

## Coaching others to improve performance

One key role of any leader is to coach team members to achieve their best. As a coach or mentor, you will typically help your team members to solve problems, make better decisions, and learn new skills or otherwise progress in their role or career.

Whilst some leaders are fortunate enough to get formal training in coaching skills, many are not. They have to develop these for themselves.

Now this may sound daunting, but if you arm yourself with some of proven techniques, find opportunities to practice and learn to trust your instincts, you can become a better coach, which will enhance your team's performance.

One proven approach that helps with this is the GROW model. GROW is an acronym standing for Goal, Current, Reality, Options and Will. The model is a simple yet powerful framework for structuring a coaching session.

A useful metaphor for the GROW model is the plan you might make for an important journey. First, you start with a map: With this, you help your team member decide where they are going (their Goal) and establish where they currently are (their Current Reality). Then you explore various ways (the Options) of making the journey. In the final step, establishing the Will, you ensure your team member is committed to making the journey and is prepared for the conditions and obstacles they may meet on their way.

### Tip 1: Know Your Own Role

In its traditional application, the GROW model assumes that the coach is not an expert in the "client's" situation, and therefore must act as an objective facilitator, helping the client select the best options and not offering advice or direction.

However, when a leader coaches his or her team members, or acts as a mentor to them, other dynamics are in play: As a leader you will usually have some expert knowledge to offer. Also, it's your job to guide the selection of options which are best for your organization, and veto options that are harmful.

#### How to Use the Tool:

Use the following steps to structure a coaching session:

##### 1. ESTABLISH THE GOAL

First, with your team member, you must define and agree on the goal or outcome to be achieved. You should help your team member define a goal that is specific, measurable and realistic. In doing this, it is useful to ask questions like:

- "How will you know that you have achieved that goal?"
- "How will you know the problem is solved?"

**2. EXAMINE CURRENT REALITY**

Next, ask your team member to describe their Current Reality. This is a very important step: too often, people try to solve a problem without fully considering their starting point. They often miss some of the information they need to solve the problem effectively. As the team member tells you about his or her Current Reality, the solution may start to emerge. Useful coaching questions include:

- “What is happening now?”
- “What, who, when, how often”
- “What is the effect or result of that?”

**3. EXPLORE THE OPTIONS**

Once you and your team member have explored the Current Reality, it’s time to explore what is the possible meaning, and all the many possible options you have for solving the problem. Help your team member generate as many good options as possible, and discuss their choices. By all means, offer your own suggestions. But let your team member offer his or hers first, and let him or her do most of the talking. Typical questions used to establish the options are:

- “What else could you do?”
- “What if this or that constraint were removed?”
- “What are the benefits and downsides of each option?”
- “What factors will you use to weigh up the options?”

**4. ESTABLISH THE WILL**

By examining Current Reality and exploring the Options, your team member will now have a good idea of how he or she can achieve their Goal. That’s great but in itself, this may not be enough! So your final step as coach is to get you team member to commit to specific action. In so doing, you will help the team member establish his or her will and motivation. Useful questions:

- “So what will you do now and when?”
- “What could stop you moving forward?”
- “And how will you overcome it?”
- “Will this address your goal?”
- “How likely is this option to succeed?”
- “What else will you do?”

## Tip 2: Practice by Coaching Yourself

A great way to practice using the model is to address your own challenges and issues. When you are stuck with something, you can use the technique to coach yourself. By practicing on your own challenges and issues, you will learn how to ask the most helpful questions. Write down some stock questions as prompts for future coaching sessions.

### Tip 3: Ask Great Questions and Listen Well

The two most important skills for a coach are the ability to ask good questions, and effective listening. Don't ask closed questions: "Did that cause a problem?" Do ask open ones: "What effect did that have?" Be prepared with a list of questions to for each stage of the G-R-O-W process. Listen well and let your client do most of the talking. Remember that silence is valuable thinking time: You don't always have to fill silence with the next question.