



Coaching tips written by our coaching expert, Susan Blow. This is also an example of some of the vast learning content that can be found on our Learning Academy. To find out more about coaching, coaching supervision, training or the Academy, call Geraldine, Alison or Paula on 0207 18 300 81.

Top Ten Tips for Coaching

By Susan Blow

- 1. Coaching isn't about you – it is about them**

Of all the learning and development strategies available, coaching is probably the most effective. A good coach should help the coachee to think clearly, embed learning and make better decisions. It is not the same thing as teaching, telling, advising or counselling.
- 2. Coaching is not one thing – it is a continuum of activities and approaches**

The coaching continuum extends from skills development through motivation and performance improvement to breakthrough thinking and creative problem solving. No 'one size fits all' approach will work. The guiding principle should always be to begin where your coachee is at....and work from there.
- 3. The learning partner (coachee) should ideally be clear what issue they would like to explore**

However, it is surprising how often a coachee has no 'problem' as such, or even a clearly defined goal. They just want help with thinking, and finding out what they *do* want to reflect on. Trying to focus on a clear goal too soon can be counterproductive. The coachee may agree to work on something to please you as coach, and never touch on the heart of the real issue.
- 4. There should be a clear 'contract' between coach and coachee**

The 'coaching contract' can be anything from a formal signed agreement to a short list of bullet points summarising 'the way we want to work together'. It gives clarity and an appropriate degree of formality: this is not chat, but a mutual agreement to spend time together thinking something through, away from distractions.
- 5. There are many frameworks available to support the process: these should guide, but never constrain, the direction of the session**

There are many brilliant frameworks and models available to support the coaching process. However, as soon as you catch yourself thinking 'that's all the G questions I wanted to ask...now for the R ones' you know you have stopped listening properly to *them*. Use the frameworks by all means but do not be afraid to loop back to earlier themes or move on if the conversation is stuck.

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- 6. Most coaching sessions at work are about improved performance: be creative and let your learning partners devise their own action plans to achieve them**

Your suggestions and solutions are doubtless brilliant....but only for you. The coachee is much more likely to implement an action plan if it is one of his or her own devising. Your job is to support that thinking process and challenge the outcome positively, not replace it with your own solution.
- 7. You will need to listen as never before. Quell your own thoughts and concentrate wholly and completely on the other person's words, thoughts and ideas**

This is by far the toughest aspect of coaching; only when your learning partner has thought the issue through in depth should you offer your suggestions.....and be cautious even then
- 8. Your richest value to your coachee will not be in the answers you give, but the questions you ask....so, learn to ask rich, varied and relevant questions**

Use a learning diary to record interesting themes for questions and to add new ones to your portfolio
- 9. Ensure that, by the end of the session, the learning partner has a clear, relevant and achievable action plan**

Question the action plan using the SMART acronym and ensure the coachee has a plan that uses specific language, has measures, is achievable (not wildly ambitious or too trivial), recorded and reviewable and with timescales built in
- 10. Make the transition from 'doing' coaching to 'becoming a coach'**

Reflect on your own development as coach. Maintain your learning diary and use it to discover more about yourself and your approaches to different coaching challenges. Reflect on your own practice and experience: what went well? And what could you do differently next time?

Susan has worked as a coach for over 10 years. She has a Masters' degree in coaching and mentoring practice, so can advise and support internal coaches and managers. She has an impressive portfolio of clients and sectors. Sue also specialises in leadership, management, writing, creativity and teams.