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3x5 Leadership's Peer Coaching Resource Guide

This resource guide will help you develop a great system for an enriching peer coach experience. It offers a phased framework to deal with behavior and system change, questions to help guide deep and transparent conversation, and other creative ways to benefit from peer coaching as a leader development tool.

Note: Throughout this resource guide, I use the word “client” to define your peer coach who is not currently serving in the coaching role. Through your relationship, you should balance your roles as coach and client between one another – between helping and being helped. This resource is aimed to help you when you are fulfilling the coaching responsibility and helping your peer coach as your “client.”



Stages & Questions to Guide Change Through Peer Coaching

1. **Identifying the problem:** we all have blind spots to our own life and behavior. Thus, identifying an internal need for change, and to break the status quo, can be hard since we unconsciously ignore information that go against our current perceptions. As a coach, you should help identify blind spots by encouraging client self-reflection; this helps to define things in their blind spots that are not obvious to them. Here are questions to increase client awareness.
 - As you think about your current behavior and goals you have, what is not working well in your life or at work?
 - What are the consequences of this for you? What about consequences for important people in your life and work?
 - What do you determine as the source of your need to change? Is it internal drive or an external motivator?
2. **Determining importance in pursuing the change:** breaking from the status quo is hard; we naturally tend to hover around it. If an urgent need for change is not felt, change is likely not to occur.
 - What are the consequences if you don't change? What about ones if you *do* change?
 - What are the rewards of this change and how much do you value them?
3. **Generating possible decisions:** getting to the point of trying to make decisions is critical because it means your client is thinking of a new future, now through a different lens. This means that this perceived future is fragile and your client may be tempted, multiple times, to revert back to their old behaviors or decisions. You must ensure you help your client stay in this new track by helping them best define a future they can be confident about.
 - What have you decided to do differently and why?
 - What is your ideal outcome? What is preventing you from achieving that outcome right now?
 - What are your new goals? Ensure goals are SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and time-bound)
4. **Establishing a course of action:** you need to get your client to develop a complete idea of what they need to do differently, how to overcome obstacles, and what skills or support is required to succeed. The best way to ensure they develop a complete idea is getting them to think out loud, or

better, to write it out. You can help discover specific ideas to best accomplish goals with these questions.

- What exactly will you do and when?
 - How will you measure progress? It is important to incorporate “small wins.”
 - From where and how do you plan to resource reinforcement for encouragement and inspiration for long-term change?
 - How and from where are you generating support, skills, or other necessary resources?
5. **Verifying commitment:** commitment dwindles without a perceived need, a sense of urgency, and small wins. As a coach, you should continually assess commitment by your peer.
- What if this does not go according to plan?
 - What if it harder than you think or you encounter unexpected obstacles?
 - How are we maintaining a need and a sense of urgency?
 - How are you remaining accountable (outside of me)? Who else needs to be involved?



Coaching Response Modes and Associated Questions

The four coaching response modes help guide appropriate questions for different stages of a “long-term” peer coaching relationship. Use these response modes to guide your questions in order to deepen conversation as needed. Ensure you assess which response mode is most appropriate for the current tone of conversation, what stage you are in during a client committing to change, and the needs of your peer-as-client.

Exploratory Response: Used to encourage active participation by both parties while giving the “client” room to respond. It generally uses the strategy of open-ended questions and questions that elicit more information.

Listening Response: Communicates an intense desire to understand; fosters clarification and self-observation. Strategies include paraphrasing complex statements, clarifying confusing statements, and fittingly asking for clarification.

Affective Response: Attends to the feelings, attitudes, and values underlying spoken words; gives attention to the meaning and emotion behind words. Strategies include labeling and asking about feelings, and getting your client to describe their feelings.

Honest Labeling Response: A direct and honest, but not brutal response; it is an incisive response that fosters self-confrontation, encourages rapid intensity, and deals with stated themes and process between coach and client. These are the questions that help get to the true essence of accountability between peer coaches. This response addresses indirection communication outright and identifies major themes of conversation. Most “why” questions help get to this essence of honest labeling and accountability.



Five Active Listening Skills for Effective Peer Coaching

1. Pay attention
 - Use active listening skills we are all familiar with: eye contact, welcoming body language, and don't interrupt. Easier said than done; we often violate this principle unconsciously. Be aware of your behavior and body language as you listen.

