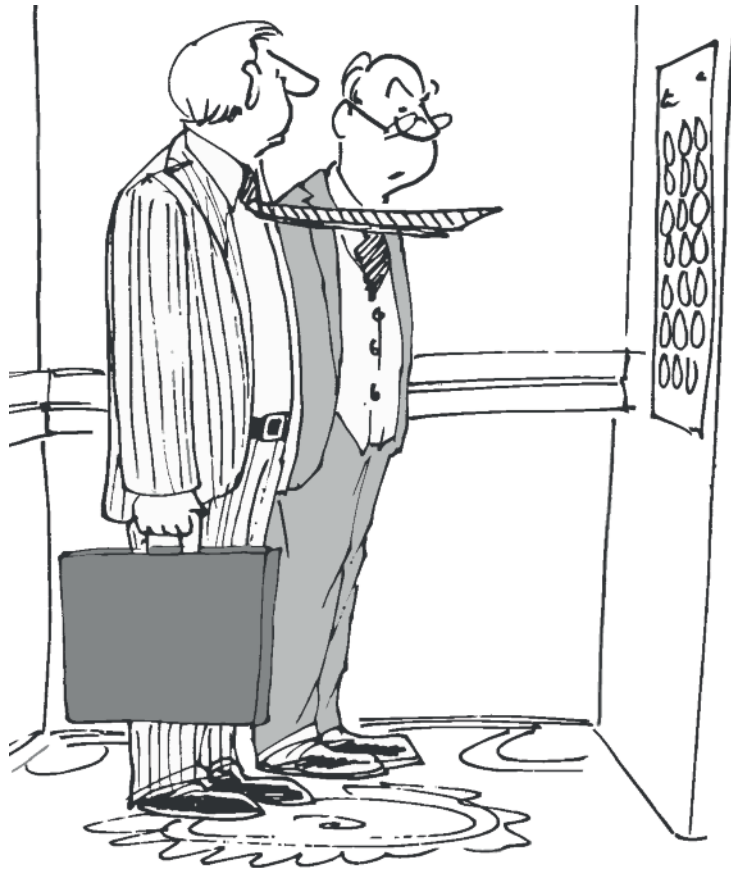


Coaching Over Coffee



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"You seem a little tense."

Great coaching requires a great conversation. And though both people would benefit from a perfect environment and ample time, much can be achieved in less than ideal circumstances.

With little more than a cup of coffee (or tea) at your side, it's possible to support, challenge or give feedback to a colleague. This booklet gives you tips and ideas for how to do coaching.

In this booklet, you will find some coaching models, processes to work through that deliver good coaching outcomes, techniques, tools and tips to sharpen your coaching practice. Though time might be tight, there's much good you can do in a chat over coffee.



Before jumping in with your size 15 shoes to coach an unsuspecting colleague, it's worth asking yourself two quick questions:

- › Is coaching this colleague what's needed right now?
- › If it is, how do I get focused quickly?



When to Coach

How do you know when coaching is called for? Here are a few signals to look for:

- 1 Patterns** in the requests (or demands) colleagues make of you. Telling your colleague what you want might be fine. After the 23rd occasion, you need to take a different tack!
- 2 Differences** (sometimes slight) in how your colleague behaves. For example, unusual levels of excitement or anxiety might suggest a conversation would be useful.
- 3 Ripples** in the pond that seem to originate with one colleague. This might indicate their words or deeds are having perhaps unintended consequences on others.

In truth, you might be receiving a mix of signals. Over time, you will pick up a feel for when to coach, and as long as your antennae are out there and working, you will know when to pick the moment. If you're still not sure, ask how you can help your colleague. If it's help of a coaching kind, people usually say so, though they probably won't use the 'c' word!

Getting focus quickly

Working at pace and rushing from one task to another can make it difficult to gather your concentration, even if you've spotted that a quick coaching conversation is needed. So how can you get focused quickly?

A tip is to think of a time when you have achieved great focus or concentration, perhaps in solving a knotty problem or working through a tricky task. Anchor that experience in your mind; make that memory as vibrant and real as you can.

Make sure you can trigger the same recollection whenever you need it – like switching on a light. Simply repeating the word 'focus' or 'concentrate' can do it for some people. Or maybe a surreptitious pinch of your skin could 'wake you up'!

“ **Remember** you need to be 'there' with your colleague, with 100% focus, to achieve a great conversation; not caught up with your own pressures and challenges. If you cannot be 'there' for a colleague 100%, you might be better calling it off.

In 44BC, the Roman philosopher Cicero set out his rules for a good conversation. Even in the age of email, blogs and text messaging, they seem refreshingly relevant.

