

What Tools Can I Use to Ensure I Have Effective Coaching Conversations with Faculty?

Presented by:

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Editor's Note:

This is a written transcript of an audio recording. Our policy is to edit only the occasional unintelligible phrase. Everything else appears as it was spoken.

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Hi, and welcome to this video. In this video, I'm going to talk to you about having effective coaching conversations. My name is Nicki Monahan. And I work in faculty development at George Brown College, which is in Toronto, Canada. My role there is to help achieve the college's vision of excellence in teaching and learning. My academic background is in counseling psychology. And I'm also a certified personal and professional coach from Concordia University.

I love coaching and I think it's a great element that can be part of your faculty development program. There's four learning objectives for today. The first one is to understand the difference between a coaching and non-coaching conversation. And all of us have all kinds of conversations every single day. They might be information gathering. They might be venting feelings. They might be something that's strategic. But coaching conversations are a very specific kind of conversation.

So we're going to focus on what makes a coaching conversation, coaching. One of the key elements to effective coaching is also powerful and authentic listening. And there are lots of things that can get in the way of us being good listeners. So the second objective is for you, as a viewer of this video, to begin to identify your own personal barriers to effective listening. One of the things that coaches do is ask powerful questions. And it's the powerful questioning that moves the coaching process along.

So in this video, you're going to be able to differentiate between more and less powerful questions, so you can start to begin to use powerful questions in your coaching conversations. And finally, I want you as a result of having watched this video, to be able to begin to engage in coaching conversations using a particular model that I learned when I was certified as a coach. The model is the 5W model and it was adapted from Concordia University coaching program in Montreal.

So let's get started. First of all, what is a coaching conversation? A coaching conversation, unlike many other conversations that you'd have on a typical day, is a very intentional kind of conversation. And it's a very specific kind of conversation. A coaching conversation is really a collaborative exchange between the coach and the coachee, or who I might refer to as a colleague. And I say colleague because that describes a very equal relationship. The coach is not superior or more powerful than the coachee.

The coach might have specific skills, but this is a collaborative exchange. And what is a collaborative exchange designed to do? It's designed to assist the coachee to identify goals, to devise strategies, and to monitor progress. So if you think you've had coaching conversations, you might want to ask yourself the question, have my coaching conversations been focused on goals, strategies, and progress. And if they haven't, you might have been having really important and meaningful conversations, valuable conversations. But they're not coaching conversations.

The role of the coach in these coaching conversations is, first of all, to establish trust and a working alliance. And if you think about meeting people at your faculty gatherings and your faculty development work, at meetings, one of the things that's really important to do is to

communicate to the person that you're coaching that you trust them and that you're going to work together. And that's a really important part of the beginning of coaching.

Secondly, you need to listen deeply to both the spoken words and the unspoken words. And sometimes what's not said is more powerful than what is said. Or sometimes there's a discrepancy between what people say and what they do. And you may have had that experience in your lifetime, maybe with a teenager who says they're going to do something and then they don't. But good coaches listen to both what's been said and what's not said.

Thirdly, coaches have to generate powerful questions because these are the things that elicit strategies for change. And because the coaching conversation is collaborative, unlike mentoring, coaches don't give you advice. They don't tell you what to do. They don't give you tips. They elicit those ideas from you. And strategies that come from the coachee, or from the colleague, are way more likely to be acted upon than strategies that come from a coach itself.

And the toughest part of the coach's job, for me anyway, in coaching conversations is to engage in direct communication, to give feedback. Because sometimes you have to give constructive feedback. But really, it's the feedback that's designed to foster achievement of goals. So that's the role of the coach. And this is how it plays out in those different elements.

First of all, you need to be able to be strong, deep, authentic listener. I want you to take a minute and I want you to just think about a conversation that you had at some point earlier today. And I want you to think, if you can come up with anything that might have gotten in the way of you being able to really listen to the person who talked to you. And if you take 10 or 15 seconds, you can probably come up with a list of at least three or four things.

There's a lot that gets in the way of our effective listening. And for you, you might have some specific barriers that are different than someone else's. The first one is distractions. We live in a world where it's so easy to be distracted. There's screens everywhere. There's stimulation everywhere. There's noise everywhere. There are things competing for our attention, whether it's our computer or our phone or somebody else, and just getting distracted really gets in the way of being able to effectively listen to a person who's talking to you.

Some of those distractions are external and some of them are internal. And I'll talk about the internal ones in a minute. The second barrier to effective listening is interrupting. And I used to be a terrible interrupter. I'm not afraid to admit it. It's a habit that I had to get out of when I took my coach training. And sometimes we interrupt for the best of intentions. I'm going to interrupt you because I think I know what you're going to say and I got a great plan for you. And I've got some great advice.

