

THIRD EDITION

AN INTRODUCTION TO

# COACHING SKILLS



A Practical Guide

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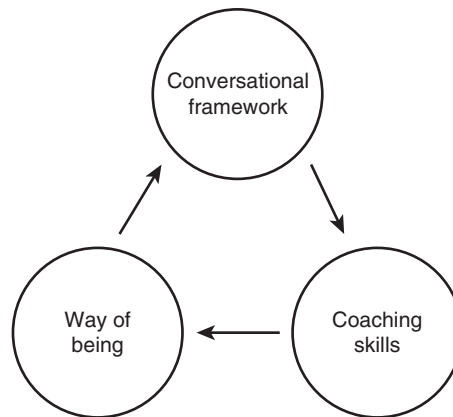
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## 2 BECOMING A COACH



**Figure 2.1** The three elements of effective coaching

A fundamental question that may need to be addressed at the outset is whether a person learns *how to* coach or whether she *becomes* a coach. There are a number of different ways of addressing this. Many people learn how to coach in a transactional way, focusing narrowly on the process and thinking about coaching as an intervention. For example, I recall hearing some managers, who had recently received coaching training, discussing the idea of ‘putting on a coaching hat’ before starting to coach others. This is an interesting way of thinking about coaching. It is, no doubt, possible to use a coaching intervention without fully adopting the philosophy that underpins the approach. A person can ‘do’ coaching without ‘being’ a coach. However, if you are hoping to inspire others and support them to achieve great things for themselves, I believe that you have to *become* a coach.

To become a coach requires three areas of learning, which will be covered in this book: a set of skills; a clear conversational framework; and a ‘coaching way of being’ (see Figure 2.1). The first two (the skills and the framework) can be taught, and often form the basis of short training courses on coaching. I would argue, however, that simply understanding the skills and following a framework will not guarantee successful outcomes. They allow a person to

2.1

‘do’ coaching. The more that I learn and write about coaching, the more I realise that the third element is the most influential. Ironically, I believe that this element, which I shall refer to as a ‘coaching way of being’, cannot be taught. Having said that, the most effective coaches have a deep understanding and appreciation of all three elements.

The structure of this book is designed to allow you to develop all three elements. We will start by building on your existing skills. If you are reading this text, you are likely to possess the foundational skills already. It will simply be a case of honing or sharpening these skills so that you can use them for the specific purpose of coaching. Once we have discussed the necessary skills in some detail, we shall move on to considering the conversational framework. In this case, we will be concentrating on two tried-and-tested conversational frameworks: the well-known GROW model (Whitmore, 2009) and the related GROWTH framework (Campbell, 2016). We will then look at additional approaches, tools and techniques that can supplement these. Once your skills are honed and the frameworks have been learned, we will explore the concept of the ‘coaching way of being’. Hopefully, you will be able to quickly develop the coaching-related skills and master a conversational framework. Developing a ‘coaching way of being’ is a lifelong journey. The good news is that the best way of developing this ‘way of being’ is through practising coaching and reflecting on your experiences.

As we start this journey, we should begin by being clear about what we are working towards. There are a number of different areas in which coaching is flourishing. This introductory book provides a firm foundation for your practice, whichever field you wish to practise in:

- *Executive coaching*: Working in organisations with middle and senior leaders.
- *Life coaching*: Working with individuals on topics relating to their personal lives.
- *Health coaching*: Working with patients and health professionals.
- *Coaching in education*: Working with students, educators and parents.
- *Career coaching*: Working with professionals about their career development.
- *Leadership coaching*: Working with leaders in any profession or field.
- *Positive psychology coaching*: Integrating coaching and positive psychology to enhance performance and well-being.

As you work your way through this book, you may wish to start thinking about which arena is of interest to you. If you are hoping to develop a coaching business, I would recommend focusing on a niche area in which you are likely to have some credibility already.

