Planning your coaching sessions

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Planning your coaching sessions - Contents

This guide is intended to support you in running your own coaching sessions to help both you and your coachee get the very best from each session.

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Why coach, when should you coach and what should you cover?

Why coach?

The power of coaching lies in having another person ask you the right questions, enabling you to discover new solutions. The coach doesn't have the answers – they have the questions. And as we know, when we discover our new solutions, they form stickier learning, compared to being told the answer.

When to coach?

Typically, coaching is used where someone has a level of skill and is looking to develop this skill. For example, they are already able to juggle three balls and want to be able to juggle them in a more fluent way, for longer, with a few tricks thrown in.

What is coaching and what should you cover?

Coaching is one of a range of development tools. As with any tool-kit, it's important to select the right tool for the job. Otherwise, as Maslow said, "I suppose it is tempting, if the only tool you have is a hammer, to treat everything as if it were a nail." In terms of range and what to cover, coaching can be anything from a single question asked in a busy office, through to a deep dive spending several hours focused on intense coaching.

The scope of each coaching session should be planned between coach and coachee. For an initial coaching session both parties should consider the scope, remit and boundaries of coaching. You might want to look at how you create a "coaching contract" as part of having a coaching culture in your organisation.

For ongoing coaching sessions, you will want to look at three key areas:

1. Actions and activities that were agreed at previous sessions. This is key to creating momentum and growth with your coachee.
2. Looking at wider development plans, long term barriers to overcome and long term goals and development. Your coaching can contribute to your coachee's long term development where this alignment happens.
3. Immediate and changing needs. Exploring any immediate challenges or opportunities your coachee has. If there is something pressing for your coachee you can decide if it is a priority and in need of being picked up in this coaching session.

What about the coaching environment?

Imagine ushering your coachee into a small meeting room in your office for what you hope is a brilliant coaching session. The thing you don't know is your coachee was once taken into this room and berated by a senior manager for a small mistake. What emotional association will your coachee feel walking into that room? How might this influence how they engage and interact with you in this room?

How do you find the best space for your coaching, a space where your coachee will be confident to really open up and make the most of the coaching on offer?

Simple.

Ask your coachee.

"Where would you like this coaching session?" If they aren't sure then you might want to offer some suggestions:

- At your desk
- At my desk.
- At the café
- On a walk (yes coaching sessions can take place during a walk)
- Somewhere else.

The idea here is that your coachee is immersed in the best environment for them. That means you get the very best from them.

Getting you ready to coach

To ensure your coaching sessions are as effective as possible, there's some preparation to do.

Whether the coaching session is formal (a diarised session that both you and your coachee planned for), or informal (in the moment), you need to have put in some ground work yourself. The three fundamentals coaches need to work on are:

1. Questioning
2. Listening
3. Being aware of coaching opportunities

Developing your skills as a coach is key. You need to reflect on your current skill set and develop these three core skills as a coach. Other skills to develop through your coaching career include:

- Communications as a whole. How do you communicate effectively.
- Creating choices. Helping your coachee explore different approaches and choices.
- Motivation. Understanding your coachee motivators and your own motivators.
- Skill or behaviour. Exploring both perspectives of your coachees approach and working on skills and behaviours as a coach.
- Patience. Giving coachees the space to think, explore and work at their pace, not yours.
- Curiosity
- Helping coachees think. This is a fundamental of coaching. Helping a coachee to think, and importantly helping a coachee to think differently.
- Observing objectively. Being able to observe a person in action, noting the evidence not your own emotional response.
- Being able to give evidential feedback. See the point above, where you can gather evidence without emotion and replay it to your coachee you can help them see the reality not your or their emotional reaction.

Questioning

Good questioning promotes a good relationship between coach & coachee by:

- Helping your coachee identify their own development needs.
- Helping your coachee to realise that their view is important.
- Helping your coachee explore new options.
- Digging deeper, to appreciate underlying or deep-seated issues, concerns and opportunities.

Here are the key types of questions you might want to explore:

Open questions
Generally elicit longer, more detailed answers, by inviting the coachee's knowledge, opinion or feelings.

TED questions - "Tell me", "Explain" and "Describe", can be used in the same way as open questions.

Closed questions
Can be answered with a "yes" or "no", though in conversation they often are answered with more information.
Useful for summarising the information you have been given, which helps as a check to see if you've understood.

Questioning tips

Good questioning promotes a good relationship between coach & coachee by:

Beware of Leading questions: they don't tell us anything about our coachee.

