

An introduction to coaching



Contents

What is coaching?
The skills, values and behaviour of a coach
Reflective practice
Conducting and reviewing a coaching session
Coaching opportunities
Useful links and references
Activity: Are you ready to coach?

Acknowledgement

Some of the material in this booklet was originally created for the Subject Learning Coach Programme, part of the Teaching and Learning Programme from the Learning and Skills Improvement Service.

What is coaching?

Coaching is unlocking a person's potential to maximise their own performance. It is helping them to learn rather than teaching them.

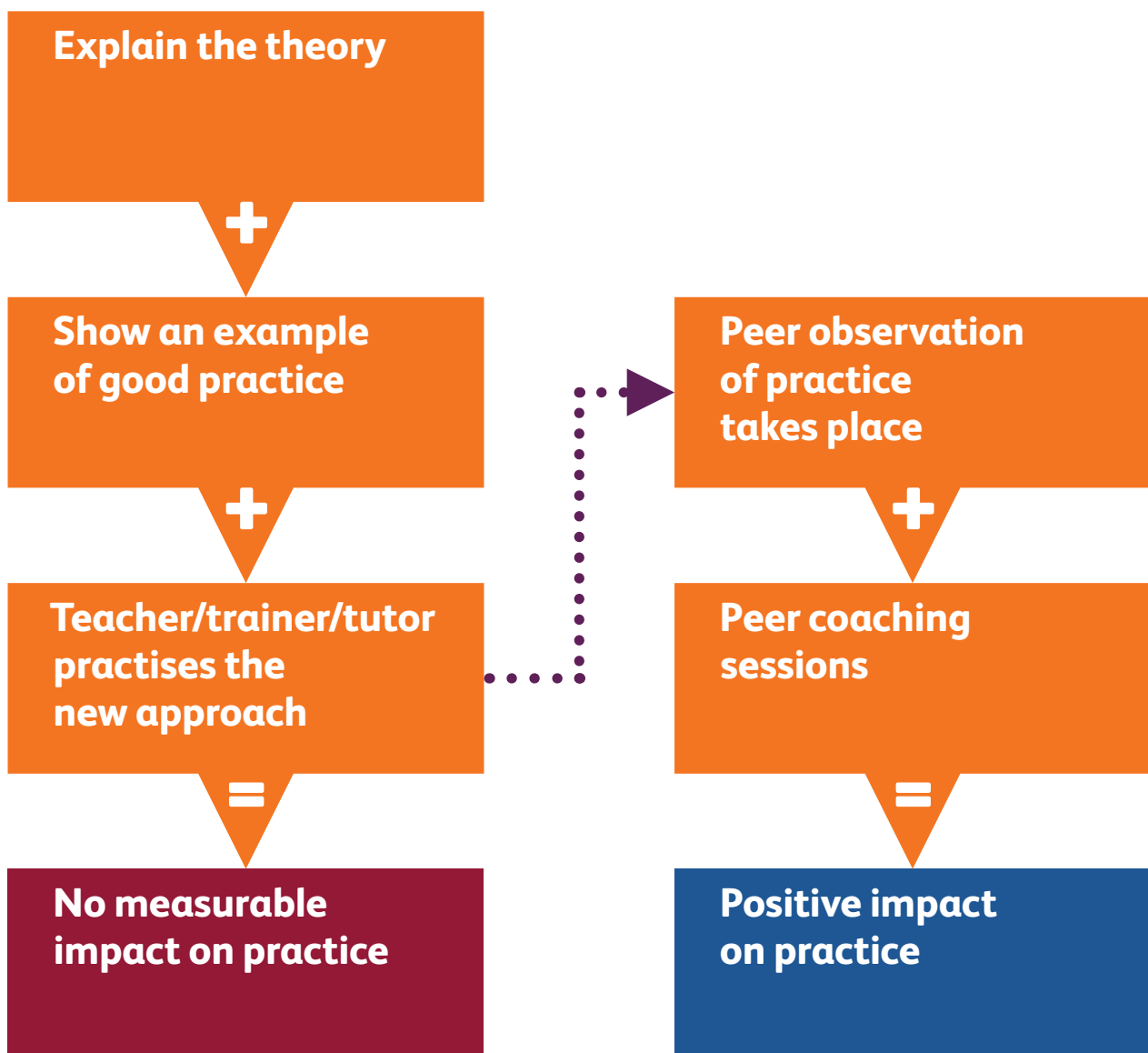
(Whitmore 2003)

