



PREMIUM PROFESSIONAL GUIDE

The Workplace Coaching Handbook

Questions, Coaching Conversations and Accountability

Agree on a purpose.

Listen carefully.

Ask one useful question at a time.

A practical guide for managers, team leaders, internal coaches and learning professionals.

INSIDE

The GROW conversation flow, powerful questions, feedback and difficult conversations, accountability and follow-up, five case studies, practical templates and a 30-day practice plan.

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WELCOME

Welcome

A Practical Guide to Better Workplace Conversations

Workplace coaching is not a performance speech disguised as a conversation. It is a purposeful exchange that helps a person think clearly, recognise choices, strengthen capability and commit to meaningful action. The coach does not need to have every answer. The coach does need to create the conditions in which useful answers can emerge.

This handbook is designed for managers, team leaders, HR and learning professionals, internal coaches, mentors and facilitators who want to make everyday conversations more developmental. It focuses on practical questions, conversation structures, listening, feedback, accountability and follow-through. The examples are written for real organisational settings: missed deadlines, new responsibilities, quality concerns, stakeholder friction, confidence gaps and development goals.

Coaching is not a substitute for clear direction, formal performance management, specialist support or decisive action when safety, conduct or policy is at stake. It is one leadership tool among several. Its value depends on choosing the right moment, agreeing on a useful purpose and translating insight into action.

GUIDE

How to use this handbook

Read the core chapters to build a consistent coaching approach, then use the question banks and templates as a working reference. You do not need to memorise every model. Choose one simple structure, practise it until it feels natural, and adapt it to the person, situation and organisational context.

For a short check-in, use a few focused questions and agree on one next step. For a complex development conversation, allow more time to explore context, assumptions, options and barriers. After the conversation, record only the commitments and information that are appropriate to retain, consistent with company policy and confidentiality expectations.

The strongest coaching conversations are neither scripted interrogations nor unstructured chats. A framework provides a reliable path; genuine curiosity makes it human.

A note on ethics and boundaries

ETHICS AND BOUNDARIES

Coaching should respect dignity, privacy, fairness and the person's right to make choices within the requirements of their role. Explain the purpose of the conversation, clarify what will be documented, and never promise absolute confidentiality when organisational policy or law requires escalation.

When a concern involves harassment, discrimination, threats, serious misconduct, risk to health or safety, or another matter requiring formal action, follow the relevant reporting process. Do not attempt to investigate beyond your role or use coaching to pressure someone into silence. If a person appears to need professional help beyond your competence, respond respectfully and direct them to appropriate resources.

The coach is responsible for the quality of the process, not for controlling another adult's decisions. Accountability means making expectations and commitments visible, not shaming, threatening or taking away agency.

PART

The Foundations of Workplace Coaching

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CHAPTER 1 · PART I

01 What Workplace Coaching Is, and Is Not

Workplace coaching is a structured conversation that supports learning, performance or development by helping a person examine a situation, consider options and choose action. It combines curiosity with purpose. It is collaborative, but it is not passive: the coach helps maintain focus, tests assumptions respectfully and returns the discussion to outcomes.

Coaching differs from telling. Telling transfers information or gives direction. Coaching develops the person's thinking and ownership. Both are useful. A new employee facing a safety-critical task may need direct instruction before reflective questions. An experienced employee who repeatedly solves similar problems may benefit more from coaching than from another set of instructions.

Coaching also differs from mentoring, counselling and formal performance management. Mentoring draws on the mentor's experience and may include advice. Counselling addresses personal or emotional concerns within a qualified professional relationship. Performance management establishes expectations, assesses results and addresses gaps. A manager may use coaching within a performance conversation, but should not disguise a formal warning as an informal coaching session.

A useful test is: what does this situation require most, clarity, capability, choice, support or formal action? Choose the method accordingly.

02 The Coaching Mindset

A coaching mindset begins with the belief that people can think, learn and improve when expectations, support and conditions are clear. It does not mean assuming every employee already has the answer or that every difficulty is caused by a lack of motivation. Performance is influenced by skill, resources, workload, process design, incentives, relationships and competing priorities.

