Coaching Skills for Managers
Support Materials

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From "Core Coaching" Sheridan Maguire. © DSC Publications

What coaching is and isn't and what distinguishes it.

The School of Coaching defines coaching as *"The art of facilitating the performance, learning and development on another".*

Within this 'facilitation' there must be an inherent belief that individuals *can* solve their own problems and *do have the capacity* to 'manage' their own situations.
The role of the coach is to provide space and time where an individual can reflect, review, clarify, challenge and explore their own situations and perceptions, in order that they may *themselves* identify the best course of action in *their* situation.

John Whitmore* suggests that Tim Gallwey** 'put his finger on' the essence of coaching when he said.
"Coaching is unlocking a person's potential to maximise their own performance. It is helping them to learn rather than teaching them".

Generally a good manager/leader will use a range of approaches within a team to resolve issues and address challenges. Coaching is a useful approach within that range.

So, coaching *adds* to a range of support a manager or organisation can provide and range of approaches a manager can use to improve performance.

As a way of helping people to learn, coaching differs form other interventions.
The following table, outlines some distinctions between coaching and other 'learning' interventions.

| Counselling	Mentoring	Training	Coaching
Focus on past to present	Focus on present and future	Focus on present and future	Focus on past, present and future
Resolve past issues	Work on a problem together Provides advice and shares experience and knowledge	Provides advice, guidance, experience and knowledge. An opportunity to practice	Provides a space to identify and solve own problems
Focus on old problems	Joint effort to solve a problem	Works at a problem outside in	Works a problem from inside, out
Provides answer	Shares own sources of knowledge and experience	Shares own and others knowledge and experience	Space to find own answers
Heals the past	Supports the present	Guides for the future	Creates the present and a future

The ToGROW Model

The To GROW model is a well established coaching model and is probably the most widely used model for structuring a performance coaching conversation. This five stage model starts with phase one, which is a conversation about the coachee's *Topic,* followed by the next phase *Goal* (for the session).

The third phase is a conversation to deepen mutual understanding around the coachee's current *Reality,* phase four is *Options* and the final phase is *Wrap-up*.

In fact, the conversation will hardly ever be linear and will slide seamlessly from phase to phase and back again a number of times during the conversation. The role of the coach is to understand where they are in the model and to ensure that all the phases are discussed.

The TO GROW model

Topic

Wrap

Goal

Options

Reality
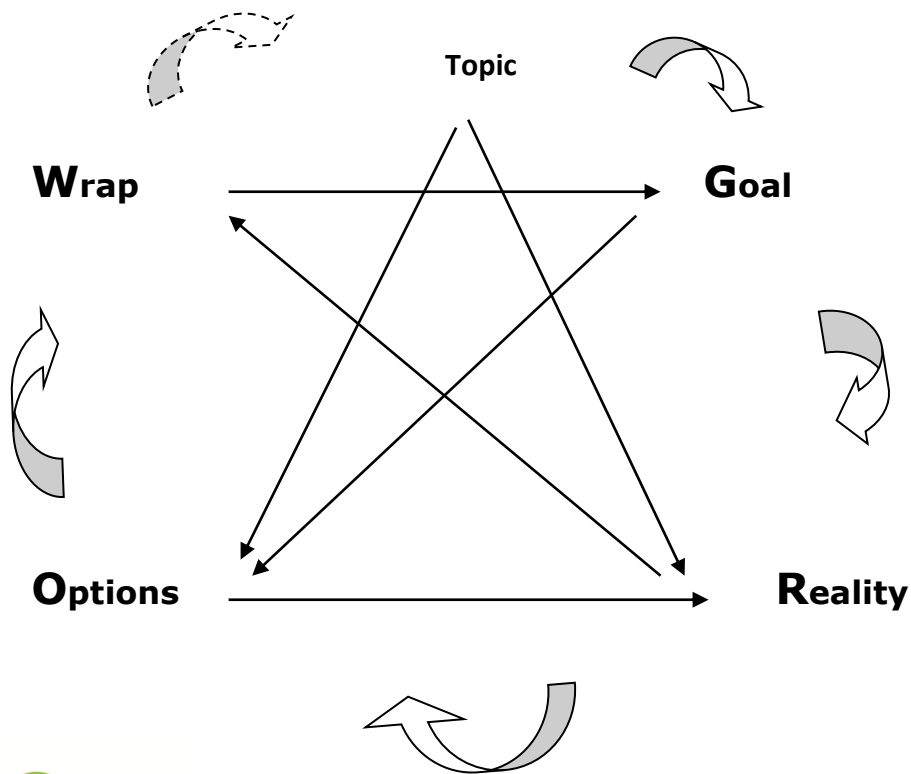
The ToGROW Model – purpose of each phase:

- **Topic** – to understand the coachee's general issue (context, scale, emotional attachment, longer term goal) and to contextualise the conversation

- **Goal** - what does the coachee want to achieve from *this* conversation? What would success look/sound like?/ have a final destination for the conversation. This is not about long term goals, just the outcome of the current conversation

- **Reality** - deepening mutual understanding about the issue/ raising awareness/examining assumptions and self limiting beliefs/gaining deeper clarity and insight/understanding the practical limitations/ appreciating paradox

- **Options** - what are all the possible options for action? challenge assumptions and negativity and push coachee to think wide and creatively/what else could they do?/what will be most effective/what would be crazy but fun?!

- **Will/Way forward** - what is the coachee going to do/by when/ what is the intended outcome and how will they know it's worked?/check alignment of actions with original goal/what help do they need and where will they get it/what is their commitment now 1-10 for taking action, and if not 10, how could it be so?/support

With practice and experience, the coach will acquire an ease with structuring conversations in this way, such that, whatever conversational structure they are following, it will recede into the background of their awareness.

Those less practiced often say that the models get in the way of their listening for the coachee, and become more of a hindrance than a help. It really is worth persevering – without the background structure, a coaching conversation will soon turn into an aimless chat with lack of focus, poor concentration, and unclear outcomes.

Coachees, when discussing their *topic*, will almost invariably start to explain their current situation in more depth, so moving to some degree straight into the *reality* phase of the conversation. The coachee may even come up with an option or two at this stage.

The coach at some point should move the conversation back to *goal for the session*, and then back into reality, and explore further options. Specific actions may also be agreed throughout the conversation, not only at the end – though a final summary and commitment to action is important.

Questions around TOPIC

Every conversation needs to start somewhere, preferably at the beginning! The purpose of the Topic phase of the GROWmodel is to get a brief overview of the performer's situation as they see it now, and set the scene for the coaching conversation that follows.

The coach initiates the conversation by asking the coachee to briefly explain the situation in which they find themselves. They will describe some kind of breakdown which has stopped them in action, and it will be around themselves, theirrelationships with others, some external/environmental factor, or a combination of some or all of these three. Typically you might hear one or more of the following:

- ▪ Topics around themselves as individuals:

  - lack of skill
  - lack of knowledge
  - low self esteem or confidence
  - negative attitude
  - low energy
  - lack of clarity around purpose or goal
  - stress issues
  - personal motivation
  - the' dog choker' effect (self-doubt, fear or embarrassment that is holding them back from doing something that they want or need to do)

- ▪ Topics around relationships with others:

  - communication with individuals/team
  - motivating another/others
  - negotiating win/win with another/others

- failed attempts to modify other's behaviours
- resentment/anger/frustration with lack of action
- building relationships
- lack of agreement/alignment
- missing conversations around goals or objectives
- team issues

- ▪ Topics around external/environmental factors:
- difficult trading conditions
- economic recession
- declining market for services/products
- organisational IT/communication technology not effective
- procedures/processes inappropriate
- lack of time/resources

As coach, your role is to simply listen to the topic, and to be clear that you understand it. That will require you to *summarise* once you think you have understood. Once you and the coachee are clear about the topic, move on to the next question.

Questions around GOAL

The purpose of effective coaching is to create a thinking space for the coachee to explore their issue or problem from an objective viewpoint – outside of themselves, so to speak - and in the process to surface entrenched assumptions. This kind of thinking requires a focus, so effective coaching conversations always have a clear goal.