It is essential for effective, long-term, sustained changes to teaching and training practice.

Joyce and Showers (2002) argued that without the opportunity to receive coaching, there is no measurable and sustained impact on practice. See the diagram below.

The process of peer coaching is derived from Robbins (1995) and reinforces the Joyce and Showers research:

Peer coaching is a process through which two or more professional colleagues work together to reflect on current practices; expand, refine and build new skills; share ideas; conduct action research; teach one another; and problem solve within the workplace.



Based on research by Joyce and Showers (2002)

Peer coaching is:

- non-directive;
- recognises the practitioner as the expert in their subject, not the coach;
- draws on the expertise of the coach to facilitate reflection and learning.

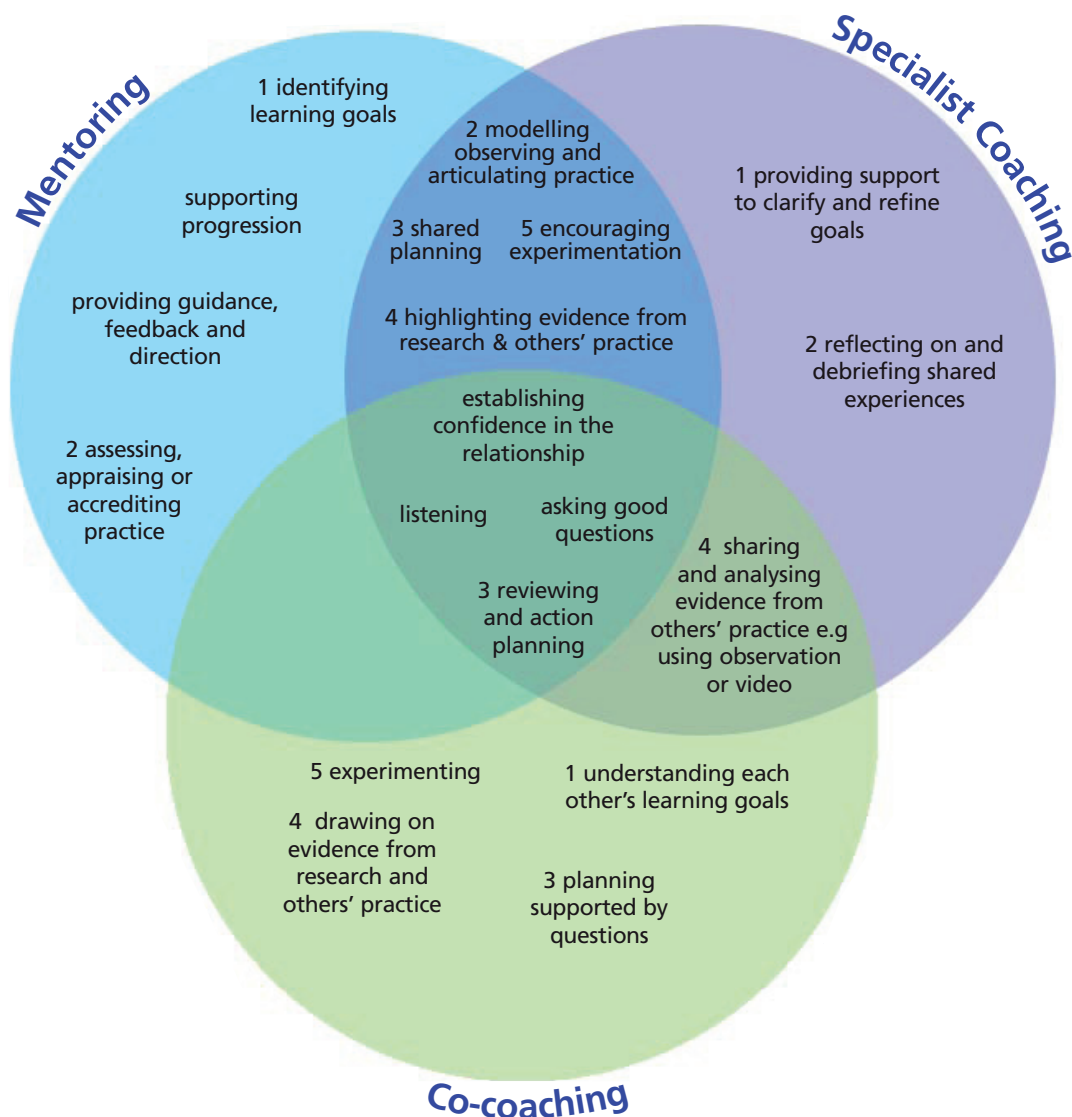
Effective coaches consciously match their coaching approaches to the specific needs of their coachee. There is no one way or 'right' way to coach – you may move up and down the directive to non-directive spectrum depending on the coachee, the issue and your own style. However, for your coachee to achieve sustainable learning and take full ownership of their own development you will need to spend more time at the non-directive end of the spectrum. See the diagram below.