Approach the conversation with curiosity rather than a verdict. Replace “Why are you always careless?” with “What is happening at the point where errors enter the process?” Replace “You need to be more proactive” with “What would proactive behaviour look like in this situation, and what is preventing it today?”

The coach should notice their own urge to rescue, advise, defend or prove a point. Sometimes advice is appropriate, but ask permission before offering it: “Would it help if I shared an approach that has worked elsewhere?” This keeps expertise available without making the other person a passive recipient.

Curiosity is not avoidance. A coaching mindset can be warm and direct at the same time. It can acknowledge pressure while still naming the impact of missed commitments.

CHAPTER 3 · PART I

03 Readiness, Trust and Psychological Safety

People are more willing to think openly when they believe the conversation is fair, purposeful and respectful. Trust is built through small behaviours: keeping appointments, listening without interrupting, applying standards consistently, admitting uncertainty and following through on commitments.

Psychological safety does not mean freedom from challenge. It means that a person can raise a concern, acknowledge a mistake or disagree without being humiliated. A coach can create this climate by separating the person's worth from the behaviour under discussion, asking for their perspective before drawing conclusions, and responding constructively when they disclose a problem.

Readiness matters. A person who is overwhelmed, angry or surprised may not be ready for reflective exploration. Start by acknowledging the situation and agreeing on the immediate need. "I can see this has been frustrating. Would it be more useful to clarify the decision now, or to look at what we can learn once we have the immediate issue under control?"

Trust also requires consistency. If the conversation is described as developmental but later used in an unexpected way, trust will erode. Be transparent about the purpose and limits of the discussion.

CHAPTER 4 · PART I

04 Choosing the Right Coaching Moment

Coaching is useful when someone needs to develop judgement, solve a recurring problem, prepare for a new responsibility, reflect on feedback or make a decision. It can be especially valuable when the person has enough experience to explore options but would benefit from a better thinking process.

It is not always the right first response. Use direct instruction when the task is unfamiliar and standards must be explicit. Use immediate intervention when there is a safety risk. Use formal procedures when a serious conduct or policy issue requires them. Use a specialist referral when the need is beyond the coach's role.

Before starting, ask yourself four questions: Is the issue clear? Is coaching appropriate? Does the person have enough time and emotional space to engage? What outcome would make this conversation worthwhile? If you cannot answer these, pause and clarify.

A coaching moment can be brief. "What is the most important thing you need to move forward today?" may be enough to unlock action. Do not turn every interaction into a formal session. Respect the rhythm of work and the person's attention.

PART



Structuring the Conversation

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05 Agreeing on the Purpose

Begin by agreeing on what the conversation is for. Without a shared purpose, a coaching discussion can drift into a general review of everything that is difficult. State the topic neutrally, explain why it matters and invite the other person to shape the focus.

Try: “We have 25 minutes. I’d like us to understand what is getting in the way of timely handovers and agree on one practical change. What would make this conversation useful for you?” This opening gives direction without dictating every conclusion.

Useful purpose questions include: “What would you like to leave with?” “What needs to be clearer by the end?” “Which part of this issue is most important to address first?” “If this conversation helped, what would be different tomorrow?”

If you and the employee have different priorities, name the difference. A manager may need to address reliability while the employee wants to discuss workload. Both may be relevant. Agree on an order: first establish expectations and facts, then explore workload and possible changes. A clear purpose protects both focus and fairness.

CHAPTER 6 · PART II

06 A Simple Conversation Flow: GROW

The GROW model offers four stages: Goal, Reality, Options and Way forward. It is a useful guide, not a rigid script.

G**Goal**

Define the outcome. "What do you want to achieve?" "What would success look like?" Make the goal specific enough to guide action.

R**Reality**

Explore the current situation. "What is happening now?" "What have you tried?" "What evidence do we have?" Separate observable facts from interpretations and assumptions.

O**Options**

Generate possible approaches. "What could you do?" "What else?" "What would you recommend to a colleague?" Avoid evaluating the first idea too quickly; allow several possibilities to emerge.

W**Way forward**

Convert insight into action. "What will you do, by when?" "What support do you need?" "How will we know it worked?" Confirm the commitment and the follow-up point.