

MAKING THE CONVERSATION PURPOSEFUL

Coaching Essentials

COACHING CONVERSATIONS





The most important thing is to have a focus area and set goals to work toward with your coach. You want to come into each coaching session prepared for meaningful conversation.

Michelle Braden, 2018

WHAT IS A PURPOSEFUL CONVERSATION?

An effective coaching conversation is very different to a friendly chat, an interview or instructional session. It is a conversation that is forward-looking with a clear purpose such as, for example, supporting a colleague, a client or your manager to think through a situation, a problem, or a delayed project in order to find a new way forward by:

- Focusing around something the other person wants to change, develop, make progress on, or solve
- Having a clear goal, outcome or direction (usually identified early on), which acts as the focus
- Potentially changing that direction, provided that is appropriate and clearly identified and agreed
- Adding value by stretching the other person's thinking and personal development and generating options for the future

'Purpose', then, is the 'where' and 'why' of the coaching conversation:

- Where are we going with this conversation, and why?
- What is the reason for going there?

Having established the purpose of the conversation, the coaching manager uses questioning to help the team member team member identify the next steps along their journey together:

- What do they need to learn in order to make the change?
- What in their thinking, feeling and behaviour needs to change in order to do the doing better?
- How can they use their own experience to learn what is needed?
- How do, and how will, their thoughts, feelings and behaviour impact on how they "be who they are" and "who is it that they want to become"?

Rostron, S. (2019)

ESTABLISHING PURPOSE

Coaching sessions are more effective with structure, and there are a number of coaching models that can be used by the coach as a framework to structure their sessions, including:

GROW

OSCAR

OSKAR

The first stage of all three models helps establish the purpose of the coaching conversation: the coach using the GROW model helps the team member set and articulate long-term and short-term goals by asking questions such as 'What do you want to achieve in this situation?' and 'Why is it important to you?', whilst purpose in the OSCAR and OSKAR models is defined in terms of outcomes. (Further information on all three models may be found in 'Coaching at Work: Structuring the Conversation')

Establishing purpose may also be seen as part of the contracting process between coaching manager and team member, the ground rules for the coaching relationship that are established early on so that both parties (and any relevant stakeholders) know and understand their obligations, boundaries, and expectations:

"While accidental success is always possible, it is the exception. Success is usually the result of intentional agreements and honored commitments between coach and client. The process of reaching those agreements is contracting, which can be explicit or implicit, formal or informal, written or verbal. Whatever form contracting takes, it is crucial for successful coaching engagements."

Bennett, J.L. (2008)

PURPOSEFUL AND CHALLENGING

As well as being purposeful, coaching conversations should also be challenging conversations that support the team member in raising their awareness of what is going on in order to create new options, which, ideally, they come up with for themselves. However, even if they know a change is needed, people often lack the confidence or self-belief that they can make decisions or changes, despite their new thinking. Effective coaches always have in mind:

- What can I do at that moment to encourage and support the team member?
- What does the team member need right now?
- Ask yourself W.A.I.T. or Why Am I Talking? What is the purpose of me speaking right now?
- How does what I'm doing help the team member make progress with their issue by:
 - developing their understanding?
 - creating more options?
 - feeling willing and able to move forward?
- How does it encourage them they will be able to resolve it themselves?

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