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EDITORIAL SUPPORT FOR EXPERTS

Editorial Sample

A Recorded Talk, Its Literal Transcript,
and Four Editorial Adaptations

A DhīraStudio Editorial Sample
Demonstration exercise, produced independently.
Not client work.

RAW MATERIAL

Literal Transcript

For seeing exactly where each adaptation began.

Unedited · audio segment 4:01–14:43 of the original recording

The use of coaching skills for leaders and managers work on four behaviors to support coaching skills in the workplace. These four behaviors are, firstly, demonstrate genuine concern and care for your team members. Second, play to the strengths of the people you are coaching. Third, don't punish failures.

Coach the person through their mistakes. And fourth, make the time to celebrate success. These are four behaviors that I found to be really important. So tackling each in turn.

I think it's obvious to your team members if you really care about them, their development and their well-being. You know, think back to all the managers that you've had. Which ones you knew cared and which ones didn't care as much? I knew a manager cared when they really listened to me.

They took my thoughts and ideas seriously. They considered my strengths and development areas in the advice they gave. They supported me. They fought for me and the team and so on.

Work on your own mindset and the behaviors you demonstrate day in day out. Doing so will make a big difference to how your team responds to you. Next, play to your team members' strengths more than trying to improve their weaknesses. You'll get further improving strengths than using the same amount of time and effort to improve weaknesses.

Most people find it quicker and easier to learn and improve in areas they enjoy and are good at, i.e. their strengths. In today's world, specialism and having a few things you're very good at is better than being okay at many things. Next, punishing failure does not encourage learning.

Punishing failure will also reduce risk-taking and individual stepping outside of their comfort zones, both of which will reduce or stop any improvements. Instead of punishment, coach the individuals through what went wrong and how they would do it differently next time. This is much more useful for learning, and you will see a lot more improvement in performance by taking this approach. Finally, take the time to celebrate success.

Celebrating success is much more motivational to team members than listening to motivational speeches from you, pep talks and similar. Positive reinforcement works, and everyone likes being complimented. Make the time to celebrate success privately and publicly. The third skill to develop when building coaching skills for leaders and managers is the power of asking questions.

As a manager or leader, asking the right questions is a brilliant skill to develop. Questions require the other person to think, so they can put together an answer. And needing to speak that answer out loud further improves the thinking. Assuming you are listening properly, you can also learn a lot from those answers.

So rather than tell your team members what you know or how you would solve the problem, ask them what they think or what they would do. You know, ask their opinion. Ask them to tell you the options they can think of and their preferred solution to a given problem. Ask them why they think that is the best solution.

Ask them how they will implement it. I promise you, get good at asking the right questions, and you'll be bowled over by some of the answers you get. I continually am. There are lots of different types of questions.

Understand and practice how to use each. Firstly, closed questions typically have a yes or no answer. For example, is John your manager? Try to avoid using these questions in most situations as you and the other person learn less from them.

The second type of questions, open questions, usually don't have a set or specific answer. You can't answer open questions with a yes or no. For example, what makes the option you have chosen the best? Try to use a lot of open questions when coaching.

It can be really useful when starting to use coaching skills to plan out a range of open questions you can ask and then practice using them.

Thirdly, generally avoid using leading questions such as, "We know that option A is a poor choice. What do you think?" Or, "Don't you think..." bum bum bum bum. Leading questions restrict a person's thinking and limit ideas and are less useful in most stages of coaching.

Finally, many people associate using "why" in a question with judgment. To avoid putting the other person on the defensive, minimize using "why" in your questions. For example, rather than asking, "Why do you think that?" you could always ask, "What makes you think that?" You are likely to get a more positive response without using "why." The fourth skill to develop when building coaching skills for leaders and managers is active listening. I've always thought listening is an underrated secret weapon for managers and leaders.

All great managers I've ever had were great at listening. Active listening is a great skill to develop, and I think too few leaders and managers work at developing good active listening skills. Active listening is not, for example, firstly, nodding at the other person while thinking about what you're gonna say next. Nor is it being silent while thinking about the eight problems you have to solve by the end of the day.

Nor is it hearing what is being said and then cutting the other person off to make a point or finishing their thoughts and sentences for them. If you're not able to repeat or summarize what the other person is talking about at any given point, you're probably not actually listening. Active listening takes effort and concentration. Some of the common traits of active listening include, firstly, maintaining eye contact.