## SNAPSHOT A ‘typical’ coaching session



### Before the session

#### ***Pre-coaching discussion, in person or over the telephone (usually 10–20 minutes)***

This is an opportunity for you to introduce yourself to the coachee, agree a time and place for the first meeting and get a sense of the topic.

**During the session**

Coaching sessions tend to last between 30 minutes and two hours. Approximate times below are based on a 30-minute session.

***Small talk to build rapport (2 minutes)***

The coach initiates a discussion which is unrelated to the coaching topic in order to put the coachee at ease and start the process of building rapport. In the UK, for example, people like to talk about the weather!

***Getting to know one another (2 minutes)***

It can be helpful for the coach to introduce herself briefly. This is a good time to find out a little bit more about what the coachee does on a day-to-day basis, regardless of whether this relates directly to the coaching conversation. This is also the right time to agree a 'contract' about how the coaching will proceed. The importance of contracting (especially during the first coaching session) is covered in Chapter 7.

***Setting goals (5 minutes)***

In this section, the coach should support the coachee to identify the topic for the coaching conversation and an overall goal. This will be discussed in detail in Chapter 7.

***Talking about what is happening currently (5 minutes)***

This is the part of the conversation in which the coachee should be doing most of the talking. The coach's role is to listen carefully while the coachee explains what is happening for her at the moment. The coach should ensure that the coachee focuses on her current reality *in relation to the goal* that she will have identified earlier.

***Exploring options (10 minutes)***

Once the coachee has explained the current state of play in relation to her topic or self-selected goal, the coach should support the coachee to generate some possible ways forward. This is a very important part of the conversation and we will focus on the Options stage in the chapter about conversational frameworks (Chapter 7) and consider ways in which we can help the coachee to generate new ideas in three chapters about inspiring creativity (Chapters 11–13).

***Selecting an option (2 minutes)***

Once a number of options have been generated, the coachee should start to evaluate the relative merits of each possibility. She will be encouraged to select at least one option that she would like to pursue.

*(Continued)*

**Committing to some actions (2 minutes)**

In this part, the coach should encourage the coachee to commit to some actions that have emerged out of the coaching conversation, based on the option selected earlier. Some coachees like to develop an action plan that can be monitored.

**Wrapping up, discussing how the coaching session went (2 minutes)**

The final stage is a review of the coaching session, with an opportunity for the coachee to give the coach some feedback. It is helpful at this point to reconfirm arrangements for the next coaching conversation.

**RELATIONSHIP-RELATED FACTORS**

In an important study about the success factors related to counselling interventions, Grencavage and Norcross (1990) detected four important elements. First, they confirmed the importance of the relationship or ‘working alliance’ between the counsellor and the client. Second, they found that much of the success of these relationships depended on factors related to the client, such as her level of expectation and the nature and extent of pressure to make changes. Grencavage and Norcross found that the possibility of change (i.e. ‘Is the proposed change possible?’) also played a significant role. It was recognised that any support available to the client (outside the counselling relationship) could have a significant impact on the outcome. This raises the question ‘What does the counsellor have most influence over?’

It seems to come down to a few key factors. The way the counsellor interacts with her client is important. Grencavage and Norcross (1990) suggest that the warmth, attentiveness and positivity of the counsellor are important. Equally, the counsellor’s ‘ability to cultivate hope and positive expectancies within the client’ is a significant factor (p. 374). In other words, the counsellor should behave and speak in a way that increases the client’s optimism or hopefulness about the counselling intervention.

I would suggest that both of these factors apply to coaching as well. This means that coaches should adopt a warm, attentive and positive approach. We will discuss this further in Chapter 14. A coach should also work to increase the positive expectations of the coachee (see Activity below).

**ACTIVITY Level of confidence**

Based on the research above, assuming that the activities of counselling and coaching are similar enough to make such claims, a coach should foster her coachee’s confidence in the



coaching process. This is much easier to achieve if the coach is confident about her own abilities.

Take a moment to reflect on your current levels of confidence about coaching. If you have started a learning journal, complete this activity on a new page. Otherwise, simply use a blank sheet of paper.

