

Leadership Toolkit



COACHING FOR CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT: *The Importance of Asking Questions*

Coaching is one of the most powerful tools you can utilize to impact your team's or an individual's performance. This tool provides you with a framework to follow when you are coaching a team or team member as well as a menu of questions to ask to make your coaching most effective

Coaching Defined

“Have you ever wondered why the head of a baseball team is called the manager and the head of a basketball team is called the coach?” asks Holly Green in an article titled *Know When to Manage and When to Coach*.

During a baseball game, the manager primarily focuses on managing the strategy and logistics of the game. He decides who pitches and when. He positions players on the field based on the tendencies of the batter. In basketball, the coach has the same authority as a baseball manager, but she gets more involved with the action on the court. She calls out plays and defensive schemes to the team and players then implements those plays using their skills and knowledge of the game as they see fit.

Managing is about telling, directing, immediate needs and a specific outcome. Coaching is about exploring options, asking questions, challenging, partnership and development. As a leader, you need to be both a coach and a manager. Effective leadership involves knowing when to wear which hat.

Coaching is the most powerful tool you need to improve performance and offer support. It is also the most under-utilized manager tool – especially when an employee needs development to problem solve an issue or to change behavior.

Questions Outweigh Advice

Many experts identify asking relevant questions as the key skill involved in effective coaching. Question asking is about fostering inquiry and reflection; it is not about offering advice or step-by-step instructions to complete a task.

Why Should I Ask Lots of Questions When I Coach?

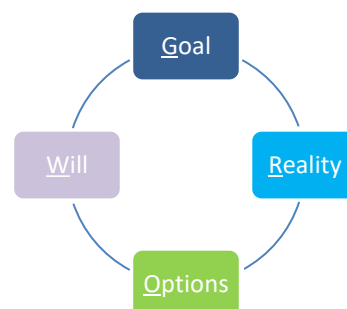
Asking probing questions is valuable in the following ways:

- Provides you additional information that you may be unaware of from your observations
- Creates dialog between you and the person you are coaching
- Creates mutual relationships and strong engagement
- Relieves your burden as the manager to always have the answer or solution

One of the leading coaching models with a strong focus on asking questions is the GROW model. This model has its origins since the 1980's and is used as a practical coaching approach in many higher education organizations across the United States.

The Grow Model

- Goal
 - What do you want?
- Reality
 - Current situation?
- Options
 - What could you do?
- Will
 - What will you do?



Let's explore each part of the **GROW** model and introduce and develop questions to help for each step of coaching discussion.

G: Establish the Goal	
Description	Useful Questions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coaching is most effective when you jointly determine a goal Probe to understand why this goal is important to the person being coached Ensure the goal is SMART (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, and Time-bound) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What do you want to achieve? What area do you want to work on? What's important about this to you? What will be different when you achieve it?
R: The Current Reality	
Description	Useful Questions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discuss what is happening now/has happened This "shared pool" of knowledge is the starting point to understand needs, challenges, and opportunities Use open-ended questions: What? When? Where? Why? How? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What's happening now? Who is involved? How is this challenging for you? What have you tried so far?
O: Options	
Description	Useful Questions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explore options to expand possible solutions and strategies Ask the person being coached to share and "own" their ideas, rather than you generating most ideas Use questions to draw out possible consequences of ideas Ensure you are driving to choices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What ideas do you have to help you achieve this goal? Who do you know who has encountered a similar situation? What are the advantages/disadvantages of your idea(s)? What do you think it would take to implement your idea (time, resources, impact to others)?
W: Will	
Description	Useful Questions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focus on preferred options What will need to happen in terms of next steps, by whom and when Pop the Question: "Are you willing and able to do this plan?" Determine support needed for success 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are you willing to do this and do you feel you are able to do this? What will you do if you run into obstacles or road-blocks? Who does what by when and how should we follow up? How can I support you?

Scenario: Sound Familiar?

As a leader, you are committed to continuous improvement but are encountering some challenges on your team. Several long-term employees occasionally share ideas for improvements. The ideas sometimes involve elements that require large scale changes from many departments across the university. In other cases, the ideas feel unrealistic to you since they require implementing large IT changes or hiring many new employees. Some of your staff have begun expressing cynicism saying that if you really want continuous improvement you would make these ideas happen. A staff member on your team recently told you to stop asking her for ideas if you're not going to implement her most recent idea. When she told you this, you asked if she was open to a discussion. What coaching questions might you ask during the discussion? Below are some ideas. Please add 2 of your own questions to each of the 4 steps:

Goal	Reality (current)	Options	Will
1. I see you are feeling frustrated. Please tell me what is concerning you?	1. Why do you think your idea is not being implemented?	1. How could your idea be altered?	1. What are your next steps.?
2. What would you like to come out of this conversation?	2. What have you thought about so far?	2. What else could we do to address your concern?	2. What support do you need?
3.	3.	3.	3.
4.	4.	4.	4.

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ADDENDUM

Assess Yourself as a Coach

Think about all the times when you coached your team members in the past month. Read the questions below and circle the frequency with which you utilized the skill described in the question. Consider...How well do you know the action on the court? How well do you know your players? How do they react in specific situations?

Before Coaching:		
How often do I work with my team members to establish desired goals and outcomes?		
ALWAYS	SOMETIMES	RARELY
How often do I prepare prior to a coaching discussion?		
ALWAYS	SOMETIMES	RARELY
How often do I observe my team members' behavior to determine what coaching would be beneficial?		
ALWAYS	SOMETIMES	RARELY
During Coaching:		
How often do I give feedback immediately after observing a team member's behavior?		
ALWAYS	SOMETIMES	RARELY
How often do I use open-ended questions to promote sharing of ideas and information?		
ALWAYS	SOMETIMES	RARELY
How often do I blend inquiry (asking questions) and advocacy (offering ideas and opinions) during discussions with individuals I am coaching?		
ALWAYS	SOMETIMES	RARELY
How often do I give feedback that focuses on behavior and its consequences (rather than judgements)?		
ALWAYS	SOMETIMES	RARELY
How often do I collaborate with team members to generate ideas for enhancing their performance?		
ALWAYS	SOMETIMES	RARELY
How often do I give positive as well as developmental feedback?		
ALWAYS	SOMETIMES	RARELY
After Coaching:		
How often do I follow up on coaching discussions to make sure progress is proceeding as planned?		
ALWAYS	SOMETIMES	RARELY
How often do I give an assignment as part of coaching?		
ALWAYS	SOMETIMES	RARELY

Add up the number of times you circled **Always**, **Sometimes**, and **Rarely** and record the totals below:

ALWAYS = _____

SOMETIMES: _____

RARELY: _____

How Did You Do?

If you see **ALWAYS** circled more frequently, then you are in the Coaching Zone. Congratulations! Utilize ideas from this tool to tweak your skill.

If you see **SOMETIMES** circled most frequently, you are on the right track and are building your coaching muscle. Use this tool to build on what you already do by trying a new tactic.

If you circled **RARELY** most frequently, you have an opportunity to immediately implement new ideas from this tool. The next time you coach your team try two new ideas until you feel comfortable with that skill.