Key coaching principles

- The coach is not necessarily the expert.
- Coaching is more about pull than push.
- Silence allows time for reflection by both coach and coachee.



Mentoring and coaching: a comparison



From CUREE *National Framework for Mentoring and Coaching: Mentoring and Coaching CPD Capacity Building Project*

The Centre for the Use of Research and Evidence in Education (CUREE) has developed a framework for coaching and mentoring for the schools sector. See the diagram above. It covers:

- 10 evidence-based principles that should inform mentoring and coaching programmes;
- core concepts – the who, what, where, why and when – of mentoring, specialist coaching and collaborative coaching;
- a description of the skills that mentors, coaches and professional learners will develop;
- an overview of how mentoring and coaching activities change in different contexts.

For more information about CUREE and the framework visit:

- www.curee-paccts.com/mentoring-and-coaching/national-framework-and-resources;
- Training and Development Agency mentoring and coaching library at <http://mclibrary.tda.gov.uk> (username: **mcanon**, password: **mclib55**).

The skills, values and behaviours of a coach

Whitmore and others have demonstrated that to be a successful coach you need to build your self-awareness, professional responsibility through reflection if you are to sustain improvements to your coaching practice.

Effective coaches:

- are interested in people and what they are doing;
- challenge and stretch their colleagues;
- encourage people to develop options;
- change perceptions – help people to see things differently;
- explain, provide advice and guidance;
- generate a commitment to moving forward;
- understand themselves;
- have self-control;
- have empathy;
- have good ‘social’ skills;
- respect and value equality and diversity.

It is said that a good coach will manage a coaching session by contributing no more than 20% of the talking. The main tools for achieving a successful coaching session are listening, questioning, summarising and observing.

Listening skills

Active listening underpins our ability to coach at every level. It allows us to understand properly what is being said. A good listener ‘hears’ the feeling behind the words and is able to respond appropriately or empathise accurately.

When you are trying to listening closely you need to avoid changing the subject; interrupting; assuming you must have an answer; monopolising conversations; half-listening; placating irrespective of the issue.

A coach has a particular way of ‘listening for’ rather than ‘listening to’:

- listening for people’s inner goals and aspirations;
- listening for the real story;
- listening for unexamined assumptions;
- listening for emotional themes;
- listening for readiness to act.

