

Ten Top Tips For Coaching Success – Part 1

1. Check how much control your coachee has over the topic under discussion.

Coaching is about helping people take responsibility for implementing action to deal with a certain situation. Are you coaching the right person? Do they have control and authority to take action? When a coachee claims to have no control, it's worth challenging their assumptions and getting them to take responsibility if it's clear they should. Perhaps ask, "If you don't take action to change the current situation then who will?"

If people don't seem to care about the topic then it's very difficult to coach them. Either help them understand why they should care and what the consequences of them not caring are (potentially under-performance leading to disciplinary action), or accept that they genuinely don't have control and focus on more pertinent issues.

2. Establish a clear session goal.

In all my years of training managers as coaches, what stands out above all else from the practice sessions is the need for a clear session goal. No, I don't mean just agreeing on a topic. A session goal goes beyond this and establishes what both parties want to get out of the coaching conversation. As Graham Alexander, the creator of the renowned GROW Model, likes to ask: "When you get up out of your chair, what outcome would be most valuable to you?" A great response provided recently by a client of mine was: "I'd like a short, bullet-pointed action plan setting out what I can do to deal with this issue". We both knew where we stood right from the beginning and what constituted success.

3. If you get stuck, refer back to the session goal.

This is very difficult to do if you haven't established one, but a brilliant technique if you have. It's remarkably easy to forget the exact wording of the stated session goal **so write it down!** During the conversation, if nerves take over and you simply can't think of what to say next, a favourite technique of mine is to say, "Let's just go back to the session goal for a moment and check that we're on track". I either read out the goal or ask the coachee to restate it. On virtually every occasion that I've done this the client then continues the conversation or the next question comes easily to mind.

4. Be thorough.

Aim to help the coachee develop a comprehensive action plan. This means an in-depth, focused conversation where you probe and act persistently to draw out key information, options and actions. Don't just skim the surface. Of course, to do this effectively you'll need well developed listening skills – not just to hear the main points they're raising, but also to pick up on the throwaway remarks, which can often be very telling. Likewise, observe body language and tone of voice. Do they all add up or is there some conflict in the message? Check it out. You're there to help them and often they need a well-tuned ear, an inquisitive approach, and some polite challenge.

5. Demonstrate your confidence in the coachee's ability to come up with a range of options.

Rather than ask, "Is there anything else you could do?", look your coachee in the eye, smile confidently, and ask expectantly, "What other good ideas do you have to tackle this issue?" I guarantee this approach will work far better than the former and generate a more positive response. Try it and see!

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