When we listen in coaching, we have to hold back on the interruptions. Another barrier to effective listening is our own assumptions. We have ideas about what someone should or shouldn't be doing. We make assumptions about people's practice and what they're doing well and what they're not doing well. And we need to hold those back. If you're the kind of helpful person and maybe you've had the role of a mentor where you've given a lot of advice and you've given a lot of tips, sometimes what gets in the way of your effective listening is that instead of

listening to somebody, you're already preparing a response. In your desire to problem solve or give advice, you've stopped listening and you've started to think about what you're going to say next.

Our emotional reactions when we're listening to somebody also get in the way. So if I'm bored, if I'm angry, if I'm anxious, if I'm distracted by thinking about what are the kids doing at home, I'm not really listening. And finally, sometimes we're just not that interested in what someone's saying. We have a lack of curiosity. So I want you to take a minute right now and I want you to just scan down that list. And I want you to put a mental checkmark, or if you're taking notes, put a physical checkmark beside the barriers that you think most often get in the way of your effective listening.

And if you're going to engage in coaching conversations, you're going to have to work on eliminating those barriers. It's impossible to do. And it's really important to do.

Let's talk now about powerful questions. If the role of the coach is to work in collaboration with the colleague or coachee to achieve those goals, the best strategy that we have is to ask really powerful questions. This is in stark contrast to a mentor who might give suggestions, give advice, give tips, tell you what to do, direct you in a particular direction. Coaches, instead, ask questions.

And they ask questions, first of all, to reflect an understanding of the other person's perspective. And those kind of questions fall on the heels of effective listening. So if I've been listening to you talk for the last 10 minutes, then I might start to ask a question to ensure that I understand what your challenge is or I understand what your goal is. I might also ask questions to evoke some insights or some clarity for you. Maybe you're not sure what's the barrier that's getting in the way of you achieving some goals.

I ask questions to generate commitment on your part. And coaching is really about change. And if you're going to make changes, you need to be committed to making those changes. So some powerful questions are questions which gauge, how committed are you to make this change? Powerful questions in coaching also prompt actions and create progress. So I want you to take a minute right now and I want you to think about a friend or a colleague or somebody that you really care about who's tried to make some changes in their life.

And I want you to think about—and whether that's within a faculty context or just in life. Maybe somebody wants to get more fit or lose some weight, or manage their time better, or use more active learning strategies in their classroom. I want you to take a few seconds right now and think about a question that you could ask that might generate some change on another person's part, because there are specific questions that do that. Here's some examples.

There's a whole category of visioning questions that help someone create a really strong, powerful mental picture of what things will be like when a goal has been achieved. So if I'm working towards a particular goal, it's really motivating if I have a really clear picture of what it's going to look like when I've achieved that goal. And these kind of visions and questions have

been drawn from the business world and the sporting world. I like to think about the first time a pole vaulter pole vaulted over 15 feet.

I'm pretty sure they thought and imagine how to do that successfully before they started at the line. So here are some examples of questions that you can ask in your coaching conversations. When you're helping your faculty colleagues, think about how things could be better. What would that look like? What would that sound like? What would you notice? If someone came into the room, what would they notice? Painting a picture.

Because coaching is about change. It's a powerful question to ask, how would things be different for you if you met this goal? And one of the things that's really important in coaching is making sure that the people that you coach are actually working on goals that are meaningful. Sometimes people say, I want to lose weight. And when they keep eating and they realize they're eating that cake in the middle of the night, it's because they're saying or they're lonely.

And maybe what they really want is to be in a happier marriage or a better parent. So we ask questions, what's deeply meaningful to you about achieving this goal, to make sure that we're really working on the right goal. And then you can ask those questions, what would you notice if you achieve this goal? What would other people notice? So one whole set of powerful questions are visioning questions.

The more simple the questions are, the more powerful they can be. And if you're a faculty member who's spent a lot of time in the classroom, you probably know that sometimes the more complicated and loaded the questions you pose to your students, the less of a response you get. And if you're a teacher and you're used to asking really complex, multi-layered, long winded questions, if you're going to work in coaching, you might want to simplify your questions.

They're not hard questions but they're challenging questions. What do you want to do differently? How will you do that? What's stopping you from? And my favorite, very favorite coaching question of all time is, what else? And I might follow that up with just, and? And then what?