With a little twist, we can adapt them as a set of ground rules to guide great coaching conversations. If you already do some of them well, that's good. As a challenge, think about doing all of them wonderfully, even when time is tight!

Conversations

1 Speak clearly

Be precise in your questions, clear in your feedback and to the point in your observations.

2 Speak easily, but not too much. Give others their turn

Remember, this is not about you; it's about your colleague. You're there to support, challenge or guide.

3 Do not interrupt

Patience. Some colleagues need a little time to say what's on their mind or to get clarity about an issue. Dive in before they're done and you risk polluting their thoughts. Besides, interrupting is bad manners!

4 Be courteous

Talking of manners, it matters that you can build rapport quickly. You need to connect with your colleague instantly, and maintain that connection throughout the conversation. If you're not sure how to do great rapport, look at pages 12-13.

5 Deal seriously with serious matters, gracefully with lighter ones

Match your colleague's state of mind. In your world, the issue is no big deal. In your colleague's world it might be... well, the world!

6 Never criticise people behind their backs

Feedback is evidence-based, useful information. Gossip is not.

7 Stick to subjects of general interest

Less pontificating and more aligning with the needs and interests of your colleague is what's required.

8 Do not talk about yourself

Remember, you're there to help, not to be the centre of attention.

9 Never lose your temper

Well, which self-respecting coach would ever do that?





Sometimes you don't have time to sit down for a lengthy, uninterrupted coaching conversation but you do want to help someone who is "stuck".

Coaching in a Hurry

Using this model from The Tao of Coaching by Max Landsberg you can achieve this in as little as 5 minutes by helping the colleague you are coaching to identify their responsibility in the situation and what they might do about it.

With this coaching method you may find it useful to have access to a flip chart to brainstorm the blocks. If you are using the method over a cup of coffee in the canteen, note them down on a piece of paper.

The visual impact of seeing the blocks written down and grouped in this way can be very powerful in helping a colleague recognise what it is they have direct responsibility for and what they can contribute to the solution of the problem.

Instant Payoff Coaching

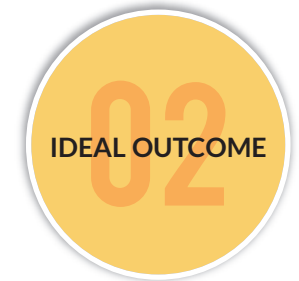


Ask your colleague to describe the current issue or problem, with specific examples and a small amount of relevant background.



With your colleague, list all the obstacles/blocks that lie between the problem and the desired outcome. Sort them into 3 groups:

- › Blocks that exist in your colleague (lack of skill, knowledge, low motivation, attitude etc)
- › Blocks that exist in others (anxious customer, manager stressed and panicking etc)
- › Blocks in the situation (inadequate resources, shift in deadlines etc)



Ask them to describe the desired outcome being as specific as they can be. Don't try to solve the problem but note down any emerging ideas.



Jointly brainstorm ways around the blocks and the possible next steps. Agree an approach, actions and timings.

When trying to focus and resolve a problem with a colleague quickly, a short model can be used. The 'Brief Solution Focus Model' will help colleagues to do something different by changing the way they behave, and also the way they read other colleagues' behaviour and situations.

This means a solution can be achieved. Attempting to understand the cause of a problem is not necessary, or particularly useful in solving it.



Brief Solution Focus

 The model includes 7 basic steps:

1. **'Problem-free talk':** build rapport with your colleague and locate their strengths.
2. **State the problem:** asking questions like: What brings us to talking about this today? What now? etc. These can help to lead into an explanation.
3. **Exploration of a solution:** i.e. exceptions to the problem:
 - a) Successful attempts to diminish the problem.
 - b) Successful behaviour and your colleague's thoughts on other areas of their life.
4. **The 'miracle question':** this question enables both you and your colleague to see a time in the future without the problem. Examples of the miracle question are:
 - “ I'm wondering what your life will be like without this problem?
 - “ Can you describe to me how things will be different when this problem is sorted out?
 - “ If we could wave a magic wand over this situation how would it change?
 - “ When it is fixed who else will notice the change?

5. **Scaling questions:**

these measure the progress or changes that occur. Examples of such questions are:

“ On a scale of 0 to 10 – zero being the worst it could be and 10 the very best – how big do you think the problem is at present?

“ This not only helps to gauge the situation, it also helps to look at what your colleague needs to do to create the change to solve the problem.

6. **Feedback:** complimentary feedback only. Two examples are:

“ I was struck by your many insights and previous ways of dealing with difficulties.

“ I noticed how supportive you are when your colleague is under pressure.

