



## Coaching Skills for Leaders

*(Solution-Focused Coaching)*

### Table of Contents

1. Why Coaching Works (Evidence Snapshot)
2. What Coaching Is / Is Not (Scope, Ethics & Privacy)
3. Engaging Employees in Coaching
4. Scaling Workplace Coaching (Program Design)
5. Integrated Leadership & Psychological Safety
6. Coaching by Development Stage (Educate → Show → Mentor → Support)
7. Conversation Practices for Coaching
8. Leader Coaching Skills (Outcomes & Use Cases)
9. The Leader as Coach (Time, Quality, Learning)
10. Benefits of Coaching (Individual & Organisation)
11. Models & Tools
  - Solution-Focused Approach
  - Instant (Real-Time) Coaching
  - Snap (“Corridor”) Coaching
  - GROWTH Model (GROW + Tactics + Habits)
  - GROWTH Question Bank (incl. Career, Performance, Stress, Absence)
  - SMART Goals → SMART + “If-Then”
12. Measuring Coaching & Demonstrating ROI
13. GROWTH Coaching Record (Employee Self-Assessment)
14. Goal-Setting Grid
15. Coaching Readiness & Triage (When to Refer)

16. What Goes in a Coaching File (and what does not)



### 1) Why Coaching Works

#### (Evidence Snapshot)

Workplace coaching has become one of the strongest tools for lifting performance, engagement, and well-being in organisations. Over the past decade, large-scale studies and meta-analyses have consistently shown that coaching improves:

- **Goal achievement**
- **Work performance and productivity**
- **Self-confidence and self-efficacy**
- **Psychological well-being**
- **Resilience and workplace relationships**

The reason coaching works is simple:

**People change best when they feel supported, challenged constructively, and empowered to find their own solutions.**

Coaching strengthens that process — and leaders who coach create teams that are more capable, self-directed, and adaptive.

## 2) What Coaching Is / Is Not (Scope, Ethics & Privacy)

Many leaders confuse coaching with other leadership tasks. Coaching is distinct from:

- **Managing** (giving instructions, directing workflow)
- **Mentoring** (sharing experience & advice)
- **Training** (teaching skills or content)
- **Counselling or therapy** (treating emotional or psychological issues)
- **Consulting** (providing expert solutions)

### Coaching is:

- A structured, confidential conversation designed to develop insight and action
- Focused on the person's strengths, not their deficits
- Future-oriented and goal-focused
- Collaborative, respectful, and empowering
- A way of helping someone think better, not telling them what to do

### Ethical Boundaries & Referral.

Coaching is **not** appropriate when:

- The issue involves mental-health symptoms or trauma
- The person is in distress or crisis
- There is bullying, misconduct, or risk
- The matter is a formal performance management issue
- The staff member needs training, instruction, or technical direction

In those cases, coaching should be paused and the person should be referred to the appropriate support (HR, EAP, GP, psychologist, manager guidance, or formal process).

This protects the leader, the employee, and the organisation.

**Privacy & Notes.** Coaching notes are developmental, factual, and co-owned (shareable with the coachee). Do not store sensitive health data or HR investigation material in coaching files. See Section 16.

---

## 3) How to Engage Employees in Coaching

Most employees want support — but they also want **autonomy** and to be treated like thinking adults. Coaching provides that balance.

To engage effectively:

### Listen before you lead.

Leaders often jump into problem-solving. Coaching requires slowing down and:

- Listening deeply
- Summarising what you've heard
- Asking open, thoughtful questions
- Encouraging the employee to generate options

### Help them define meaningful goals.

Ask about their motivations, strengths, and long-term aspirations — then help connect these goals to the team and organisation.

### Encourage problem-solving rather than dependency.

Share your own experiences only when it adds value, not as the default. Coaching moves people from “tell me what to do” → “I know what I need to do.”

---

#### **4) Scaling Coaching in the Workplace (Program Design)**

A coaching culture doesn't happen by accident. It requires structure, consistency, and leadership commitment. Organisations that successfully scale coaching tend to have five features:

##### **1. A clear, well-designed coaching approach**

Coaching must be more than a script — it needs to align with organisational values, leadership capabilities, and the skills you want to develop.

##### **2. Policies that support trust and autonomy**

This includes confidentiality guidelines, coaching agreements, and clarity about how coaching fits with performance management.

##### **3. A developmental pathway for leaders**

Leaders need training, practice, supervision, and opportunities to reflect. Coaching is a skill like any other — it develops over time.

