

## Strengthen your skills 1.1

### Help someone find their answer

<b>What is this?</b>	Guidelines to help you practice being less directive during an informal conversation.
<b>Why would I do this?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– To become more effective at coaching and facilitation.</li> <li>– To experience a different style of conversation and the benefits of a less directive principle.</li> <li>– To help let go of any cynicism you might have, about the principles of collaborative coaching.</li> </ul>
<b>When might I use it?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– When you want to try coaching someone informally</li> <li>– When you want to begin coaching and aren't sure how to.</li> <li>– When you realize that you are giving your coachees too much advice, or controlling the direction of conversations.</li> </ul>

### Set up

For this exercise, choose a casual conversation where someone is discussing an issue or complaining in some way. It will be a conversation where the other person is not asking you to solve their problem; they're just talking, or complaining about it. For example, perhaps they're too busy, or in conflict with someone, unhappy with a situation, etc. You can ask someone to do this, or you could wait for the next time this occurs naturally.

### Key principle: Don't fix, don't 'coach'

During the conversation, *do not* give them any advice or suggestions for a way forward. No matter how great your ideas or advice, act from an assumption that you don't have an answer – and they do.

### Step one – display the relevant facts(enquiry)

Hold an intention to enquire; to create a conversation where the relevant facts and attributes of the situation are heard. Ask questions, use silence and summaries until you've (both) heard what you feel to be the 'key' facts which clarify the situation, e.g. 'What's causing this?' 'How supportive is your boss?' 'What actually is the real problem here?' Observations often work better than questions, e.g. 'So you're spending a long time out of the office'.

### Step two – help them surface their answer

When you feel you have enough information; choose from the following questions, (use whichever seems best):

- Q** 'What are you thinking of doing then?'
- Q** 'What needs to happen?'
- Q** 'How will you/ are you going to sort this out?'
- Q** 'What can you do to improve things then?'
- Q** 'What options do you have?'

Or ask any other question that requires them to focus towards a solution.

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#### Step three - This step is optional and I discourage you using it (!)

If you are still 100 per cent convinced that you have a better answer, the right answer, and that they will benefit greatly from hearing it, then tell them. Use one of the following phrases to link to the previous part:

- 'Can I offer an idea?'
- 'As you were talking, I've thought of something that might help. What if...'
- 'You know; I'm wondering if another answer might be to...'

#### Sanity warning: If you feel it's not working

Sometimes, there are reasons why this exercise might not work for you. For example, you might feel quite awkward or uncomfortable not 'fixing' things for people. You might decide:

- the discussion isn't flowing naturally;
- you can't think of the right questions or observations
- they really (definitely) can't think of any ways forward

If this seems true, then stop the exercise, and try another day! Go back to having a normal, casual conversation, e.g. give your own views, experience, ideas, etc. Alternatively, do step one on its own, then add step two when it feels right. Simply ask a few more questions than you would normally, before suggesting something.

Before long, you'll find that not offering solutions feels more natural, as you feel less compelled to give your idea or advice. Then when that bit feels comfortable, simply ask them what their solution is, perhaps using some of the suggestions in step two.

#### Additional support & reading, all by Julie Starr

- The Coaching Manual, The definitive guide to the process and principles of personal coaching, (Pearson Education)
- Brilliant Coaching, How to be a brilliant coach in your workplace, (Pearson Education)
- The Mentoring Manual, Your step by step guide to being a better mentor, (Pearson Education)

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