



# Coaching Done Right!

8 key practices for managers  
to coach their teams



## **1** Clean Up Your Act

This is about understanding your intent before you start a coaching session, and “cleaning it up”. Clean up your act means letting go of assumptions or beliefs you may have about yourself, your relationship with the player or the goal of the coaching session.

Your intent is what you are seeking to achieve. If it is to solve a problem, fix, heal or control the player then it will show up in the coaching conversation and undermine the player’s ability to find his or her own solution.

If you are going to coach someone effectively, spend a little time reflecting on:

- What you think and feel about that person?
- What’s the relationship you have with them?
- What you think they should do and how they should do it?
- And, critically, what’s your true intent in coaching them?

Clarifying your intent ahead of a coaching session will help you come into it with an open mind.

## **2 Listen to Understand**

People listen in a myriad of ways. They sometimes listen out of interest, sometimes for what they want to hear, other times for points they can refute. While coaching, they might be listening for a solution or a way forward, which may distract them from listening and become an interference for the player.

The key question here is to understand what the player needs from your listening. At the heart of it, the player needs to trust that you understand them, so they gain the confidence to speak, to think openly and creatively. A few simple actions can help reinforce that trust:

- Put your full attention on understanding what they are talking about and how they relate to the topic.
- At crucial points, verify your understanding: summarise what has been said and ask for confirmation
- Occasionally, ask a clearly aimed question, or simply say “Is there anything else I should understand?”

The beauty of listening to understand is that the player will also have gained a better understanding. And once there is clarity, better choices and decisions can be made.

## **3 Follow Interest**

Who gets to decide what the player talks and thinks about, where the player should put their attention? If it is the player making the decision, then the effect, over time, is to develop agency and self-efficacy in the player. It's called following interest, the player's interest.

Following interest is a remarkable simple skill and can be understood and practised as ‘floodlight then spotlight’.

- Floodlight is to bring light to every aspect of a topic or issue so one has the best understanding possible. It illuminates the whole territory and includes what one thinks, feels, intuits and imagines. The question ‘what do you notice?’ is profoundly helpful
- This is followed by spotlight, which is to focus on a specific element – ‘what's most interesting?’ or ‘what stands out?’ are two questions that help the player to focus and move forward.

Asking the player to focus on what's most interesting rather than say, what's most important, means you engage both of the player's intuitive and analytical faculties, which will get her or him to a resolution more effectively.

## **4 Use Your Intuition**

When the coach accepts that it is for the player to make their own choices and decisions, a tremendous burden is lifted. The coach can relax and give their full attention to the player.

Humans are blessed with a capacity called resonance – our brain chemistry and emotional states are affected by those around us, particularly if we are close to them. It is through this means that babies learn so much from their parents.

When the coach’s mind is relatively quiet and not overly engaged in thinking, and the coach is focused on the player, a degree of resonance develops. This may occur to the coach as intuitive insight. Use it, carefully, but use it. Often in these moments the coach sees or understands something that the player cannot, and the effect can be transformative.

The best way to make use of such insights is to offer them to the player. And then let them make sense of it.

## **5 Ask Real Questions**

A real question is not an observation, opinion or suggestion dressed up as a question. You’ll know a real question when you ask it – because it’s almost certainly a question to which you don’t know the answer. If you do know the answer then don’t ask a question, instead speak directly, intentionally.

Real questions raise awareness in the player and are usually simple and short:

- “What do you notice?”
- “Tell me more about that?”
- “Tell me, of all that, what stands out?”
- “What’s your purpose in this?”
- “What’s possible?”

Real questions are most likely to increase your understanding and to move the player’s thinking forward.





## **6 Remove Interference**

We all have great potential, but we get in our own way through doubts, fears, anxiety and indecision. It's called interference. Interference acts on our potential, diminishing it like a half-closed tap reduces the flow of water, resulting in sub-optimal performance.

What's important is first to acknowledge the interference, to identify it as specifically as possible. Once the interference is acknowledged, there are 2 strategies to reduce its effect.

- You may focus the player on the interference to get past it. Helpful questions to do that include 'how is this stopping you?', 'how real is it?', 'how might you lessen its impact?'
- Or you may redirect the player's attention on something related and more positive. Questions to do that include 'what does success look like', 'what would it take to get there', and 'If you were in full confidence, what would you do' – e.g. someone in doubt about a business project might be helped by visualising success, thus moving beyond the interference.

You can trust your experience or your intuition to decide which course to take or you may leave the decision to the player.

## **7 Stay on Course**

It is part of your role to keep the conversation on course, and that the player gets value from it. We have this as a key practise because listening and following interest can result in a conversation that meanders and, while you will ideally follow the interest of the player, he or she can get distracted.

Staying on course is best achieved by establishing early on the topic for the conversation and the player's desired outcome. This will then serve you as a guide.

To establish the topic, you might ask:

- "What do you want to talk about?"
- "Which of your goals should we talk about?"

To establish the desired outcome, you might ask:

- "What do you want to get from this conversation?"
- "What would really help you as a take-away?"

To keep the conversation on course you might ask:

- "Is this helping you move towards the agreed outcome?"
- "Have we got the right outcome for this conversation? Which may cause you to change course to be effective?"

## **8 Conclude**

End the conversation conclusively and transparently. Clearly you need to agree next steps and time frames but what we are suggesting goes beyond that. The relationship exists so that each party can perform more effectively. In checking that the conversation has been useful, honestly and transparently, you strengthen the relationship.

Questions you might ask include:

- "The agreed outcome for the conversation is X, have we achieved that?"
- "What have you achieved in this conversation?"
- "I am aware that we have not achieved the agreed outcome, but where are you now?"
- "How have we done together?"

It is particularly important to conclude transparently when you feel that the coaching has not worked so well. It's a real demonstration of trust and commitment and the resulting feedback will help both parties develop.