7. **Task setting:** ask your colleague to note any changes between the coaching sessions, as well as more specific tasks. Tasks could be about exceptions. Set a task like: Think of a time when you were not so disorganised; what did you do differently? Get your colleague to write this down between sessions, and discuss the progress the next time you meet.

When coaching in a hurry, the temptation is to rush for answers. Be careful. Do more than try to help somebody get an answer – pay attention to asking the right question. It’s also helpful to remember that questions come in various forms.

Questions to Get Unstuck

Closed questions

These can be answered by 'yes', 'no', or a simple fact. For example:

- › Do you supervise any staff?
- › Do you enjoy your current work?

Advantages	Disadvantages
Helps to put your colleague at ease at the start of the conversation. Get them used to hearing their own voice.	If over used, it can resemble an interrogation.
Helps establish & identify common facts.	A slow & laboured way of fact finding.
For testing understanding & summarising.	Views and ideas are not expanded.
Helps take control of the situation, for example when your colleague is talking too much.	Does not promote discussion.

Some questions to write on your cuffs

Just in case you get stuck...

How can I help? You will be amazed how this simple question will enable your colleague to guide you in guiding them.

What would be an example...? Helping a colleague to be precise will help them achieve clarity in framing problems and solutions.

What do you (really) want (to get, achieve etc.)? As well as being clear, it's as well to be open and honest.

Open questions

These require your colleague to give more information. They cannot answer 'yes' or 'no'. For example:

- › Why do you think that?
- › How did that affect you?

Advantages	Disadvantages
Useful when fact finding.	Asking them too early in the conversation, could hinder the colleague from being put at ease.
Invites expression of ideas and views.	They may be more time consuming.
Encourages a shy colleague to talk.	With a talkative colleague the structure of the conversation could change or be lost.

Leading questions

These suggest the answer in the question, attempting to force agreement. For example:

- › You do agree that 'such & such' is true, don't you?

Advantages	Disadvantages
To test understanding.	Forcing an agreement.
To find out if the colleague will disagree with you.	Your colleague's knowledge and ideas are not discovered.

Limiting Questions

These include some alternative answers, from which to choose from, and therefore the colleague is limited in the answer they give. For example:

- › Did you work for x, y or z?

Advantages	Disadvantages
When verifying information.	The correct answer may not have been offered as one of the alternatives.
	If too many alternatives are offered your colleague may not remember them all and choose one at random.

When coaching, it's not what you say, it's how well you listen. And when you are practised in your coaching, then you will be able to distinguish between three listening styles:

Empathy

Conversational Listening

Words are a way of communicating our thoughts. This is the tip of the communication iceberg. It is useful, especially when in conjunction with Cicero's rules for great conversation.

Active Listening

The way your colleague may say things, their body language and their facial expressions convey feelings. Sometimes, they may communicate one thing in words and another in their body language. This betrays that what they are saying may be very different from what they are feeling. The good coach will learn to notice these signs.

Empathic Listening

The deepest level of communication happens when you build a rapport with your colleague. We speak of understanding people intuitively or empathically and we are fully in tune with what they mean when they speak.

This is the level of listening we strive for between coach and colleague. It is hard to achieve and requires a great deal of energy to maintain. Excellent coaching is exhausting!

Whether coaching face-to-face or over the telephone, empathetic listening is synonymous with building rapport. You need to get in sync with your colleague quickly, and to monitor the level of rapport throughout the conversation. Colleagues are more likely to trust you and to disclose their challenges or interests if they get an instinctive sense you are focused on and interested in them.

Whether you're appropriately matching their body language, tuning into their breathing, or seeing the world from their point of view, you will be building a connection. You may need to pace the conversation for a little while until you feel you are able to take the lead, and that your colleague will respond to guidance.