##### **4. Systems to support consistency**

This includes:

- Learning resources
- Peer coaching
- Coaching supervision
- A safe environment for leaders to practise

##### **5. Strong executive sponsorship**

When senior leaders coach — and are coached — the culture shifts rapidly.

---

#### **5) Integrated Leadership & Psychological Safety**

Coaching only works where people feel psychologically safe.

Psychological safety means:

- People can speak freely
- Mistakes are framed as learning opportunities
- Leaders model curiosity rather than judgement
- Employees feel safe to take interpersonal risks

Leaders create psychological safety by:

- Asking questions more than they give instructions
- Admitting when they don't know something
- Encouraging dissent and diverse viewpoints
- Showing genuine interest in people's experiences

A coaching culture cannot exist without psychological safety.

---

#### **6) Coaching Across Stages of Development**

##### **1. Educate (early stage)**

Provide structure, clear expectations, and teaching.

##### **2. Show (learning stage)**

Model behaviours and demonstrate skills.

##### **3. Mentor (growth stage)**

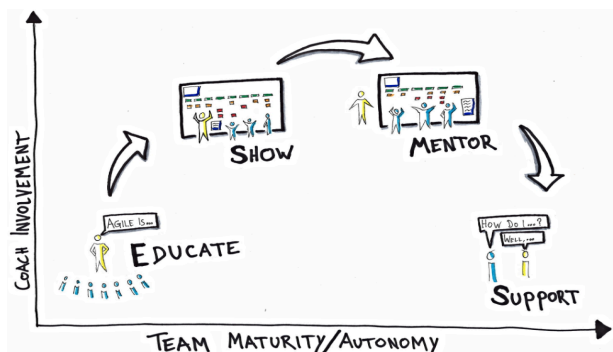
Offer guidance, reflection, feedback, and challenge.

##### **4. Support (mature stage)**

Empower independence. Offer autonomy, ask insight-building questions, and allow the person to lead.

---

Coaching is not one-size-fits-all — maturity matters.



## 7) Core Practices of Effective Coaching Conversations

Excellent coaching conversations share five essential features:

### 1. Collaboration

Coach and employee work together to explore issues, identify goals, and develop actions.

### 2. Focus on the present and the future

Rather than revisiting the past, coaching looks at what is happening now and what the person wants going forward.

### 3. Trust and constructive tension

Conversations can include challenge, but always in a context of safety and respect.

### 4. Ownership of the solution

The employee remains responsible for their choices, actions, and development.

### 5. Productive use of silence

Silence allows deeper thinking. Leaders often fear silence — good coaches embrace it.

## 8) Why Leaders Need Coaching Skills

Leaders who coach become more effective because coaching strengthens:

- Relationship building
- Trust
- Communication
- Ability to manage difficult conversations
- Team engagement
- Accountability
- Frameworks for developing people

A coaching approach also reduces the amount of time leaders spend putting out fires. Employees become more capable, more autonomous, and more confident.

## 9) The Leader as Coach (Time, Quality, Learning)

Many leaders fear that coaching will slow them down. Counterintuitively:

**Coaching saves time.**



When people grow, they take on more responsibility. They solve problems earlier, make better decisions, and seek guidance rather than direction.

When to instruct vs. when to coach

- If urgency is high → instruct.
- If quality or learning is the priority → coach.

Most organisational challenges benefit from a coaching approach.

## 10) Benefits of Coaching (For People and Organisations)

Coaching reliably improves:

### For individuals:

- Performance
- Confidence
- Workplace relationships
- Time management
- Problem-solving
- Well-being
- Accountability
- Motivation

### For organisations:

- Increased productivity and quality
  - Better retention and engagement
  - Stronger leadership pipelines
  - Alignment between strategy and behaviour
  - Healthier teams and culture
  - Improved reputation as an employer of choice
- 

## 11) Coaching Models & Tools

Below are the core models that anchor the coaching process.

### 11.1 The Solution-Focused Coaching Approach

This approach focuses on:

- What is working
- What the person wants
- Their strengths
- Exceptions to the problem
- Small, meaningful next steps

### Underlying principles:

- **If something works → do more of it.**
  - **If it doesn't → try something different.**
  - People change faster when focusing on strengths rather than deficits.
- 

- The employee's definition of "what good looks like" matters most.
- You don't need to understand the entire problem to build a solution.

This approach is supported by robust evidence and is particularly effective in workplace settings.

---

### 11.2 Instant Coaching (5-minute model)

Use this when someone is stuck on a specific task.