At this moment, how confident are you about your ability to coach? Draw a line with a '0' on one end and a '10' on the other. On this scale, select a number that represents your current level of confidence. Below the line, write down some of your thoughts about why you selected that number. For example, if you have said '6', what makes it a '6' and not a '0'?

What practical things can you do in order to improve your self-rating? Make a note of a few things that you can do to increase the level of your self-assessment.

## WHAT MAKES THE DIFFERENCE?

More recently, two leading executive coaches have suggested that the field of coaching has sometimes overlooked the many years of research that have gone into what makes psychotherapy successful (McKenna and Davis, 2009). According to their analysis of those studies, they conclude that there are some 'ingredients' that lead to successful outcomes in one-to-one relationships.

What accounts for the difference in outcomes in therapeutic relationships?

### 1 Client factors (40%)

Interestingly, the most significant difference between outcomes seemed to be based on factors outside the therapeutic relationship. The character of the client and what is happening in her life (her social network, her professional role, her family) has a significant influence on the likelihood of a positive outcome.

### 2 The relationship (30%)

According to McKenna and Davis' analysis of research into this area, 30 per cent of the factors influencing the outcome of therapeutic relationships is the nature of the relationship between the therapist and her client. This means that the single most important factor *within the control of the therapist* is the strength and nature of the relationship.

### 3 Placebo or hope (15%)

Echoing the study by Grencavage and Norcross (1990) mentioned earlier, McKenna and Davis (2009) note that people on a waiting list for therapy start to improve even before the first session. Simply put, those that expect to benefit from therapy are more likely to do so. My own personal experience confirms that this happens in coaching too (see Story from practice below).

#### Story from practice



In most of my executive coaching assignments, I contact the coachee prior to our first coaching session for an introductory conversation. I find out a bit more about the coachee and I say a few words about my own professional background. The conversation usually ends by discussing the broad topic that the coachee would like to explore at the first session. When we meet, I usually ask how things are in relation to the topic that they mentioned on the phone. Very frequently, the coachee will report that things are actually better and that there have been improvements in the situation already.

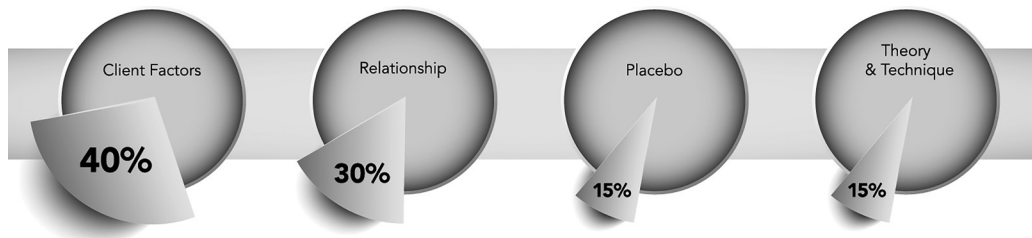
### 4 Theory and techniques (15%)

According to McKenna and Davis (2009), hundreds of research papers over many years seem to point towards an uncomfortable reality. Despite the existence of many theories and approaches to psychotherapy, no one approach seems to be more effective than another. In the words of the authors of the study, 'It's not the particular model or tool that makes the difference. Nor is it the brilliant theoretical or experiential insights of the coach. It's how we engage the client to think and act on his own behalf' (p. 256). McKenna and Davis conclude that a coach's belief in her approach is more important than the approach itself.

Therapy is very different from coaching. However, both are confidential, one-to-one relationships aimed at improving outcomes. Although the relative importance of each 'ingredient' may be different, it may be helpful to consider how these factors might influence coaching relationships.

McKenna and Davis conclude by proposing some practical suggestions for coaches:

1. First, 'use theory, models, tools, and techniques that you believe in and can deliver with competence and confidence' (p. 257).
2. 'Draw out and deepen the client's own theory of his situation and how he can deal with it most effectively' (p. 257). Rather than impose our theory and therefore a solution, it is important that the coachee understands her situation in a way that makes sense to her.