Secondly, following, taking in, and understanding what is being said by the other person. Third, using attentive body language to encourage the other person to continue talking. Fourth, at appropriate points, paraphrase or summarize what has been said back to the other person to demonstrate that you're taking in what they are saying. By actively listening to others, it encourages them to speak, and it is amazing what they will tell you.

Think about how many times a person truly listens to what you're saying in a given day. Probably not that many. Active listening is also about being observant. You know, with the tone of voice, with the pace of the voice, with the body language, and then using all the nonverbal clues to understand what the person really means with the words they say out loud.

These clues are usually more important than the words themselves. For coaching, active listening is essential.

If you don't understand what the person is saying, or you've missed crucial points being made, how are you gonna truly support their learning? Listening is a great way to demonstrate that you are interested in the other person, which is also important in building relationships.

Active listening is an essential skill in coaching, so make the time to practice it. The fifth skill to develop when building coaching skills for leaders and managers is coaching for performance. In business, when investing in development in any form, there is an expectation that improved performance and better delivery of results is the outcome of that investment. Most coaching programs with external coaches will agree goals and measure progress against those goals to assess the effectiveness and value of the coaching program.

Choosing goals and working to those goals provides the coaching program with direction and purpose. When you're using coaching skills as a manager or a leader, I suggest that you do so in relation to the goals to achieve. This might be something simple like solving an immediate problem, or it might be much more complex like delivering a big project. A good framework to structure your coaching sessions with your team members is the GROW model.

The GROW model consists of four stages, being, firstly, goal setting. Secondly, what is reality? Thirdly, what options do you have? And fourth, what will you do?

So running through each part of the GROW model quickly, keeping into context our need to coach to improve performance. The first step of the GROW model, setting goals or objectives, is a very good place to start. Ask the person you're coaching, where do you want to get to? What does reaching your goal look like?

How will you define your goal? What will it feel like to achieve this goal? And similar questions. Coach your team member so they are clear what goals they are aiming for.

Make sure these goals tie in with the needs of the team and the business. And at times you may need to adapt the goals slightly as circumstances change. Coach the team member to reach the goals before setting new ones. The second step of the GROW model, what is reality, is an honest assessment of the current situation.

Understanding where we are now is an important starting point. If we don't accept it or have blinkers on, the solutions we work on will not be as good.

The most important criteria for assessing reality is objectivity. That is trying to set aside your assumptions, opinions, prejudice, hopes, fears, etc., all of which distort your perception of reality to some extent.

Focus the team member on the facts and what is actually happening. You know, examples might include, you know, our revenue is down 29%, or 23% of our products are loss-making, or we have a negative NPS score, or the lack of the right skills on the team means we are five weeks behind. Challenge your team member when they only state opinions. Asking for evidence to support their position is a good way of doing this.

Don't allow your team members to sugarcoat the situation or present information that is not objective and reflective of reality. Coach them to be as honest about the situation and reality as possible. The third step of the GROW model, what options do you have, is about asking your team member to generate options. You know, this sounds pretty easy.

What limits these options is our assumptions, beliefs, and our past experiences. The coach's role is to spot these limiting factors and highlight them to the team member. The goal is to get as many options as possible on the table, even the ones the team member feels are not likely or desirable. Challenge assumptions such as, you know, it can't be done, or we don't have the budget, or our competitors will stop that happening, or it'll cost too much or take too much time.

When you remove the limitations of a person's thinking, really good options can be found. When you have all the options, you can coach the team member through reducing these options down. Keep challenging them and look out for the assumptions and beliefs that appear to remove options without objective consideration. The fourth step of the GROW model, what will you do, gets the team member to start thinking in terms of actions.

What will they agree to to do as the next steps? What actions are they going to set themselves and be accountable for? It is important that they decide on the actions, and that you, the coach, are not telling them or deciding for them. When challenging the actions, tie it into the goals agreed.

For example, you could ask, what makes you think that this is the best route to achieving, you know, XYZ goal? Subsequent coaching sessions should include a review of progress against each goal, and coaching them through the obstacles that they need to overcome to reach each goal. Always leave a coaching session with a team member owning at least one action. So there you have a quick summary of the GROW model.

It is a very useful framework to coach individuals to reach goals, and in the process of doing so, improve their performance and skills.

ADAPTATION 1 OF 4 — NEWSLETTER

What “Why” Actually Does

For readers who expect to hear from you every week.

Excerpt drawn from approx. 6:21–8:41 of the full recording.