Questioning skills

Effective questioning skills underpin coaching so it is worth taking a few minutes to think about the type of questions you might use to support the coaching process. Different types of questions will elicit different sorts of information. Most coaches need to discover both facts and feelings through a combination of open, closed, specific (targeted), reflective and hypothetical questions – although the balance may alter depending on where you are in the coaching cycle. See the table below.

Type of question	Example	Purpose
Open (cannot be answered yes or no)	“What are your current priorities?” or “What are you aiming to achieve?”	To get the coachee to open up and tell the coach about their issue. To understand what they are there to achieve.
Closed	“Do you enjoy making decisions?”	To get a yes/no response.
Specific	“When was your last meeting with your manager?”	To find out the facts.
Reflecting	“It appears that you aren’t too happy with how the meeting went?”	Reverses a statement or question by rephrasing and sending it back to the coachee. Keeps them talking.
Hypothetical	“If you had to do a presentation tomorrow what topic would you choose?”	Good for testing possible reaction to certain situations.

Reflective practice

Reflecting on your coaching practice helps you to improve and is a key element of being a coach. Always reflect at the end of a coaching session and keep a log of what went well and what could have been improved. If you ask for feedback from your coachee, you will gain a valuable perspective.

Try to:

- step back, explore and analyse your own role in the coaching session;
- consider the different perspectives of other people involved;
- consider potential implications, e.g. for others and for your organisation;
- consider what you have learned from the process.

You may find the “What, so what, now what” approach that you were introduced to during your induction to the champions’ training programme useful here.

Creating a coaching culture

- Have a coaching conversation every day.
- Live coaching, don’t pretend it.
- Make sure you have someone who can coach you.
- Build relationships, then coach.
- Remember, coaching is listening, not telling.
- Build on strengths, create energy for positive change.
- Value everyone’s differences and uniqueness.
- Have regular, consistent, structured conversations with each person.
- Plan and agree on goals that will stretch and review frequently.

Conducting and reviewing a coaching session

When first selecting someone to practise coaching with there are several points to consider. At first, at least, it is best to work with someone who is willing to try out the model with you, someone supportive and interested in what you are doing and trying to achieve.

With the coachee you then need to begin building trust and establish what you both expect from the session including the length and location of the session, personal levels of commitment to the coaching process and confidentiality.

Initially, you may decide to work in coaching triads with one person as coach, one as coachee and one as observer, where you take it in turns to play each role, allowing 15 minutes for each session and 5 minutes for each review session. Taking the role of observer enables you to gain a deeper insight into the coaching relationship, identify effective coaching behaviours and analyse the coachee’s responses.

- As the **coach** you need to set the context; provide ongoing coaching, respond in ways that help the coachee move forward; and conclude effectively, agreeing next steps.
- As the **observer** you need to agree the ground rules; make careful notes; avoid being judgemental; record what you hear and see; and provide constructive feedback.
- As the **coachee** you need to: prepare yourself; engage with the process and provide feedback.

In a coaching relationship the coach should not assume responsibility for issues brought to them – that responsibility lies with the coachee. If, as a coach, you find yourself working in a triangle where a line manager has expectations and desired outcomes that may not have been explained to the coachee, it is important to protect your integrity and the trust involved, and make sure that everyone understands the expectations and desired outcomes.

The GROW model is a useful tool for coaching. Remember the silent GROW you used during Day 1 of the champions’ training programme and the types of question asked.

The emphasis should always be on the purpose of the coaching session – to benefit the coachee.

Coaching opportunities

Planned coaching

Planned coaching is where you or a colleague identify a development opportunity or requirement, and you agree that working together on this would be useful.