**Figure 2.2** Ingredients for successful coaching

(Source: McKenna and Davis, 2009)

3. 'Help the client to identify with precision the strengths she can bring to bear on the challenges ahead' (p. 257). In other words, you can support the coachee by helping her to highlight the strengths and resources that she already possesses.
4. 'Be confident and clear about how the coaching process will work' (p. 257). As a coach, your confidence in the process will increase with experience and reflective practice. It is important to bear in mind that your familiarity and comfort with a conversational framework is likely to have a positive impact on the coachee's expectations.
5. 'On a regular basis, ask the client whether she thinks you understand and appreciate her view of her situation' (p. 257). In other words, check that you have been able to show empathy. This cannot be emphasised enough. Doing whatever it takes to help the client believe that you appreciate her situation is of critical importance.

McKenna and Davis' findings accord with some earlier work by Alexander and Renshaw (2005). According to them, in order for coaches to practise effectively, they should attend to three areas:

1. Coaches must value their coachees, be open and honest in their interactions, and be able to support and challenge.
2. Coaches must have self-confidence and be self-aware.
3. Coaches must have a clear methodology. They need to have accomplished skills, being able to use both a clear framework and a range of effective coaching tools. (p. 381)

This book will cover all three areas, discussing the importance of the relationship in the 'Coaching way of being' section (Chapters 14 and 15), coaching skills in the 'Key skills' section (Chapters 3–6), and conversational frameworks in 'The coaching process' section (Chapters 7–9). A range of effective techniques that can be used when coaching will be presented in the 'Practical tools and techniques' section (Chapters 10–13). Your self-confidence and self-awareness should emerge as you read this book, undertake the exercises, watch the videos, practise coaching and reflect on your experiences.

We have considered some of the elements that lead to effective outcomes based on recent research. Before we move on to review the skills related to coaching, I think it would be helpful to get a richer sense of what should be happening in a coaching conversation, and I would like to invite you to explore a metaphor that emerges from Whitmore's definition of coaching: 'unlocking people's potential to maximise their own performance' (2009: 11).

## UNLOCKING POTENTIAL: FINDING THE KEY

The notion of 'unlocking' in the English language implies the existence of a lock. It follows, therefore, that a 'key' is needed to perform the act of 'unlocking'. This is a perfect metaphor for coaching and that is the reason that keys feature on the cover image of this book. This metaphor is particularly relevant and it may help us to explore the central essence of coaching.

### Fundamental premise 1: Every coachee is able to achieve more than she is currently achieving

If a person's potential is locked away, this suggests that it already exists somewhere. That is one of the fundamental premises of coaching. Each person has almost unlimited potential, and certainly we, as coaches, must start from the belief that *every* coachee is able to achieve more than she is currently achieving. This positive belief should be espoused by every coach. As we have seen in the discussion above, the hopefulness of the coachee can impact on the success of a session. The coach's hopefulness and belief in the coachee play an important part in increasing and sustaining the positive expectations of the coachee.

### Fundamental premise 2: The coachee must discover her own key

The fact that coaching is about 'unlocking' potential means that the process of coaching involves finding a key that will allow the coachee to maximise her performance. So, we could say that both the coach and coachee are having a conversation in order to find that key. That is what the relationship is about. However, for coaching to be effective, the coachee must find the key for herself. The coach's role is to support the thinking and exploration of the coachee. Indeed, novice coaches often report that the most difficult task is resisting the urge to provide advice. Using this analogy, the challenge arises when the coach thinks that she has discovered the 'key' and proudly hands it to the coachee saying 'There it is! Now you can use this to unlock your potential.' At best, this is patronising. At worst, you can get in the way of the

coachee discovering her own key. Less obvious but still unhelpful is the scenario in which the coach has seen the key and directs the coachee through leading questions and insinuation to find the key which the coach has already seen. Effective coaches will not look for the key themselves. Rather, they facilitate the coachee's search for the key. The most important moment in a coaching relationship is the one in which the *coachee* finds the key. This is often called the 'A-ha!' moment and will be discussed in Chapter 15. When the coachee discovers her own key, this gives her the positive emotion, the energy and the self-belief to achieve more of her potential.