There's a coaching talk I came across recently, the kind aimed at managers and team leads, that spends most of its time on the usual ground: closed questions versus open ones, leading questions to avoid. Then, almost as an aside, one line stands out from the rest: swap "why" for "what makes you think that," and watch what changes.

It's such a small swap that it's easy to read past it. But sit with it for a second and the logic is hard to argue with.

"Why did you do it that way?" sounds like curiosity. It shows up in leadership books filed under "understanding root causes," in performance reviews, in the kind of one-on-one that's supposed to feel supportive. But think about where else that exact question gets asked. Courtrooms. Disciplinary meetings. Any situation where someone is expected to account for themselves to a person with the power to judge the answer.

That's the trap. "Why" is grammatically a request for information, but socially it functions as a demand for justification. The person on the receiving end doesn't hear "help me understand." They hear "explain yourself," and they answer accordingly, reaching for the most defensible version of events rather than the true one.

"What made you think that" asks for the same information and does none of that work. It's still curious about the reasoning. It just doesn't put the other person on trial to get there. The spotlight moves off the person and onto the thinking itself, which turns out to be a much easier thing for someone to walk you through out loud.

It's worth noticing how ordinary this pattern is outside of work, too. A parent asking a kid why they did something. A partner asking why a decision got made without them. In almost every case, the honest answer to "why" starts with some form of self-defense, because that's the posture the word puts people in, whether or not it's the posture anyone intended.

Journalists get trained on a version of this same instinct. Ask someone why they left a job, and the answer is usually the polished one they've given a dozen times already. Ask what led them to start looking, and sometimes you get the real story instead, the one with an actual moment in it rather than a tidy explanation built for public consumption.

None of this makes "why" a word to avoid entirely. Sometimes you do need the reason, stated plainly, and there's no way around asking for it directly. But in a coaching conversation, where the goal is to help someone think more clearly rather than defend a decision they've already made, the softer phrasing tends to get further. It lowers the temperature just enough that people stop performing an answer and start actually producing one.

What makes this particular fix worth sharing isn't that it's clever. It's that it's almost embarrassingly available. No new framework to learn, no structural change to how a conversation runs. Just one word, swapped for another, in the exact moment most managers default to the version that puts people on the back foot without meaning to.

Try noticing it this week. Not changing anything yet, just noticing how often "why" comes up in conversations where the actual goal is understanding rather than accountability. Most people are surprised by the number once they start counting.

Then try the swap where it fits. "What made you think that" instead of "why did you think that." "What led you to that decision" instead of "why did you make that decision." The information you're after stays the same. The person answering tends not to.

There's a longer piece coming on the other habits worth building into how a leader coaches a team: what to do after someone fails, what active listening actually requires, the discipline behind a good coaching model. This one felt worth sending on its own, mostly because it's the easiest of the group to try in the very next conversation you have.

ADAPTATION 2 OF 4 — LONG-FORM ESSAY

What Good Coaching Leaves Out

For the argument that needs the full page.

Excerpt drawn from approx. 4:01–14:43 (full segment) of the full recording.

There's a version of leadership that mistakes presence for value: the manager who has an answer for everything, who steps in before the silence gets uncomfortable, who corrects the plan before the team has finished proposing it, who explains the lesson before anyone has had the chance to miss it on their own. All of this can look like help, and sometimes it is, but more often it's intervention dressed up as guidance, leaving the other person with less room to think than they had before the manager arrived.

The four coaching behaviors worth paying attention to, care, focus on strengths, restraint after failure, and the habit of celebrating what worked, share something underneath the surface. Each one asks the leader to do less, not by putting in less effort, but by interfering less: trading the reflex to jump in, correct, or perform competence for something quieter, and in the long run more useful, room for someone else's competence to develop.

Take care first. It sounds like the softest of the four, almost incidental, but the pattern is specific: people can tell when a manager's concern is real, and they respond to it not with gratitude but with trust, which is the actual currency that makes coaching possible at all. Care isn't a behavior you perform for effect. It shows up, or it doesn't, in what you choose to notice about someone's development and what you choose to overlook, in whether you remember what they told you weeks ago about what they wanted to improve, and in whether that memory shapes how you talk to them today.

Most performance reviews spend their word count on what's broken. Fixing what's broken feels like leadership. It isn't, always. People improve faster in areas where they already have some traction, and a coach who spends the bulk of their limited time chasing deficits is fighting the direction learning naturally wants to go. Strength, not deficiency, is where growth compounds fastest. Play to it, whatever that costs in the appearance of thoroughness.

