

## A “COACH APPROACH” IS AN ESSENTIAL MANAGEMENT SKILL

A “coach approach” is an essential management skill. It focuses on developing and maximizing employees’ abilities and talents to achieve the best possible organizational performance. It may be used for individual employees as well as teams. The “coach approach” is centered on openness, curiosity, collaboration and support of others.

Managers who use a “coach approach” ask powerful questions (open-ended), actively listen, facilitate solution based thinking, and provide regular and honest feedback to support growth. A “coach approach” is successful when relationships between the employee and the coach manager are founded on respect and trust. It means that employees’ ideas are sought and supported. It also means that there are times when the coach manager needs to work with the employee / team to discover what went wrong, and what should be done differently the next time.

Initially when using the “coach approach” a little more time may be needed to get something done quickly, however the benefits outweigh that drawback. Many of today’s employees prefer working for a manager who uses this approach. The relationship between the employee / team and the coach manager is usually stronger. Typically employees are more engaged, empowered to contribute and committed to the organization. In turn, the organizational culture becomes more open, transparent and collaborative.

At McMaster we believe in the ongoing cultivation of human potential, leveraging the diverse talents of our employees and recognizing that **everyone has the opportunity to be a leader in their own role**. McMaster’s core leadership capabilities are designed to nurture employee engagement through best people practices.

Coaching is a communication approach that values people and builds their potential.

- Fosters trust and respect through conversation
- Aligns individual efforts with organizational goals
- Empowers individuals and teams to learn and succeed

\*Developed by TMG Working Group, 2015

### “Coach Approach” Essential Skills

#### Active Listening

Listen with attention, curiosity and empathy  
Listen for potential, not problems  
Let go of your own filters, perceptions, biases and assumptions  
Focus on the employee and their goal  
Listen at a deeper level – body language and meaning  
Reflect, summarize, clarify, reframe  
Silence enables the employee to think. Thinking leads to insights, solutions.

#### Powerful Questioning

Ask open ended questions – start broad, then narrow to generate focus  
Use closed questions sparingly to gather facts  
Start with What? / How? / Where? / When?  
Avoid leading questions and judgemental comments  
Invite self-assessment to raise awareness

#### Coaching Can Happen Anywhere and Anytime

- \*On the spot coaching
- \*Planned coaching session
- \*Coaching by phone
- \*Coaching over coffee
- \*Coaching via Skype and / or email

### Potential Pitfalls and How to Avoid Them

#### Lack of Time

Coaching is an investment of time and will eventually pay off when you have developed confident and motivated staff. By not finding the time to coach staff sends a powerful message that you are always too busy for them. Plan to coach and protect the time.

#### Judging

You should never use “weaknesses” revealed by staff to form a judgement, or you will quickly lose their trust. Coaching is about openly discussing positive and negative performance and moving forward, not being judgemental.

#### Telling

A major pitfall! Sometimes telling is appropriate, but remember the solution is far more effective and embedded if the coachee has come up with it themselves. It is far more likely to work.

*“It may be harder to give up instructing that it is to learn to coach. Coaching is unlocking people’s potential to maximize their own performance.” – Sir John Whitmore.*

#### Coachee Agrees to Actions then Does Nothing

Check whether the coachee is able to carry out actions. Notice what could get in the way and coach more to resolve.

**SAMPLE QUESTIONS FOR EFFECTIVE COACHING CONVERS**

**Goal**

Help clarify the goal. Identify what needs to be achieved. Agree areas for discussion in the conversation.

- What is the aim for this discussion?
- What does that look like?
- What will that enable you to do?
- What will you have that you don't have now?
- Imagine 3 months from now, all obstacles are removed and you have achieved this: What do you see/hear/feel?
- What new elements are in place? What is different?

**Reality**

Help understand what is happening now / gain insight. Clarify the issue / situation. Invite self-assessment. Determine current impact. Provide observations & feedback. Determine future implications.

- What is happening currently?
- How important is this to you?
- On a scale of 1-10, if an ideal situation is 10, what number are you at now? What number would you like to be at?
- What impact is this having on you?
- How does this impact other areas of your work?
- What are you doing that takes you towards your goal?
- What are you doing that is getting in the way of your goal?
- Who else does it affect?

**Options**

Help to find out what is possible. Brainstorm many options. Assess pros and cons. Help find a way forward. Only offer ideas after you have engaged them to come up with their own idea.

- What could you do? What ideas do you have?
- What alternatives do you have? Is there anything else?
- What has worked in the past?
- What steps could you take?
- Who could help you with this?
- Where could you find out the information?
- How could you do that? What is the best option for you?

**Will**

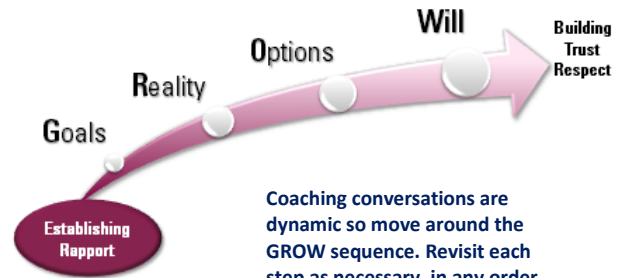
Help to determine a way forward & commit to best actions. Identify possible obstacles to overcome. Discuss the plan of action and support.

- What will you do?
- When will you do it?
- Who will you talk to?
- Where will you go?
- Is there anything you need to put in place before that?
- How committed are you to taking that action?
- What will it take for you to commit to that?

*“As with any new skill, attitude, style, or belief, adopting a coaching ethos requires commitment, practice, and some time before it flows naturally and its effectiveness is optimized .“*  
 - John Whitmore

**G.R.O.W. Model**

*It's all about the Conversation!*



Coaching conversations are dynamic so move around the GROW sequence. Revisit each step as necessary, in any order, to ensure facilitate an engaging conversation.

**Grow is Not Coaching!**

It is important to remember that GROW is not coaching in itself according to Sir John Whitmore. The model's simplicity is its strength as long as it is used in conjunction with essential coaching skills and behaviours.

GROW is an acronym for Goals, Reality, Options and Will is a framework that guides conversation. It gives conversations a purpose, ensures important aspects of the topic are discussed that result in commitment to an action plan. Remember coaching is a process that moves people toward a goal.

**Additional Resources**

- **Coaching Approach Resources**  
<https://hr.mcmaster.ca/managers/coach-approach/>
- **Coaching for Performance: Growing Human Potential & Purpose** by John Whitmore
- **Conversations for Creating Star Performers** by Shawn Kent Hayashi

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