

Top Tips for Coaching

Coaching involves helping individuals to identify new ways of improving their performance, achieving their objectives and finding solutions to workplace challenges. Coaching is very different to managing, and it is important to know what the key skills and behaviours of a good coach are before getting started. Following these top tips will help you to do this.

Build rapport and trust

For coaching to be successful, it is vital for there to be trust and rapport between you and your coachee from the outset of your relationship. To help achieve this, it is a good idea to meet with the coachee or at least have a telephone conversation with them before your first formal coaching session. This will allow you to start building the relationship, and will help put the coachee at ease. At the beginning of your first meeting, you should spend some time setting the scene, explaining how the sessions are going to work, and checking whether the coachee has any questions.

Be a great listener

To be a good coach, it is essential to be a great listener. Listening carefully during a coaching session will give you a clearer understanding of the issues affecting your coachee. This will help you to formulate pertinent and helpful follow-up questions and provide relevant feedback. During a coaching conversation, therefore, you should:

- maintain eye contact with your coachee
- focus on what your coachee is saying
- be aware of their body language
- avoid becoming distracted by anything else around you
- acknowledge and encourage the coachee with verbal cues (e.g. 'Carry on' or 'And then?') and non-verbal gestures (e.g. nodding)
- take note of the key points the coachee is making (it is a good idea to let the coachee know you will be doing this in advance)
- ask questions to clarify relevant points and to ensure you understand fully

Ask challenging questions

You should ask questions that prompt your coachee to engage in some genuine self-reflection. This should help them to achieve greater insight into the challenges they face and to identify potential solutions. Asking open questions (e.g. 'Why do you feel that is the case?', 'What could you have done differently in that situation?') can often help you do this. Asking a well-placed closed question from time to time can also be effective; a question like 'Do you think you're good at your job?' can have a big impact in a coaching conversation. Some coachees may find these types of questions difficult to answer; you should reassure them that they can take the time they need to gather their thoughts before responding.

Give feedback

Offering constructive feedback is an important aspect of coaching. This does not mean making judgements about the coachee, but offering helpful insights based on what you have seen and heard during the coaching session. Using the BOOST model can help you deliver feedback positively and constructively during a coaching conversation. This involves making sure that your feedback is:

- **Balanced:** you should focus on strengths, as well as areas for development
- **Observed:** your feedback should be based on behaviours you have seen
- **Objective:** feedback should not be influenced by your own emotions, biases or personal preferences
- **Specific:** comments should be supported by examples
- **Timely:** feedback should be given as soon as possible after the event

Embrace silence

As the coaching conversation progresses, periods of silence are likely to occur from time to time. This may be because the coachee is reflecting on a question you have just asked, or because you suspect that the coachee has more to add to a response. Although it might seem strange at first, it is important not to try to fill these silences by asking another question or attempting to finish a coachee's answer for them. Silence provides you and the coachee with the space to think and reflect, so it is important to allow it in your coaching conversations.

Assume a non-directive stance

One of the key differences between coaching and managing is that a coach's stance in a conversation should be **non-directive**. This involves asking insightful questions and providing constructive feedback to help someone reach their own solutions, rather than specifying what to do or how to do it. To help you become less directive in your coaching conversations, it can be helpful to spend some time reflecting on how you normally behave when someone asks you for support. Do you try to solve their problems for them? Are you likely to give them instructions? Do you talk more than you listen? Being aware of these traits can help you identify appropriate ways to adapt your style in a coaching conversation. For example, you may identify that you need to speak less and listen more, be more comfortable with silence, or ask more open questions.

Use appropriate tools and methods

If you are a new coach, it is important to focus on developing your **communication skills** and your ability to be **non-directive** in a coaching conversation. The tools, methods and models you use should be the ones that help you to do this. One such model is **GROW**, which provides a structure for conducting an effective coaching conversation. [1] Experienced coaches, on the other hand, might find it helpful to engage with some of the more complex academic work that is being conducted into coaching. Industry journals and credible websites and blogs can be good sources of this type of information.

Consider coaching supervision

Coaching supervisors provide non-directive support to coaches, helping them to navigate challenges and generate new ideas for their coaching relationships. It is usual for professional (i.e. executive) coaches to have a supervisor, but coaching supervision can be helpful for newer coaches as well.

If you are interested in finding out more about coaching supervision, it is a good idea to speak to your line manager or HR department (if you have one) to find out if your organisation can provide funding for this. Alternatively, if you decide to source your own coaching supervisor, you might find it helpful to consult the Association for Coaching (AC) or the Coaching Supervision Academy. Both these organisations have online directories of accredited coaching supervisors.

[1] The GROW model is a question-based framework whereby the coach asks questions about the coachee's goals, the reality of their current situation, their objectives, and their will to achieve them.

Related Items

Related Resources

- The Will and the Skill: a Coaching and Mentoring Exercise