1. Ask them to describe the issue.
  2. Ask them to describe the ideal outcome.
  3. List the obstacles (in them / in others / in the situation).
  4. Brainstorm options and agree on one clear next step.
  5. A quick, practical way to shift someone from stuck → moving.
- 

### 11.3 Snap Coaching ("Corridor Coaching")

A slightly longer version of instant coaching, used in real time:

1. What outcome do you want?
  2. What's getting in the way?
  3. What options have you considered? What else?
  4. What will you do next?
  5. When will you do it?
- 



**COACHING IS RELEASING A PERSON'S POTENTIAL TO MAXIMISE THEIR OWN PERFORMANCE. IT IS HELPING THEM TO LEARN RATHER THAN TEACHING THEM.**



## 11.4 The GROWTH Model

A modernised version of the well-known GROW framework. This model supports deeper insight and better follow-through.

### G — Goal:

Clarify what success looks like and why it matters.

### R — Reality

Explore what is happening now, including strengths and exceptions.

### O — Options

Generate possible actions and alternative approaches.

### W — Will

Identify the actions the person commits to.

### T — Tactics

Break goals into practical, doable steps.

Here we implement implementation intentions:

*“If X happens, then I will do Y.”*

This dramatically increases follow-through.

### H — Habits

Reinforce ongoing behaviours through:

- Cues
- Environmental design
- Accountability
- Repetition
- Removing friction

Behaviour becomes identity.



## 12) SMART Goals

A SMART goal is:

- **Specific**
- **Measurable**
- **Achievable / Agreed**
- **Relevant**
- **Time-bound**

However, SMART alone is not enough.

The evidence shows the real gains come from pairing SMART goals with If-Then planning.

Example:

### **SMART:**

“I will run three times a week for 30 minutes until December 31.”

### **If-Then:**

“If it is Monday, Wednesday, or Friday at 5pm, I will put on my shoes and run.”

This turns intention into automatic behaviour.

---

## 13) Measuring Coaching Progress

To demonstrate value and maintain quality, measure coaching using:

- Goal attainment
- Self-efficacy (confidence)
- Engagement/energy levels
- Behavioural shifts observed by leaders

Short pulse surveys and simple scaling questions (1–10) are highly effective.

---

## 14) GROWTH Coaching Record (Employee Self-Assessment)

This section includes:

- Career development
  - Well-being
  - Performance
  - Attendance
  - Customer service
  - Reflections
-

- Areas for growth
- SMART goals
- Agreements
- Follow-up dates

This structure is evidence-aligned and leader-friendly.

---

## 15) Coaching Readiness & Triage

### (When to Refer)

Use coaching when:

- The person wants to improve or grow
- The issue is behavioural, relational, or strategic
- The person is stuck but not overwhelmed

Use training/instruction when:

- The person does not yet know how to do the task

Refer or escalate when:

- There is distress, trauma, or psychological risk
- There is bullying, discrimination, or legal risk
- It is a performance management issue

This protects people and the organisation.

---

## 16) What Belongs in a Coaching File

### Include:

- Coaching notes
- Agreed goals and actions
- Progress updates
- Capability development plans
- Reflections
- Feedback
- Session summaries

### Do NOT include:

- Mental-health information
- HR investigation details
- Medical information
- Sensitive personal details
- Anything you would not be comfortable sharing with the coachee

Coaching files must be developmental, factual, and transparent.

---

## CONCLUSION

This integrated coaching guide provides leaders with:

- A clear understanding of what coaching is
- Strong ethical boundaries
- Practical, evidence-based tools
- Step-by-step models that work
- Conversation guides and coaching questions
- Ways to measure growth and impact
- Structures that protect leaders and empower employees

The overall philosophy is simple:

Coaching helps people think more clearly, feel more capable, and act more effectively.

**When leaders coach consistently, organisations become stronger, more resilient, and more engaging places to work.**

---

## Key Sources

- Meta-analyses and reviews on workplace coaching effectiveness and program design. [Frontiers+1](#)
- GROW model provenance (Whitmore). [Open Library+1](#)
- Implementation intentions (Gollwitzer & colleagues; meta-analysis). [prospectivepsych.org+1](#)
- Habit science (context cues, repetition; formation timelines). [USC Dornsife+2behavioralpolicy.org+2](#)
- Psychological safety (Edmondson; HBR explainers). [Harvard Business School+1](#)
- Solution-focused coaching/SFBT evidence in workplace/adjacent settings. [Radar+1](#)