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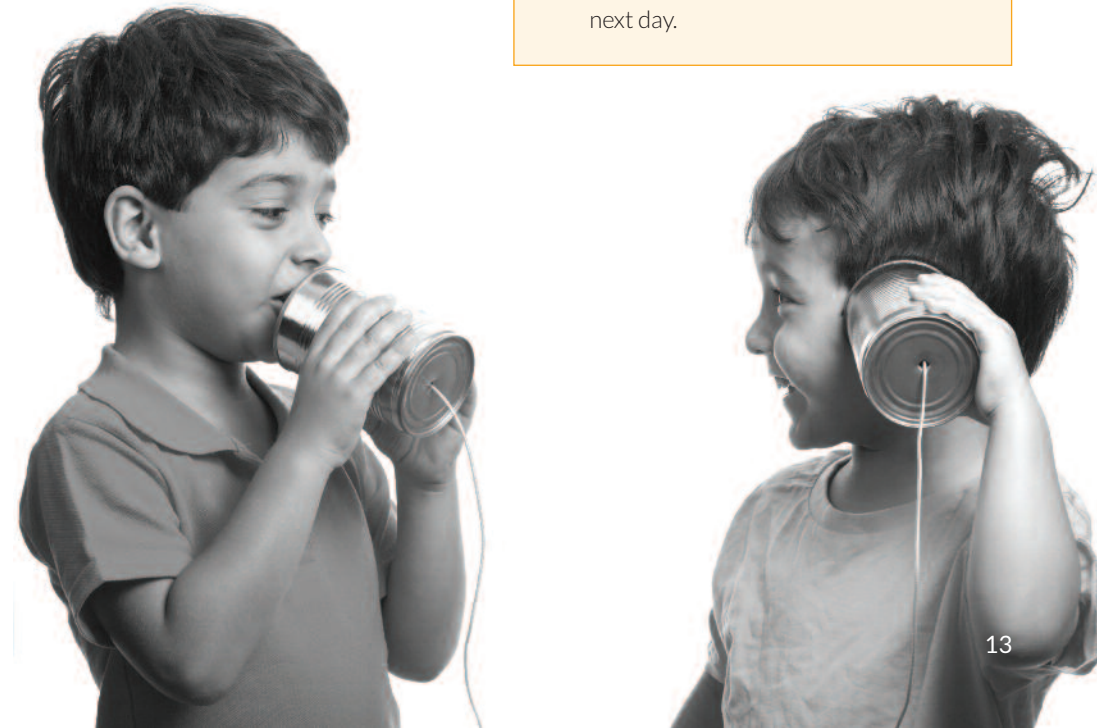
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Even with the best of intentions and the best of plans, coaching conversations can go wrong. No worries, it happens.

You can avoid some of the most common problems by scanning the list below and spotting any examples where your own coaching practice is a little ragged. It's not an exhaustive list – so feel free to add your own warning signs – but it will help you to reflect on any coaching that did not go as well as you'd hoped.

Pitfalls & Mistakes



1 Fishing for information to feed your curiosity

Whenever you are coaching, and especially when time is short, you only need the minimum of information to help. Resist the temptation to find out unnecessary information whose only purpose is to satisfy your prying mind.

2 Confusing advice with guidance

If you are asked for advice, you may wish to give it. Otherwise, remember you are here to guide your colleague through careful questioning, summarising, observation and feedback.

3 A little knowledge is dangerous

You may think you know all about the issue at hand, because you are familiar with the context, your colleague, or the problem. Hold on. You have a unique perception of the world. So does your colleague. Chances are there will be differences.

4 Losing the plot

You need to keep track of where the conversation is at, and know where you want it to go. That's the value of using a model. It can guide you to guide your colleague.

5 Slow, slow, quick, quick, slow

If you don't match where your colleague is, and go at their pace, you risk leaving them behind or confusing them. Once you've paced them for a while you can start to shift the pace, and lead the conversation towards a useful end point.

6 It isn't over till it's over

With half an eye on the clock, you might rush to a premature close. Being brief is not the same as cutting things short, and you need to be sure your colleague feels the conversation has reached a useful point before calling a halt. (Or perhaps a break or pause, so you can pick it up again in an hour, or a day.)

7 Pulling your punches

If the one thing your colleague needs to hear is the one thing you're not saying or asking, then what is the point of it all!



Links & Ideas to Explore

When to Coach

- Read Nancy Kline's book, **'Time to Think'**.

Remind yourself of the famous Jonny Wilkinson Super Kick and read on the internet how he composed himself and established focus in that moment.

Conversations

- 'The art of conversation'** The Economist 19th December 2006

Coaching in a hurry

- Read **The Tao of Coaching** by Max Landsberg

Brief solution focus

- Explore what Neuro-Linguistic Programming has to offer for helping people re-frame things or find a new way of encountering reality.
- Read Jenny Rogers' **'Coaching Skills'** for more miracle questions.

Questions to get unstuck

- Rather than 'Mind the gap', enjoy the space in the conversation as this is valuable thinking time. Be careful not to jump in.



Empathy

- Watch Brené Brown discussing Empathy
<https://www.thersa.org/discover/videos/rfa-shorts/2013/12/Brene-Brown-on-Empathy/>

Pitfalls & mistakes

- Stop yourself next time you are about to offer advice and ask yourself is it necessary? Might the other person come up with a better idea? Who is the expert?
- Next time you are in a busy restaurant, café or even airport notice those people around you, who look like they are having great conversations. How do you know? Can you emanate that next time you have the opportunity?
- Keep up to date with coaching in the workplace through www.i-l-m.com and www.associationforcoaching.com



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