Punish a mistake and watch what happens next: the next mistake gets hidden, not fixed. That's the cost most managers don't count. The reflex to punish, or just to visibly disapprove, comes from a reasonable place, since mistakes are costly and costly things seem to deserve consequences. But a team that hides its mistakes from you is a team you can no longer actually coach. Better to walk the person through what went wrong: choose curiosity over a verdict, and stay interested a beat longer than instinct wants to allow.

And then, the smallest gesture, easy enough to skip that it usually gets skipped: taking the time to celebrate what went right. Not a speech, not a performance of enthusiasm, just the plain acknowledgment that something worked, said directly to the person who made it work. Positive reinforcement works. It always has, whatever the latest management book claims to have discovered about it. Underneath all four behaviors is the same move: get out of the way of the person's own competence, instead of standing in front of it.

Nowhere is that clearer than in the way a leader asks questions, which can be either the most useful tool in coaching or its most disguised form of control. A closed question invites a yes or no and teaches almost nothing to either party. A leading question, dressed up as curiosity, is really just an opinion with a question mark attached to it. Even the word "why" sounds like genuine inquiry, but it tends to put people on the defensive, because it asks them to justify themselves rather than think out loud. The alternative, asking what makes someone think what they think, hands the thinking back to the person who has to live with the answer, instead of asking them to defend a decision that's already been made.

This is where restraint becomes technique rather than personality. A good question doesn't just gather information the leader happens to be missing. It forces the other person to construct an answer out loud, a different and more demanding cognitive act than simply agreeing with someone else's plan. The leader who resists the urge to supply the answer is doing the harder, less visible work of making someone else's thinking sharper, question by question.

Listening carries the same discipline, though it rarely gets treated as a skill on its own. Real listening isn't nodding while composing your next sentence, or holding still while running through your own list of problems for the day, or hearing what's said and then finishing the other person's sentences for them. The bar is being able to summarize, accurately, what the other person just said, a surprisingly high bar most people don't clear even when they believe they have.

Most people, in a given day, are not truly listened to by anyone. The leader who manages it, consistently, gives something rare enough that it changes how a team behaves around them: more forthcoming, more willing to say the difficult thing out loud, simply because someone finally noticed the difference between hearing and understanding.

The GROW model brings this same logic to its most structured form, and its four steps ask as much of the coach as of the person being coached. Setting the goal belongs to the person being coached, not the leader, however tempting it is to suggest a better one. Assessing reality means setting aside your own assumptions long enough to see what's actually true, not what's convenient to believe about the situation. Generating options means resisting the pull to hand over your own answer, even when you're fairly certain you already know it. And deciding on the action, the final and most consequential step, has to belong entirely to the person who will carry it out, since a decision made for someone rarely survives contact with the work of actually doing it.

A coach who makes that decision for someone hasn't coached them. They've simply told them what to do.

What ties all of this together is less a technique than a posture: the coach's job is not to be indispensable, but to make their own presence, gradually and deliberately, less necessary. The care, the patience with failure, the discipline of asking instead of telling, the willingness to actually listen, the structure that keeps decisions where they belong: each one is a version of the same idea. Getting out of the way, so that someone else's thinking finally has room to arrive.

ADAPTATION 3 OF 4 — COURSE MATERIAL

Coaching Skills for Leaders and Managers

For the handout your course or workshop needs.

Excerpt drawn from approx. 4:01–14:43 (full segment) of the full recording.

1. Four Behaviors That Support Coaching

Demonstrate genuine care. People can tell when a manager's concern is real. It shows up in what you notice, remember, and follow up on over time, not in what you say.

Play to strengths. Most people improve faster in areas where they already have some ability. Coaching time spent building on strengths tends to produce more progress than time spent closing gaps.

Don't punish failure. Punishing mistakes discourages risk-taking and teaches people to hide problems instead of raising them. Coach the person through what happened and what they'd do differently next time.

Celebrate success. Acknowledging what went well, privately and publicly, is usually more motivating than a general pep talk.

Reflection exercise. Think of a manager you considered genuinely good. Which of these four behaviors did they show most consistently, and which did they rarely show?

2. The Power of Asking Questions

A good question requires the other person to construct an answer, which builds understanding in a way that being told an answer doesn't.