Firing off question after question, to get 'there' quickly, might sound and feel like an interrogation to your coachee.

Hold off on deciding what your next question is going to be and focus on listening to the answers so that the answer helps to shape your next question.

Remember, your questions should direct and not lead.

To help with your questioning, we've created a bank of coaching questions. You can use it to stimulate your own ideas, as a starter list or as a reminder.

You'll find this coaching questioning bank resource on our resource page

Your notes and reflections:

What questions can you ask at your next coaching session, and are they open or closed?

Silence is Golden

“Silence is the sleep that nourishes wisdom.”, so said Francis Bacon.

Silence may be a productive space for our coachee and we need to respect that as coaches.

Silence is one of the most powerful questions you’ll never have to ask: it’s good at drawing more information from a coachee.

As coaches, we need to get comfortable with the silence that gives our coachees the thinking time they want and need.

Listening

Listening is fundamental to successful coaching. And let’s be honest, asking great questions is wasted if you can’t, don’t or won’t listen to your coachee’s responses.

Our biases, concentration and anxiety levels all impede our listening ability.

We can monitor and improve our listening skills by:

Using active listening techniques to gather more information from our coachee

Being aware of and discarding our assumptions and ideas, choosing to focus instead on listening

Focusing fully on our coachee, blocking out distractions

Note-taking (which is essential for evidential feedback)

Using clarifying questions, as appropriate

Challenging ourselves as a coach to gather more information by listening fully to our coachees.

As it’s a conscious function, we must choose to listen.

Coaching opportunities

Coaching opportunities are all around us. As a coach spend some time thinking about where you can gather your “evidential feedback”. Make a note and plan to fully observe the people around you doing their job, and any of the following activities:

- Having a discussion with the individual.
- Comparing performance level against role competencies.
- Feedback from other depts., colleagues or external sources e.g. great feedback, number of queries and complaints.
- One-to-ones/appraisals and personal development plans.
- KPI, target achievement and performance against goals.
- Meetings (planning, chairing and participating in).
- Feedback from colleagues and other directors, partners and managers.
- Results from knowledge assessments/tests/quizzes.
- Missed deadlines.
- Internal presentation.
- Net Promoter Scores/customer feedback.
- Client meetings.

Your coaching observation opportunities

How many of these do you recognise in your role? Make your notes here on what you intend to observe and when you will do it.

Assumptions

As humans, with our beliefs, experience and values, we're prone to making assumptions.

As coaches, we need to resist the temptation to assume and, instead, make the effort to understand our coachee, including *their* own values, beliefs and motivators.

To help you to understand your coachee's motivators, there's a free resource here.

When we suspend our assumptions and learn about our coachee, we create an environment that is conducive for the coachee to develop and grow.

Your preparation time is the ideal space to park your assumptions. They'll still be there when you go back for them.

Summary

Take the time to prepare and you'll enjoy the new results that you and your coachee achieve.

Understanding our coachee's development needs is fundamental, so explore what they are looking to achieve in the short, medium and long term. Dig deeper to understand how they tie into their personal development plan. You could ask about:

- Tasks are they responsible for now?
- The tasks that cause the most difficulty?
- Some of the forthcoming changes/challenges? E.g. Succession planning
- Existing skills & experiences
- External influences
- Progress against objectives/targets

Compare the standard that they are expected to achieve versus the current reality - this determines the development gap and gives you an insight into their perception of reality.

Good luck with (and enjoy) planning your coaching sessions. Put the initial work in as an investment in yourself as a coach: the more effort you put in at the planning and preparation stage, the better your coaching sessions will be and the more comfortable you will feel.

Your reflections and actions

Make your notes here on what you intend to do to improve your own coaching.

A Little More About Us (and how we can help you)

We are New Results

A comprehensive training agency committed to supporting Dictate. You and your teams on your professional development journey. By focusing on your own unique learning needs, we aim to unlock your team strategic potential. Our expertise spans across:

- Leadership & Management Development.
- Personal & Professional Growth and Development.
- Business Growth Strategy and Operational Development.

How we work with you

Our services are not only flexible and dynamic, but also partnership focused to be aligned with your unique needs. Whether it's through direct programme delivery, enhancing your internal training programmes or offering licensable content for your platforms. We're here to adapt and grow alongside you as a committed learning partner.

learn more

If you're interested in learning more about new results and how we can help you, please visit our website: www.newresults.co.uk . Or explore our client testimonials and case studies – New Results Case Studies.

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