

THE THREE CORE COACHING SKILLS

To excel in conversations that help others perform at a higher level, you will be more effective as a coach by applying the Three Core Coaching Skills:

- **Listen Like a Coach**
- **Think Like a Coach**
- **Speak Like a Coach**

Listen Like a Coach

Often, in conversations, we don't listen with our full attention. We are distracted by our thoughts and find ourselves only half-listening. Great listening requires the discipline to put aside these thoughts to focus on the other person wholeheartedly.

Great coaches listen in a profoundly different manner. They listen not for what is important to themselves but listen instead for what is really important to the speaker. They temporarily suspend their own beliefs, values, and aspirations so that they can listen in a much deeper, non-judgmental way. They listen to find out what is most important to the other person. They listen for the nuggets that will reveal values, passions, and aspirations. They listen for what is not being said and what doesn't make sense. Great coaches know that it is impossible to hear what another person is really saying when their own internal voice is at full volume.

Listen Like a Coach Exercise:

Start to develop the habit of becoming much more coach-like by listening at a much deeper level during one important conversation each day. During each of these conversations, listen for the following:

- Coaches listen for **values and passions**—What are the core principles that guide this person's decisions and actions? What excites them most?

- Coaches listen for **aspirations and disappointments**—What are the person's most important hopes and ambitions? Which of their goals have not yet been met?

- Coaches listen for **strengths**—What are the person's unique talents and gifts? What can they do better than almost anyone else?

- Coaches listen for **emotions**—What is the person feeling? What triggers their strongest reactions?

- Coaches listen for **inconsistencies and avoidances**—What seems contradictory? What is not being said?

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Think Like a Coach

When someone comes to us with a problem or opportunity, most of us are all too willing to dive in with all of our experience, intelligence, and expertise to help the person out. We like to be helpful and share our expertise.

Great coaches take a different approach. They assume that the other person will likely find a better solution if coached to explore fresh new thoughts and develop their personal capabilities in the process. These coaches see their roles as enhancing the thought processes of others rather than thinking for them or solving their problems.

Great coaches encourage others to think in radically different ways and confront issues that are being intentionally avoided. What have they never tried before? What's their scariest idea? What is the most exciting outcome they can imagine? What is a completely new way of approaching their situation? Great coaches help others see through fresh eyes by challenging the status quo, confronting fears, exploring wild ideas, and developing new ways of thinking.

Great coaches have a distinctive mindset.

- 1.** Great coaches have the perspective that those they lead, regardless of their current performance level, are talented, resourceful, and capable of learning and making their own decisions.
- 2.** Great coaches see their role as not merely a supervisor but rather as a catalyst for significant change in others.
- 3.** Great coaches believe that they serve their team members best when they hold each of them fully accountable for their own performance and that to do otherwise would dramatically undermine their coaching efforts.

Think Like a Coach Exercise:

This week, seek to develop new thinking habits by intentionally entering meaningful conversations with three questions in mind:

- How can I help this person expand their thinking by expanding my own?
- What assumptions, fears, and beliefs might be limiting this person's (and my) thinking?
- How can I encourage this person to think the unthinkable?

Which of the above three questions will be most challenging? What barriers might get in the way? How can you reframe the barriers in a more positive light?

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Speak Like a Coach

When coaches speak, they do not simply solve a problem or give advice but rather speak to help others grow and develop. Coaches do this by guiding the conversation through the following five elements:

- 1. Affirming the person:** *“You are talented and have significant potential.”*
 - Helping others feel valued and appreciated.
- 2. Confronting the facts:** *“What will happen if you stay on your current path?”*
 - Encouraging others to see and face reality.
- 3. Exploring the possibilities:** *“What is a completely different way of looking at your situation?”*
 - Generating options and possibilities.
- 4. Encouraging the change:** *“I think you can do a lot more with your life and career.”*
 - Stimulating personal growth and development.
- 5. Advancing the action:** *“What is the most potent first step you can take to move forward?”*
 - Facilitating movement from intention to accomplishment.

A great coaching conversation is always based on the above-noted five elements but rarely follows a sequential, linear path. Instead, it is usually the product of the coach asking one question: *“What is the single best thing I can say at this moment that will help this person develop in some way?”*

“Every time you speak, you are auditioning for leadership.”

— James Hume

Speak Like a Coach Exercise:

To help develop the habit of speaking like a coach, each day this week, have at least one important conversation in which you intentionally guide the conversation through the above elements. Let your intuition and your intentions (to help others develop) determine the pathway through these elements. After one conversation, reflect on your experience and how it impacted the other person:

Affirming the Person

How did you help the other person feel valued and appreciated?

Confronting the Facts

How did you help the person face the facts?

Exploring the Possibilities

In what ways did you encourage the person to generate options?

Encouraging the Change

What did you say to inspire personal development?

Advancing the Action

What did the person commit to moving forward?