### ACTIVITY **Discovering a key**



Think back to a time when you discovered your own 'key' or solution to something. We often call these 'A-ha!' moments. We will revisit this concept later in this book. For now, write a paragraph in your learning journal about an 'A-ha!' moment that you have experienced. What was the situation? How did you feel after the 'A-ha!' moment?

### Story from practice



I enjoy talking to students about coaching and take every opportunity to do so. I was presenting an overview of coaching to a group of students on a Master's in Applied Positive Psychology (MAPP) programme at a British university. As part of the exploration of the term 'coaching', I invited the students to get into groups to talk about the analogy of the key. This type of activity usually generates interesting insights into the nature of coaching relationships. On this occasion, students came up with some wonderful ideas that challenged my own thinking about this topic. One group was curious about whether it was OK for the coachee to believe that such a key did not exist. Another group wondered if some coaching conversations might be about the existence of multiple keys, with the coach supporting the coachee to identify the *right* key. Most interesting was the idea that the coach and the coachee may sometimes be able to co-create the key needed to unlock the coachee's potential. These ideas are discussed briefly below.

## Co-creating the key?

Coaching is a collaborative activity. In other words, both parties are involved in the thinking process. In this regard, it is possible to imagine that two partners (coach and coachee) actually co-create the key together. Through conversation, it is possible for the partnership itself to

design a key that may unlock the coachee's potential. This is particularly helpful when the key has been 'lost'.

### Too many keys?

In some coaching conversations, it may well be the case that the coachee is overwhelmed by opportunities or choices. She can see keys everywhere and cannot decide which, if any, to pick. In these cases, the conversation can focus on which key might make the most difference, which is best for the coachee at the moment or which is the easiest to find and use.

### No keys at all?

In other conversations, the coachee may feel that there is no key to unlock her potential. These conversations can be challenging, because of the centrality of the idea that coaching is about improving performance and enhancing well-being. In this case, it may be helpful to clarify the reason that the coachee has sought coaching. A good coaching conversation could focus around the topic of identifying goals for future sessions. To follow our analogy, the first coaching conversation could focus on a strategy for how to start looking for the key.

## CONCLUSION

So after having considered some research and having explored the metaphor of the key, what can we conclude about 'becoming a coach'? What are the attributes that we should develop if we are to be outstanding coaches who can make a real difference to the performance and well-being of others?

### Being interested

To build effective relationships and encourage our coachees to talk and explore their thoughts and feelings, we must be able to show that we are genuinely interested in what they are saying. It is not that we must *look* interested, we must *be* interested in our coachees and what they are working through.

### Being genuine

Coachees cannot build trusting relationships with people who are putting on a mask. Coaches must be genuine in their interactions. Lying, pretending and faking cannot be part of a coaching

conversation. Trusting relationships can only develop between two human beings who are honest and authentic. Coaching will provide you with an opportunity to be honest and genuine in a conversation about the personal and professional development of others.

## Liking people

Some people make good money out of coaching. That said, the primary driver for every coach should be to support others to flourish. Coaches must like people. If this statement challenges you, that is OK. Coaching others will increase your appreciation of human beings. If you like people already, you simply have a significant head start!

## Believing in people

Not only should a coach be a 'people person', she should also believe in others. We must give people the benefit of the doubt at all times. It is imperative that a coach believes that people are essentially good. Again, the practice of coaching can help to bolster this belief.

I hope that you are feeling energised and motivated about *becoming* a coach, even more than the idea of learning to coach. By this point, you should have a clearer idea about what coaching is and a better understanding of its purpose. We will now move on to the skills of coaching.

### Online resources



To access additional resources, please go to <https://study.sagepub.com/coachingskills3e> where you will find a summary of this chapter, relevant videos and activities.