

The 3-3-1: A Simple Assessment Method that Works

As an executive coach and organization development (OD) consultant, I rely heavily on assessment work. Assessment tools come in all shapes, sizes, complexities and approaches.

Here's my favorite: The 3-3-1 Assessment developed by Marshall Goldsmith for Stakeholder-Centered Coaching.

The 3-3-1 consists of asking the following questions:

- What are the leader's three biggest strengths?
- What three areas of growth, development or improvement would prove most beneficial?
- Of these three, which one do you recommend we focus on first?

I put these questions to "stakeholders"—people who have an important stake in the leader's effectiveness and can offer a diverse array of perspectives.

I use the 3-3-1 not only for individual executive coaching engagements, but for team, department and overall OD projects as well.

What makes the 3-3-1 my favorite?

It's far and away the most time-efficient. I don't have to plow through reams of data nor do stakeholders have to plow through a plethora of questions, many of which may be duplicative or confusing.

Nevertheless, if the client already has other survey data, I use the 3-3-1 as an efficient cross-check.

What makes the 3-3-1 so effective?

The first question identifies critical strengths you want to be sure to preserve and on which you can draw in developing an executive coaching or strategic OD plan.

The second question identifies growth areas that would most likely prove beneficial. Rather than obsess on weaknesses, it sets up what Marshall Goldsmith calls "feedforward," which is more constructive and less threatening than "feedback."

The last question enables the coaching or OD plan to zero in on what's most meaningful and productive of good.

I let stakeholders know the questions in advance. I give them the option of responding via email or in a telephone interview, which typically takes about 10-15 minutes. Depending on circumstances, in-person interviews can be scheduled.

A critically important point: *confidentiality*. I tell stakeholders my contract provides that the client can't ask me to reveal assessment data. Who said what stays with me.

To learn more about this assessment method or Stakeholder-Centered Coaching, you can go to my mentor's resource page. [Frank Wagner](#) is a close and longtime colleague of Marshall Goldsmith, and he developed the Stakeholder-Centered Coaching curriculum.

In a world where coaches, consultants and clients are increasingly pressed for time, it behooves us to use time-efficient assessment methods. The 3-3-1 is just that.