Planned coaching may take the form of a one-off session, or a series of them. Planned coaching would be appropriate, for example, where your colleague:

- is learning a new skill;
- is assuming extra responsibilities;
- has received some negative feedback;
- returns from some form of training and wants to consolidate their learning;
- is new to the organisation or department or job role.

Impromptu coaching

Impromptu coaching happens on the spur of the moment – when you spot an opportunity to turn a problem or question into an informal coaching conversation.

Perhaps your colleague tells you that they are unhappy about the outcome of meeting with a colleague or manager and asks for your advice. ... Rather than giving them advice, or describing how you have handled a similar situation in the past, you could ask questions such as:

“What would you like to say?”

“What do you think would be the best thing to do?”

“What are your main concerns?”

“How reasonable is their opinion?”

Your colleague may not realise that they are being coached, but they will know that they are being helped to work out their problem. The questions you ask them will make them better prepared to handle the situation; they should consider wider options for action, with less emotion, and will therefore be more likely to move on positively.

Useful links and references

Links

www.selfhelpmagazine.com/article/giving-feedback

Free Management Library – items on giving feedback: www.managementhelp.org/commskls/feedback/basc_gde.htm

Online BBC course on giving and receiving feedback: www.bbctraining.com/onlineCourse.asp?tID=2241

Coaching protocols and models cards: see resources for Day 1 on the CTP website.

SLC programme and community site: www.subjectlearningcoach.net

References

Joyce, B. and B. Showers (1996) The Evolution of Peer Coaching. In *Educational Leadership*. 53 (6), 12–16.

Joyce, B. and B. Showers (2002) *Student achievement through staff development*, 3rd ed. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.

Robbins, P. (1995) Peer coaching: quality through collaborative work, in Block, J., Everson, S.F. and Guskey, T.R. (eds), *School Improvement Programs: A Handbook for Educational Leaders*, New York: Scholastic.

Whitmore, J. (2009) *Coaching for performance: GROWing human potential and purpose – the principles and practice of coaching and leadership*. 4th edition. London, Nicholas Brealey.

Activity

Are you ready to coach?

Coaching requires a range of skills and competencies to be successful and have a positive impact. To help you gauge your current level of effectiveness we have identified nine competencies with examples. Score yourself on a scale of 1–10 where 10 is the highest. It is important to be realistic with yourself so that you can track your progress during the lifecycle of the programme.

You might like to use your reflective notebook to think about what you might need to do to improve your confidence and competence in any of these areas.

As a successful coach:		1  10
1	I believe that everyone has the ability to change and improve their performance and behaviours. For example: people have unlimited potential, all behaviour has a positive intention, people make the best choice they can at the time, people have or can create all the resources they need to change.	
2	I have a range of communication skills that encourage people to participate in a coaching conversation. For example: listening, questioning, summarising, building rapport, using silence.	
3	I have a range of personal qualities that are essential in developing successful coaching relationships. For example: empathy, tenacity, challenge, self-awareness, self-control, inspirational, motivational, open to feedback, self-disclosure.	
4	I use a recognised peer-coaching model to ensure that my coaching has clear goals and defined outcomes. (You could use the GROW model for this.)	
5	I use contracting to establish clear ground rules to support an effective coaching relationship. For example: confidentiality, boundaries, frequency (dates, times), level of support/guidance, agreement on process, role of the coach (no advice).	
6	I employ a range of techniques to support people in their learning and development. For example: distinction between coaching and other forms of support such as mentoring/counselling, training, consulting, barriers to learning and ways of unblocking these.	
7	I have a sound knowledge and understanding of improvement of performance and organisational development. For example: understanding of leadership and the differences between leadership and management, leading change, managing conflict, leading team development, influencing strategies, culture, relationships, external drivers.	
8	I understand how e-learning can support or enhance a coaching relationship. For example: communication skills, online communities of practice, use of multi-media and teleconferencing/ instant messaging/telephone, using online platforms and tools as a means of collaborative development.	
9	I demonstrate a commitment to my own personal development.	