One reason why a coaching conversation can seem circular and ineffective is that there is a lack of clarity around the goal for the conversation. There must be a goal, even if the goal is to get really clear about the goal! It's important, too, to understand that an agreed aspirational end goal – to treble turnover in the next six months, to deliver a challenging project on time and under budget – will be broken down into smaller performance goals, and it is these 'bite-size chunks' that form the basis for day-to-day coaching conversation goals. For instance:

ASPIRATIONAL END GOAL
- To win 20% more customers in the next 12 months in a contracting market

PERFORMANCE GOALS
- Create more effective team working across the organisation
- Develop a new IT system to capture customer/market information
- To develop my communication and leadership skills

Each of these performance goals will involve the coachee taking specific actions as they commit to moving forwards. The coaching focuses on the action and the subsequent learning, leading to further goals, action and more learning.

This iterative process increases rapidly in speed as the coachee gathers momentum. The coach is there to focus this momentum towards achieving the coachee's aspirational goal in the agreed timescale.

For instance, the coachee may have said that their *topic* is about problem they are having with their boss at work, and in the conversation it becomes clear that the issue is that the coachee feels pressurised and unable to say 'no' to his boss, causing him stress and lack of confidence.

The then describes an *invented future* in which their relationship to their boss is stronger and more equal, where 'no' is easier to say, and in which the performer is regularly coping successfully with large amounts of work.

Success measures are discussed and might include for example, the having of regular meetings with the boss, the declining of one particular piece of work, the finishing of a major project within three months and some behavioural indicators that demonstrate better communication and understanding between the performer and his boss.

The coachee now has a number of choices about where to focus to use the conversation to improve his performance. For instance, he might choose to think of ways to finish the project more quickly, or how to engage his boss in more regular meetings, or to examine how he might think differently about saying 'no' more often. One or possibly more of these choices now become the focus of the conversation and specific related actions are the intended outcome.

Before moving on, the coach needs to be sure that the intended outcome is congruent – that is, will the coachee leave the conversation with some learning and action that will mobilise them towards their longer term goal? Also, is the outcome realistic within the timeframe of the conversation?

'I want to have some ideas about how to tackle the chronic absenteeism in my department' is probably a perfectly appropriate outcome to aim for in a half hour coaching conversation. On the other hand *'I want to define my personal values in relation to this organisation and its values'* is a longer term goal that would need to be teased apart into smaller components, to discover the most appropriate and achievable outcome for the session.

Case Study

When a little (well, OK, a lot) younger, I was a junior instructor at a karate club. One evening after training, the younger of two club member brothers came up to me in the dojo and asked for some extra training so he '*could kick higher'.* I remember the two brothers were nicknamed Little and Large – the younger brother Paul being so much shorter than his older brother, Josh.

I assumed that Paul's intention was to increase his kick range by a couple of inches. Paul and I spent a good hour stretching and sparring in the dojo, focussing on the mawashigeri round-house kick. By the end of a hard evening, Paul was definitely able to extend his kick further, yet seemed dissatisfied with this outcome, which I thought was pretty good. I then asked the question that I should have asked at the beginning:

'Paul, exactly what did you want to have achieved by the end of this session?' He replied:

'I want to kick higher than my brother'.

Paul would have needed major orthopaedic surgery over several years to even think about kicking higher than his taller brother. Because of a lack of mutual clarity and assumption on my part about expected outcome, Paul was dispirited and upset, despite his measurable performance increase.

(Paul went on to become one of the club's finest exponents of kata, which requires perfection of technique rather than physical size.)

Questions around GOAL
- *How will you tell that you are reaching your goal?*
- *What will begin to change as you move towards your goal?*
- *What will success sound/look/feel like?*
- *What timeframe will you set for achieving your goal, and what do you want to have happened by the end of the first week/month, the second week/month etc?*
- *What changes will you see in other people's behaviour or attitudes and in what timeframe?*
- *Who will give you feedback about your successes, how do you want them to give it, and how often?*
- *If you noticed only one thing changing, what would that be? How would you know it was changing?*
- *On a scale of 1 to 10, where are you now and what upward shift in the scale would indicate success to you?*

Questions around REALITY

- *Tell me more about the situation?*
- *What's your level of commitment to moving forward?*
- *Who is involved?*
- *What have you done so far?*
- *Who have you spoken to or got involved?*
- *What effect did that have?*
- *How much authority do you have around this issue?*
- *What has stopped you so far in resolving this?*
- *What might stop you taking action now?*
- *What, if anything, is stopping others acting to resolve this with you?*
- *What do you think is <u>really</u> going on – for you, for other people?*
- *What do you feel about the situation?*
- *What do you think others are feeling or wanting?*

and in general by

- asking open questions – *who, how, what, when…*
- exploring the use of language such as metaphors, repeated words
- accurately reflecting language and summarising
- giving feedback – informal (*I notice that you …)*
              - prepared (eg 360)
              - inductive (*What impact do you think your action had?)*
- challenging assumptions – *if you knew you could…*
              - *if there was time/money…*
              - *if you did have the power…*
              - *if you could say anything to xyz you wanted*
                to say without consequence… etc