And then there's a really good coaching question that generates an idea of how committed someone is to the change. And I might say, on a scale of 1 to 10, how committed are you to this strategy? And if someone says 10, I know they're going to do it. And if someone says, oh, well really only about a four, then we need to work with how do we increase the level of commitment to make that change or it's not going to help, it's not going to happen.

Sometimes it's important in coaching to find out who are the people in our coachee's or colleague's lives who can really help them in the change process. So I like to ask the question, who might help you? Who's on board with you? Who also is committed to you making this change? And if your colleague doesn't have anybody, then maybe we do some work about bringing in some more supportive people to help them make those changes.

These questions are simple, but they're really, really powerful. The next stage of a coaching conversation is direct communication. And the first element of direct communication is

feedback. It's a hallmark of coaching that you give feedback. And for some reason, we've got to a place in our careers as faculty where somehow getting feedback can feel really scary.

When's the last time somebody walked into your classroom and observed you teach and gave you specific feedback? For some of us, it might be back to our first year of teaching we're a dean came in. But feedback is critically important to growth. And again, if you think back to your little league coach, your baseball coach, your tennis coach, they were giving you feedback all the time.

And you didn't really worry about it. You knew your coach was doing it to make you a better player. I remember my tennis coach saying to me, you're hitting late on your backhand. Just move the racket up and make contact with the ball earlier. He gave me that feedback because he had observed me closely, in person and on videotape. And I welcomed it because I knew it would help me make a change.

So feedback is an important and direct communication and it's a key element in coaching conversations. Sometimes we have to challenge our colleagues or those that we're coaching. And confrontation is a strong word, but sometimes coaching involves confronting someone about whether or not they're actually doing the work to make change. So if in our previous session you said, between now and the next time we meet, I'm going to do x, y, and z.

And I ask you, hey, how did that go? And you haven't done it, I might have to challenge you. A gentler form of direct communication is self-disclosure. And sometimes it's really helpful to those that we coach and those that we work with to say, you know, when I was in this situation, one of the things that helped me move forward was such and such. It means that you are working with your colleague.

Here's a model that I learned at Concordia University's personal professional coaching program. And it's a model that you might want to try out and adapt to your coaching conversations with your colleagues. It's a model that you use for each and every coaching conversation. We begin with, what is the topic? And the topic generally has to do with the overarching goal that your colleague is trying to achieve.

And then what's the vision? We might have to remind our colleagues, remember when we talked about what's that going to look like? How are things going to be different? What are you going to notice? What are your students going to say? We focus on the vision. And then the third w is absolutely critical because every coaching conversation has to have a specific outcome.

What is the outcome of this session? At the end of this session, what will you have accomplished? And maybe it's something simple like, at the end of this session, I will have decided which active learning strategy I'm going to try in my classroom next week. And so then we have to explore what needs to be explored in order for you to do that. Maybe you have some fear or resistance. It didn't go so well last time.

Maybe you're using the same strategy all the time but this new one feels uncomfortable. So the next w is what needs to be explored. And finally, and this is the most critical of the five w's,

what is the plan. Every coaching conversation ends with a plan. And if you don't have a plan, it's not coaching.

So that's a model that you might want to try and practice. And practice with just a member of your family who's wanting to make a change, or a faculty colleague that you're not necessarily in a formal coaching relationship with. So if you're beginning to have coaching conversations, first of all, you need to think about what makes a coaching conversation different than an ordinary, everyday conversation.

Consider your role as coach and think about how it's different than a mentor. And then you might want to practice effective listening. Ask a friend, a colleague, a family member to just sit down with you for 10 minutes and say, I'm just going to listen to you and notice what comes up. Is it distractions? Is it interruptions? Is it wanting to solve their problems?

Practice exploring the power of questioning. And you can do that with the questioning that you do in your classroom, or you can do that with the kinds of questions you ask friends or family members or colleagues. Think about, are my questions long, complicated, long winded, rambling? Or are they short and powerful?

And then I've given you a model that you can use for practicing coaching conversations. It's the 5W model. It's pretty easy to remember. You're going to want to ask for feedback about your coaching skills once you engage in these coaching conversations, and have someone who has some coach training watch you and give you feedback about how you're using that model. And finally, and I think this is really critical, consider coach training.

Before I followed my Concordia University program, I thought it was a pretty good coach until I realized there were things that are really didn't know how to do and things that I didn't do well. Coach training can make a difference and hopefully it will make a difference in the quality of coaching conversations you have if you bring coaching into your faculty development program.

It's been a pleasure to work with you about coaching conversations. We really appreciate your insights and your feedback. So if you could take a few minutes and complete the Survey Monkey that's at the bottom of the screen, we would really appreciate it. Thanks and have a great day.

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/effective-coaching>