- **Closed questions** (yes/no) produce less learning. Use sparingly.
- **Open questions** have no fixed answer and are the most useful for coaching.
- **Leading questions** carry an implied opinion and restrict thinking. Avoid them.
- **“Why” questions** can feel like an accusation and put people on the defensive. Swap “why do you think that” for “what makes you think that.”

Reflection exercise. Write three open questions you could ask a team member this week instead of offering your own solution.

3. Active Listening

Active listening is not nodding while planning what to say next, staying silent while running through your own to-do list, or interrupting to finish someone's sentence.

A simple test: if you can't summarize what the other person just said, you weren't really listening. Tone of voice and body language often carry more than the words themselves. Practical habits: eye contact, following without planning your response, and periodically paraphrasing what you've heard.

Reflection exercise. In your next one-on-one, paraphrase what the other person said before adding your own point. Notice what changes.

4. Coaching for Performance: The GROW Model

When coaching is tied to a specific goal, the GROW model offers a simple structure.

Goal. Clarify what the person is aiming for, and make sure it connects to the team's needs.

Reality. Assess the current situation on facts, not opinions or assumptions. Ask for evidence when someone states an opinion as fact.

Options. Help the person generate as many paths forward as possible, including ones that seem unlikely at first. Past experience often limits the options someone considers.

Will. The person being coached, not the manager, decides on the action. The coach's job is to test that action against the goal, not choose it.

Every session should end with at least one concrete action agreed. Review progress against it in the next session.

Reflection exercise. Pick a current challenge on your team. Write one question for each GROW step (Goal, Reality, Options, Will) you could ask the person facing it.

ADAPTATION 4 OF 4 — EBOOK CHAPTER

Where GROW Goes Wrong

For the material that's ready to become a book.

Excerpt drawn from approx. 10:59–14:43 of the full recording.

Ask a room full of managers if they know the GROW model, and most hands go up. Ask them to run a real coaching conversation through it, out loud, and the model tends to fall apart in the same four places every time. Not because it's a bad framework. Because each of its four steps has an easy way to fake it.

Start with Goal, the step everyone gets right on paper and wrong in practice. The failure here rarely looks like skipping the question. It looks like asking it and accepting the first answer that comes back, usually something vague enough to mean nothing: "get better at this," "improve the situation," "do more." A goal that vague isn't a starting point. It's a placeholder dressed up as one, and the coach who lets it stand has already let the whole conversation off the hook before it began.

Reality is where the model breaks down most often, and for a reason nobody likes to admit: honest reality checks are uncomfortable, and discomfort is the first thing most conversations quietly optimize away. The tell is a particular kind of politeness. Someone names a problem, softens it immediately, and the coach, wanting to keep things pleasant, lets the softened version stand. Revenue is "a bit behind," rather than down twenty percent. A key skill is "still developing," rather than absent. None of this is dishonesty exactly. It's the ordinary human preference for a version of the truth that's easier to sit with, and a coach who doesn't push past it is coaching against a fiction.

Options fails in the opposite direction: not through avoidance, but through speed. Someone names a problem, the coach already has an answer in mind, and the "options" step becomes a formality on the way to the coach's preferred solution, dressed up as a question so it feels collaborative. Real option-generating is slower and, frankly, more annoying than that. It means sitting with the discomfort of a few genuinely bad ideas on the table before a good one shows up, because the good ones rarely arrive first. Skip that discomfort and you get options in name only, a single idea wearing a plural.

Then there's Will, which fails in the most familiar way of all: the coach, sure they already know the right move, nudges the conversation toward it instead of letting the other person land on their own answer. It rarely looks like an order. It looks like a leading question, a raised eyebrow, a "have you considered," repeated until the person being coached arrives, gratefully, at the exact conclusion the coach had in mind the whole time. This isn't coaching. It's steering with extra steps, and the person on the receiving end usually knows it, even when they can't quite say why the conversation felt hollow.

What connects all four failures isn't laziness. It's that each shortcut feels, in the moment, like the reasonable thing to do. Accepting a vague goal feels efficient. Softening a hard truth feels kind. Moving fast past options feels decisive. Nudging someone toward the right answer feels helpful. None of these instincts are malicious. They're just the path of least resistance, and the model exists precisely because that path leads somewhere worse than the discomfort it avoids.

Used honestly, GROW isn't difficult to understand. It's difficult to sit through, which is a different problem entirely, and the only real fix for it is noticing, step by step, exactly where the temptation to shortcut shows up, and choosing the slower version anyway.

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