Questions around OPTIONS

- *What else could you do other than those things we've already*
- *discussed?*
- *… and what else?*
- *… and what else?*
- *… and what else?*
- *If you had all the resources you needed, what would you do?*
- *If you had a magic wand, what would you do?*
- *If you know you are unstoppable, what's the first thing you would do?*

- *If it were entirely within your authority, what changes would you make?*
- *If you know that people's reaction will be to agree with you 100%, what actions would you recommend?*
- *If you know you cannot fail, what would you do?*
- *What's the one thing you haven't tried yet because you thought it was too outrageous/bizarre/funny?*
- *What would your best friend/worst enemy/business adviser/mum/dad/advise you to do?*

Questions around WRAP

- *What are you going to do now?*
- *What are you going to do first?*
- *What is the timeframe?*
- *What are the milestones towards success?*
- *What support, if any, can I offer you?*
- *What might stop you in action?*
- *What downside if any do you see around this action/actions*
- *What is the intended outcome of this action/these actions?*
- *Will this action achieve your goal? How will you know?*
- *How will that move you nearer your goal?*
- *What might stop you in action?*
- *If there are any downsides identified, what could you do to reduce or minimise these?*
- *What's your commitment ?(scale 1 – 10)*
- *What's missing that has you score your commitment level under 9?*
- *How could you move your commitment nearer 10?*
- *Now could you adjust your identified actions that would have your commitment to action nearer 10?*
- *What's holding you back from action?*
- *What conversations do you need to have, when, and with whom, in order*

Closure of the coaching session

A coaching conversation is one that builds relationship. So it is particularly important to leave the conversation with a sense of closure. An effective way of doing this is for the coach to ask for feedback from the coachee at the end of the session. A question I ask often is:

- *What do you want to say about the way we have worked together today?*

The intent is to elicit some genuine feedback that I can use to build my relationship with the coachee and to make my coaching more effective for them next time we meet. The question is very open and makes the assumption that there *is* something to say – because there always is!

More specific questions to elicit feedback might include:

- *On a scale of 1-10, how well did this session meet your expectations in terms of Expected outcome/non-directive coaching/my attention/challenge*
- *How could we make these sessions even more effective for you?*
- *What could I do to be more effective for you as a coach?*
- *What could we do more of/less of to make these sessions more effective for you?*
- *Is there anything you'd like to say to complete this session today?*

Though simple, it takes time and practice to become fluent with the To GROW Model, in much the same way as learning to drive a car. Practice is essential.

KEY COACHING SKILLS

These are the points gathered from yours and previous courses.

Use these statements as a reflective exercise for self assessment. Take each statement and score your ability in this area from 1-10 (poor to excellent). Note the areas you can make improvement and define specific actions to help you get there. Do this from time to time to reflect upon your learning experience as a coach/coaching manager.

After all coaching sessions take some time to review your own performance asking "What did I do well?" and "What would I like to improve next time?"

1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

1. I ask effective questions
2. I actively listen when required
3. I passively listen when required
4. I can pull out key points from someone else's rant
5. I am non-judgemental
6. I accept failures and mistakes as part of peoples' learning
7. I believe that others have the capability and capacity to solve their own problems
8. I retain emotional control even when there's a curve ball
9. I am positive and encouraging and demonstrate this in words and actions
10. I can hold a silence to allow someone to consider their own thoughts and feelings
11. I can empathise and see the 'bigger picture' of someone else's view of the world
12. I am patient
13. I am goal focussed
14. I am solution focussed
15. I can make sound judgement when called to
16. I believe that with the right support anyone can improve their performance
17. I can provide constructive feedback, specific and de-personalised
18. I am creative and resourceful in my approach to problem solving
19. I am compassionate and seek to understand someone else's feelings and views
20. I am assertive – I make assertive, professional challenge without compromising