



## Coaching Key Skills

Whether you are working with a coachee on a formal coaching programme or if you are just using coaching skills in your everyday interactions the following tips will help develop your coaching skills.

### Establish Rapport and Trust

- Choose an appropriate a quiet space free from distractions and interruptions. It may be better to avoid sitting at a table.
- Relaxed posture that is attentive and open
- Body language – use appropriate eye contact and body language to help build rapport
- Contracting – explain the process and agree the boundaries
- Manage the coaching e.g. punctuality, timing of sessions, being in the moment
- Use of active listening (see below)
- Engaged, empathetic, honest, supportive, non judgemental, and optimistic outlook with appropriate use of humour.
- Avoid interruptions and giving advice
- Maintain confidentiality at all times unless illegal or safeguarding activities are raised.

### Active Listening

Coaches listen for at least 80% of the time. Listening is active gathering information and prompting reflection in order to help the coachee move forward. Good active listening helps the coach identify unsaid inner goals, aspirations and barriers and unlocks the 'real story' along with unchallenged assumptions, patterns and a unwillingness to act.

Active listening might include some or all of the following	Examples
Open questions - Questions that require a detailed answer	'What issues would you like to discuss....', 'How do you feel about that?' Start questions with 'what', 'where', 'when', 'who' and 'how' to develop open questioning skills (try to avoid 'why' as this can lead to defensiveness from the coachee)
Summarise and reflect back what has been said (as well what is unsaid) to check your understanding as well as to prompt further reflection in the coachee	'Let me just summarise things so far ....' 'So what you are saying is .....' 'I sense from what you say that.....'
Check understanding to ensure you are not putting your own interpretation onto the coachee's words	'So are you saying that...' 'What do you mean by....?'
Reflect the implications of what the coachee is saying	'So that might mean .....' 'What might be the consequences of .....'
Encourage reflection on underlying feelings and unsaid issues	'How did you feel about that?' 'You seem .....' 'I sense that...'
Encourage further reflection beyond discussing the issue at surface level – this can involve getting the coachee to think about the issue in different ways	'Tell me more about .....' 'How much....' 'How often....' 'What would an outsider here see that you can't?' 'What would happen if...'
Think about non verbal communication both your own and the coachee's	Posture, eye contact, nodding, listening words e.g. ah hah, hmmm, subtle mirroring of body language, value silence and thinking time
Identify the learning style of the coachee and use this when questioning and reflecting to help them fully engage	'What would it look like if this situation was improved?' (visual) 'Talk me through how you might do that' (auditory), 'What are the 3 key actions that would make this a success?' (kinaesthetic)

### **Use questioning to encourage reflection**

- Use open questions – what, when, how, when, if (try to avoid 'why')
- Use frameworks to help structure questioning if you lack confidence e.g. GROW model
- Avoid leading questions
- Think about how personal and probing the question is and be attentive to how the coachee reacts in order to know what questions are inappropriate.
- Start with broad questions, be curious and use this to gradually narrow the focus
- Constantly clarify and reflect back to ensure you have the correct understanding of answers
- Repeat a word with question intonation rather than asking a new question
- Allow coachees time to think.

### **Prompting action, reflection and learning**

- Have a specific focus each session and make sure the coach and coachee are aware of the goals
- Allow the coachee thinking and reflection time without rushing them
- Check feelings and emotions and how they impact on the situation
- Look for patterns of behaviour and draw attention to them
- Summarise what has been said & reflecting back to check understanding
- Ensure the coachee suggests action points and try to get them to be specific (possibly including times and dates)
- Ensure the action points are recorded and followed up on in the next session
- Break down a big challenge into small achievable goals

### **Developing confidence and celebrating success**

- Focus on the positive / strengths of the coachee and use these as a springboard for problem solving in similar situations
- Avoid 'why' questions as they can suggest blame in some situations
- Develop an evidence bank of what the coachee is good at so there is a sense of balance if more challenging areas are being discussed.
- Look for 'quick wins' that will make the coachee feel they are moving forward with their goal
- As a coach try to be 'in the moment' rather than constantly worrying about the next question
- Don't be afraid to take risks and push yourself and the coachee – admit you are nervous or that you are a bit stuck and suggest you try something different
- Don't be afraid to identify boundaries especially if the coaching edges towards counselling type issues or areas you are uncomfortable with.
- If you think you have started mentoring without realise it say so – admitting your faults shows you are reflecting yourself, gets the session back on track quickly and can encourage the coachee to reflect more deeply themselves.
- Have faith that you and coaching can have a positive impact on the coachee no matter how challenging it may seem.

**'Coaching is 90% attitude and 10% technique'**

(THOMAS, W., and SMITH, A., 2004. Coaching solutions: practical ways to improve performance in schools. Stafford: NEP)