

HOW TO HAVE A COACHING CONVERSATION.





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Introduction

When working with employees and volunteers there will be times when you will need to provide instructions and advice on what to do. There will be other times when you will have conversations to support people with their learning and development.

This guide helps you to take a coaching approach to conversations to support people with their learning and to develop skills and confidence. It will help you to have conversations which enable the other person to have ownership of their challenges and take responsibility for their actions.

In this guide we will look at the structure of a coaching conversation and the skills to use.

BENEFITS OF COACHING CONVERSATIONS

Coaching conversations can help the employee or the volunteer:

- *Become more aware.*
- *Recognise their own strength and skills.*
- *Increase autonomy and confidence.*

Coaching conversations help the organisation:

- *Increase employee engagement and retention.*
- *Develop greater collaboration and teamwork.*
- *Increase the productivity of individuals and teams.*
- *Improve morale - resulting in staff who feel appreciated, are positive, content and clear on their role.*

THE STRUCTURE OF A COACHING CONVERSATION

Coaching conversations are different to social chats. Each coaching conversation contains specific elements - we sometimes call this the flow.



What's the Focus?

The conversation always begins with asking the person about what they want to achieve – or their goal. To help someone define their goal it's helpful to ask a range of questions including;

- *What do you really want?*
- *What's important about this?*
- *How will it help you?*
- *How will you know when you've reached it?*



Establish the Facts

Ask the person to share what they know about the situation and what they want. Your role is to help the person clarify what are facts and what are beliefs or ideas. This is not the place to share your own thoughts or assumptions. To help with this you could ask:

- *What do you know about where you are?*
- *What do you know about where you want to get to?*
- *How true is that?*
- *What assumptions are you making about yourself or your goal?*



Listen

Take the time to really listen to every word they share and be curious about what they are saying and ask questions. Look at their body language;- are their shoulders relaxed or hunched, are their arms crossed or relaxed, do they look tense or energised. Consider if their body language matches what they are saying - perhaps they are saying they are really excited, but they look nervous. Share what you're seeing with them. You could say something like: *"I notice you talk about being excited, but your arms are crossed tight and I'm wondering if you're feeling something else - perhaps nervous?"*



Reflect Back What You Hear

Reflecting back what someone has said helps to build trust and helps the person to feel heard and listened to. To reflect back, start your sentence with: 'I'm hearing' and share back a short summary of what the person has said.



Ask Questions

Ask short, open questions to develop a shared understanding of the topic and to help the person explore their goal. Here are a few ideas to get you started:

- *What outcome would be ideal?*
- *What do you really want?*
- *What do you want to change?*
- *What is working well right now?*
- *What do you feel you need to achieve your goal/outcome?*
- *What could you do differently next time?*
- *What's the first step you could take*
- *If you tried doing that, what do you think would happen?*
- *What are the next steps you will take?*
- *Who could help you along the way?*



Discuss and Create Options

Support the person to come up with their own options on how to reach their goal. Questions to help with this could be:

- *What's the first step you could take?*
- *How could you get from where you are to where you want to be?*
- *What options are there?*



Agree Actions

It's useful to clarify what the person will do after the conversation. To help with this ask the person about their next steps. This could include questions such as:

- *What are you going to do as a result of this conversation?*
- *What could get in your way of doing that?*
- *What do you need to be able to do xxx?*
- *When will you make this happen?*



COACHING SKILLS

Having a coaching conversation takes 5 key skills:

1. *Building Trust*
2. *Active Listening*
3. *Asking Questions*
4. *Help People to Do Their Own Reflecting*
5. *Help Create Actions*



1. Building Trust

The role of a coach is to create a safe supportive environment so that the person can share their honest thoughts and feelings in order to work out their next steps. Ways to do this could include:

- *Showing and expressing empathy: this is about being curious about the person's situation and feelings and holding back on your assumptions or judgment about the person's choices and thoughts*
- *Being curious: ask the person about the situation, themselves and their world. This will help the employee know that you are interested in listening to them and supporting them*
- *Respect and acknowledge their skills and talents: We all have talents, ask the person about their skills and talents and share the skills that you see them demonstrate*
- *Completing actions:- as a coach, if you commit to a follow up action, such as checking in with the employee or volunteer in a few days, it's important to do this as a way to build trust.*



2. Active Listening

Active listening is taking the time to truly listen to what the other person is saying, and holding off from thinking about any solutions or ideas that pop into your head. Instead listen for each word they say and be curious about it. Active listening helps you to understand the other person's situation and to build a relationship based on trust, support and empathy which will help you to continue having positive conversations. Listening actively is a skill, and we can think about three levels of listening:

Level One

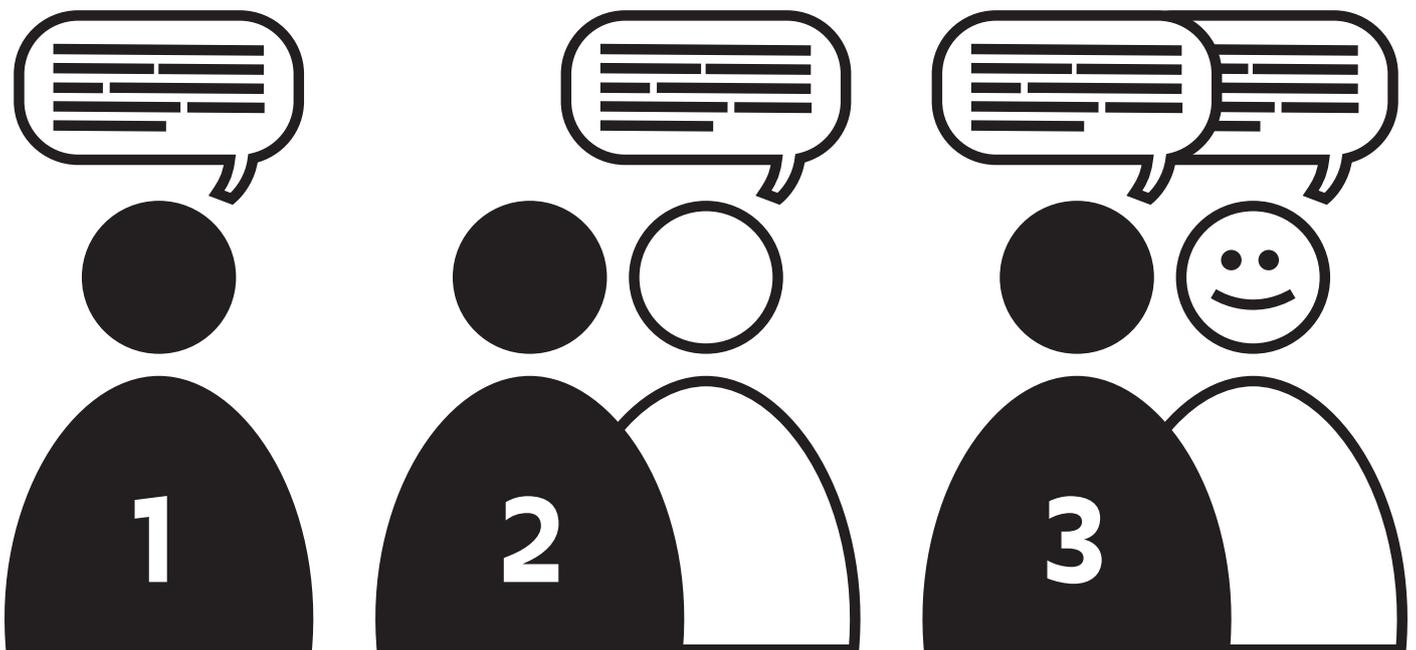
Listening to yourself. Perhaps you're thinking about what to say next, or your next meeting. When we listen at this level we don't really hear the other person.

Level Two

Listening to the words. Here you are focused on every word the person says. You are not distracted by anything else. Here you are listening to the other person.

Level Three

Listening for insight. Here you are 100% focused on the other person. You listen to the words they say, but also notice their body language, their tone and you also notice what they avoid talking about. You ask about all these things. This is where active listening really happens.



3. Asking Questions

The purpose of questions is to help the person learn and think deeper or differently about the situation they are talking to you about. When thinking about questions to ask consider:

- *Asking one question at a time. If we ask lots of questions, people are not sure which one to answer*
- *Keeping your questions short – the less words in your question the better*
- *Asking open questions - these are questions which don't have a yes/no answer. Open questions help people think more*

There are some questions which you should avoid asking in a coaching conversation:

- **Closed questions** – *Closed questions are ones which can be answered in one word – yes/no - they make it harder to keep the conversation flowing. An example of a closed question is - is this what you want?*
- **Asking why** – *often we ask people questions that begin with why – such as why did you choose that one? Often we ask this question because we want to know more. But for some people being asked why may make it feel as though they are being judged or told off. Instead, rephrase your questions, what was your reason for choosing that one?*

4. Help People to Do Their Own Reflection

Creating a space where someone can reflect is really helpful – as it helps them to explore and understand their thoughts, beliefs and assumptions so that they can come up with ideas on what to do next.

When having a conversation using coaching skills you can help people reflect by:

- *Creating lots of space where they can talk about what's happening without being interrupted*
- *Ask them about other ways to see the situation or what could be a different perspective*
- *Ask them what's becoming clearer through the conversation*



5. Help Create Actions

All conversations using coaching skills end with the person thinking through next steps – as this helps put the thinking into practice. Ask the person what they will do as a result of the conversation and what support they need - it will help them consider how to put this into practice. Some questions you could ask are:

- *What can you take from this conversation and use in your work/job hunt...*
- *When will you do this?*
- *What support might you need?*
- *What might stop you taking this action? And what could you do to stop that happening?*



FURTHER RESOURCES

The Coaching Manual

By Julie Starr

Becoming a Coach

By Jonathan Passmore & Tracy Sinclair

The Art of Coaching

By Jenny Bird & Sarah Gornall

Time to Think

By Nancy Kline

International Coaching Federation

www.coachingfederation.org

European Mentoring and Coaching Council

www.emccuk.org

Coaching and Mentoring Network

www.new.coachingnetwork.org.uk

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