward self-discovery and encourage them to determine their own answers. We, as administrators, must be patient guides who skillfully assist our clients in their discovery. It is in this discovery process that people experience “aha” moments which provide the catalyst for real change. This is the most effective approach as it is consistent with the way that our brains function. It is our role to provide a safe yet challenging environment where our clients feel they can be open and do not fear being embarrassed, humiliated or shamed. Our ability to be present, listen

non-defensively, and keep our own lenses clear, is critical to our client’s success.

Guiding the Process

FIRO Theory provides a lens through which people can view themselves.

This view allows them to see how they are showing up in the world and provides a context for making meaning of their actions and the impact they have on others. Understanding their inclusion, control, and openness preferences arms them with a simple formula for closing the gap between how they are seen versus how they want to be seen. Identifying the gap is the first step towards closing it.

Greater awareness leads to greater choice.

We help our clients generate options by guiding them toward greater self-awareness. The more aware they become, the more options they have to choose from and the less they feel stuck or victimized. Element B provides clients with a lot of information. Our job as the guide is to help them sort through their results in an inquisitive non-judgmental way. We do this by asking questions and following the



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energy. We ask questions that allow the client to explore the places that have the most charge for them and allow them to choose their focus.

Effective questions are open ended.

According to David Rock, Chief Executive Officer, Results Coaching Systems, "When you ask someone questions you are getting them to focus on an idea. When people pay more attention to something they make more connections in the brain. It is necessary to make these new connections in order to change behaviors." Brain scans show that Aha moments, or moments of insight, are accompanied by increased activity in the brain. It is believed this increased activity is a result of new neural networks being formed.

Effective questions encourage people to go beyond a cognitive response and dig deeper for greater self-understanding.

Effective questions are open-ended and designed to get the other person focused and actively involved. They encourage people to go beyond a cognitive response and dig deeper for greater self-understanding. They are stated simply, easily understood, short and to the point, and they challenge the other person to think, feel and reflect. Examples of some good questions to ask during an Element B interpretation include:

What is your initial reaction to your inclusion scores?

Do the scores surprise you? How?

What incidents or situations come to mind as you read the scores?

Do the scores help to explain anything about yourself that has puzzled you?

What is the best interpretation you can make up about your scores?

What is the worst interpretation you can make up about your scores?

Are you being the way you want to be?

What impact might your openness scores have on your relationships?

How does your preference on control impact you at work?

What might be getting in your way?

How do members of your team experience you?

Tell me what it is like to be where you are?

Creating Aha moments.

When we guide our clients through Element B by asking questions rather than giving them an analysis, we help them create their own focus and experience new insights that increase their brain activity and the capacity to make new neural connections. According to Dr. Jeffrey Schwartz, a research professor of psychiatry at UCLA, this process makes us feel good. "The insights don't have to be life-changing to have a pleasurable effect. The simple insight of figuring out the answer to 12-across in the crossword puzzle is enough to give a little feeling of positive reinforcement," says Schwartz. We've probably all experienced these moments with our clients. I recently had a client who nearly jumped out of her chair when she realized that her high control scores were impacting her relationship with her four-year old daughter. In that moment she came up with tangible behaviors she could immediately change in order to improve things.

Element B provides a vehicle for us to create Aha experiences for our clients; just what the brain wants. Not surprisingly, it turns out that people are

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much more receptive to their own insights than to the observations of others. In fact, when others give us their advice or opinion, our brains often respond like two year olds—becoming defiant and resistant. According to David Rock, “our brains are so complex that it is rare for us to be able to see any situation in exactly the same way as another person. So when we get advice from people we’re always finding ways that the advice doesn’t match up with our own experience or expectations.” We dismiss it, defend against it or attack it. By using Element B as a guide to make their own connections, we reduce their defensive reactions and are better able to support them in making real change.

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Real change requires action!

Having identified the areas that are causing them the most grief, our clients can develop very clear steps to make things different. Our role is again to be the questioner, providing them a safe space to figure out their own solutions and have their own Ahas. What follows is an example of a series of questions that took a client to action.

The client is an engineer, we’ll call him Joe, who discovered that his rigidity around his low inclusion preferences was holding him back. Upon seeing his scores he quickly stated, “I know

what my problem is, nobody knows that I exist.” He realized that he wanted to flex up in order to be seen and heard more often.

I asked him, “What might you do in order to make things better?”

He quickly generated a list of possibilities, tangible things that he could do like having coffee with members of his team, going to more of their meetings, seeking people out for their opinions, joining the monthly luncheon and actively participating in office events.

I then asked, “What are you willing to do?”

The list grew shorter. This gave us an opportunity to talk about what scared him and how his fears undermined his intentions and his aspirations. The list grew longer again.

“What will you do first?”

This allowed us to focus on the areas where he had the most energy and felt he could get a quick win and boost his confidence.

“When will you start?”

This required a commitment and some accountability.

“On a scale of 0-9 how committed are you to being successful?”

When he answered, 6, we got to go back and look at fears that were coming up and examine whether or not he had chosen the right place to start.

When he arrived at a commitment of 9, we moved on to “How will you know that you were successful?” And then “How will you celebrate your success?”

Joe found his own answers and created his own plan, a plan he was willing and able to act on.

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If we want to inspire action and change, we must find ways to spark Ahas and new insights. Element B provides a tool that can help us create a dialogue with our clients that serves to guide them on their own path of self-discovery. Patient, non-defensive, active listening is the gift we give for the journey. 

Resources

"The Neuroscience of Leadership," by David Rock and Jeffrey Schwartz, Strategy+Business magazine, Summer 2006.

Change Management – Understanding the Science of Change, Christopher Koch, CIO Executive Council, September 15, 2006.