

Please
Share Freely!

Coaching the Coach

Your Learning and Development Guide for Supporting Coaches

This guide outlines how you and your learning and development team can guide and support coaches.

Please feel free to share it inside your organization.



Help your coaches adapt to challenging situations.

© iStockphoto/VII-photo

You've set up a coaching program at your organization – great! But how do your coaches get the coaching they need?

What's your response when coaches ask for help with the coaching they're delivering?

To some extent, you want them to be able to resolve problems using their own skills and strengths, in much the same way that they'd advise the people they coach. But some of their questions could be complex, and you may need to get involved – at least initially.

Below, we'll outline eight questions that your coaches might raise, and we'll look at how you can coach your coaches to resolve them.

1. "Where do I start?"

Coaching may be a hot topic at the moment, but not everyone is familiar with it. Coaching styles also differ hugely, particularly at different levels (a CEO needs a very different coach from a new manager). Make sure that you've clarified exactly what coaching means for each of your coaches.

To answer the "where do I start?" question, outline how different coaching situations call for different approaches, and produce different results. For example:

- **Corporate change:** the coach may need to focus on emotional and status-related issues, as well as on organizational changes.
- **Personal issues:** the coach may need a "softly softly" approach to help people through life- or career-defining moments, and to cut through emotional interference.
- **Increasing self-awareness:** the coach is likely to start with psychometric tools such as **Myers-Briggs**, and move on to standard coaching models.
- **Self-limiting beliefs:** the coach will need to listen carefully, and challenge views gently but firmly.

Then explain coaching approaches such as the **GROW model**, and encourage coaches to apply some of their management skills to the start of the coaching relationship, such as establishing **SMART goals** with their coachees. Suggest that coaches and protégés monitor results, just as they would in their day-to-day roles.

2. "What should I do if my coachee won't open up to me?"

Discuss concerns about the coaching relationship as soon as possible.

To start, look at any conflicts between the coach's job and their role as coach. What blindspots or characteristics do they have that could affect the relationship? The **Hogan Development Survey** is a useful tool that can help people identify less positive aspects of their personalities that can affect working relationships.

Encourage your coaches to use this tool, and to "self-coach" as they work through the results.

In addition, encourage your coaches to look at different coaching models, such as solution-focused coaching. This will help them adapt their style to the needs of the people they coach. Also, make sure that they remind coachees that sessions are confidential, and explore whether the goals agreed at the outset are still relevant.

3. "How can I relate better to my coachee?"

Your coaches may be in different departments from their coachees. This creates professional distance, but it may mean that coaches struggle to understand the issues that their protégés face.

Encourage your coaches to compare their working styles with those of their coachees, and to look for opportunities to draw out new skills. For example:

- "I can see that my coachee enjoys planning projects. I specialize in project planning – how can I pass on what I've learned?"
- "I tend to rely on facts not feelings when I'm making a decision, but my coachee does the opposite. How can I encourage him to make more fact-based, objective decisions?"

Of course, it takes time to build a relationship, especially one that's confidential but work-related – coachees may feel uncomfortable about opening up to someone they know professionally. This is why coaches need to remind them of the purpose and value of coaching, and encourage them to open up to make the most of the opportunity.

Remember, your coaches aren't there to teach new skills, but to encourage the people they coach to reach their own solutions. Coaches should focus on this, rather than on "overwriting" coachees' existing approaches to problem solving.

4. "How should I coach someone I also manage?"

Effective coaching starts from a neutral position. However, this can be tricky to maintain when you coach

someone who you also manage, as the “baggage” of the existing relationship can get in the way.

Your coaches need to avoid “command and control” behavior when they’re coaching. Encourage them to focus on a style that is:

- Collaborative: they should aim to talk less and issue fewer orders.
- Inclusive: they should give [specific feedback](#), instead of making judgments.
- Empathic: they must help the person they’re coaching understand the issues that they’re facing. [Empathic listening](#) is an ideal tool for this situation, as it allows the coachee to speak freely while the coach reflects key phrases back.

Ultimately, you may find that a coaching relationship between a manager and a direct report presents too many conflicts of interest to be fruitful. Be vigilant, and be ready to reassign coaches if you need to.

5. "How should I handle complex issues?"

It’s important to remind coaches that they’re not psychological or emotional counselors. They can offer advice based on their knowledge of your organization, and help people find their own solutions, but, if someone is struggling with significant problems, it’s time to help them access expert advice.

Your coaches will be aware that discussions with their coachees are confidential. However, they can still direct coachees to appropriate sources of help. This could be their manager, or, if your organization offers one, an employee assistance program.

Remember, though, that it’s essential to remind coaches and protégés where coaching stops and expert help begins.

6. "Where can I go for more support?"

Coaching can be intense, and it’s understandable that people will need support from time to time. So, make

sure that everyone knows that they can approach you for guidance.

Offer networking events and refresher training regularly. Use these events to remind everyone of the purpose of the coaching program, and to check in with participants to make sure that the program is meeting their needs.

7. "How do I get my own coach?"

The coaching process may encourage coaches to explore their own coaching needs. If your coaches are at management level, and if the situation seems to demand it, you may want to look for external coaches who can offer specialist support and politically independent judgments. (This is important if trust is an issue, or if expectations of success are low.)

You may also find it easier to get a good fit by “shopping outside.”

However, in-house coaching can still be appropriate for management-level colleagues. Familiarity can ease non-contentious transitions – for example, supporting a newly promoted leader – and when you [incorporate coaching into management](#), you foster a culture of learning in your organization.

8. "How can I get ongoing support?"

Coaching is most successful when you keep your knowledge of yourself, your skills, your organization, and best practice up to date. Likewise, coaches and coachees are more likely to be effective if a “learning climate” exists in the organization. This means that participants are supported in trying out new skills and expanding their knowledge.

So, keep abreast of developments in coaching models, and think about how you could build your own knowledge into your coaching program. Use our [LinkedIn Group](#) to share your ideas and get support.

Visit www.mindtools.com/corporate to find out how your organization can access more than 1000 resources on leadership, management, problem solving, and communication.

You can also license more than 60 one-hour training courses and hundreds of business podcasts. Used together, these will help you develop and embed skills organization-wide.