- Avoid feeling a need to merely wait for your client to finish talking so you can say what you want. Thinking of your next words will often lead you to miss critical statements or nonverbal communication from your client.
 - Ensure you minimize environmental distractions, such as engaging in your peer coaching sessions *away from the office* if possible.
2. Hold judgement
- Your attitude should be: “I am here to understand how the other person sees this situation. I must wait and ensure I fully understand the situation and context before I express my opinion or making a judgement.”
 - In my own executive coaching education experience, I’ve put my foot in my mouth so many times by hastily making judgements with clients. You will never regret waiting a little longer to speak in order to listen and understand more.
 - Be empathetic. Empathy is the ability to be aware of, to understand, and to appreciate the feelings and thoughts of someone else. In essence, it is showing respect for the other person and their experiences. It’s not weakness; it is the start of “doing life” with others.
 - Be patient. Do not fear gaps of silence during peer coaching sessions. Do not rush to fill them with words due to discomfort. In coaching, silence can be very productive and helpful. It allows for in-the-moment reflection and thought. Try and let conversational silence gaps last a little longer than you naturally would. To help deal with silence gaps, you can try questions such as “what more do you think, or feel, or want to say?”
 - At the core, your goals should be to build and maintain client self-esteem, and encourage their improved self-awareness.
3. Reflect
- One of your major roles as a peer coach is to figuratively hold up a mirror to your client to help them better see themselves. You should reflect information and emotions back without necessarily agreeing or disagreeing with what they see in the early stages of your coaching relationship. Self-discovery must occur before you can provide feedback, advice, or opinions.
 - Accomplish this through paraphrasing. It shows you are following the conversation and keeping track of the facts. Do this with periodic recaps of conversation. It removes miscommunication and interpretation, and demonstrates to your client that you understand their perspective.
 - “What I’m hearing is…”
 - “Let me check that I understand you correctly…”
4. Ask Questions
- Questions are the basis of all organizational, executive, and peer coaching relationships. They are important tools to further your client’s thinking, highlight any limiting assumptions, and bring greater clarity.
 - Use open-ended questions. Questions should often start with “what,” “where,” “when,” and “why.” Questions starting with “is” often resort to a limiting yes or no answer.
 - Open-ended questions help your client think further about a topic and encourages them to make better sense of it.
 - Don’t worry about making questions overly-fancy or complicated; the simpler the better.
 - Ensure you are careful with “why” questions. They are great for encouraging accountability (honest labeling response mode), but can also lead your client to become defensive if not posed appropriately, or asked prematurely.
 - Avoid double-barreled questions or questions within questions. Again, the simpler the questions are, the better. You are not in a rush to a solution; take your time.
 - Avoid leading questions; do not subtly insert your opinions into questions. This actually occurs subconsciously much more often than we think.
 - Ultimately, don’t allow your questions to overwhelm your client or the session; it is not an interrogation. Let your client drive the session in the direction they want it to go.

5. Summarize

- Conversations can end with the peer coach making a brief statement of what was said by the client. This helps the client see and reflect on what they said and how they were perceived. You can begin a summary with “it sounds like your main concern is...”
- You can also encourage your client to summarize what they said; it can help them consolidate their thinking.
- **IMPORTANT:** coaching should lead to action; it is not merely a venting session. Ensure through your conversations that you move through the stages outlined on pages 1 and 2 of this resource. Coaching should lead to some form of change in the client and their organizational behavior.



Peer Coaching as An Organizational Tool

As discussed in the blog post that this resource guide came from, peer coaching can be more than a personal, informal leader development tool you employ to grow. It can also be a formal development tool used in your organization. One additional way is by using “staff meetings.”

Do you have a routine, “battle rhythm” meeting with your people that relies on report-outs? For military organizations, this can be a unit training meeting or “command & staff” meeting. One way to incorporate peer coaching into your organization is turning a selected staff meeting structure from individuals reporting their own performance into one of collaborative problem-solving. The meeting leader or a team member brings a topic for group discussion.

Through this method, team members begin to see their peers as valuable sources of advice. It will lead to better decisions across the organization and makes it a more enjoyable way of working with peers, which can often be frustrating and competitive. Implementation guidelines include:

- Set topics in advance, prior to the meeting. Whoever is selected to bring the topic of discussion for the particular meeting must prepare beforehand.
- Have the team member give a short lecture or brief, or provide a one-page topic description prior to the meeting, that includes a specific question that they want the group to address.
- In the room, break into small groups of three or four to debate the topic; this helps encourage higher degrees of honesty and contribution.
- Decision-making control should not be taken away from the individual who brought the question to the table. This should be a quality source of diverse input; it is not another way to centralize decision making to the leader, a means of obtaining consensus, or an attempt to abdicate decision-making from the responsible team member to the group.

Taken from Harvard Business Review’s article, [“Use Your Staff Meeting for Peer-to-Peer Coaching.”](#)



Peer Coaching Sample Questions

To Clarify Focus

- What do you want to focus on?
- What would you like to get out of our meeting today?
- What’s going on right now?

- What are you currently experiencing?
- How does what you are saying relate to this issue?
- What is this conversation really about?
- I've heard you mention different things – which one do you want to work on right now?
- What's most important out of everything you are saying?
- How is this issue important?
- What's your role in this issue?
- Where do you feel stuck?
- What is the intent of what you're saying?
- What would you like us to ask?

To Identify the Goal

- Where are you now in relation to what you need to achieve?
- What is currently happening that you want to change?
- What other perspectives could there be?
- How would someone else see this situation?
- What do you need to do to shift your perspective?
- What could you not be seeing so far?
- What is the desired end goal?
- What does success look like?
- What will change bring about? What are the good and bad consequences?
- What are you hoping to achieve? What impact do you desire?
- Where are you really heading with this? What will it look like when you _____?
- If you could set a goal around this, what would it be?
- What is the end result that you are trying to get to?
- What is the goal of this whole situation?
- Have you experienced anything like this before?
- What did you do?
- How did it work out?

To Develop Solutions

- Where must you start with this situation?
- What needs to shift for something different to happen?
- What have you not yet tried that might help?
- What options can we look at?
- Which option seems best right now?
- How can you break that into manageable chunks?
- What are the possibilities as you see them?
- How do you see the path to where you want to go?
- What are other ways to get there?
- What must happen in order to get that/there/it?
- How can you make this easy?
- What support do you need from your manager, co-workers, family, and friends?
- What are the obstacles in the path?
- How will you move beyond the obstacles?
- If you meet this goal, how will it benefit you, us, our organization?
- What do you need more of: skills, information, resources, support, tools, or motivation?
- What other paths could you take?
- What information do you need?
- How would someone you admire find his or her way to making this happen?
- What would it look like if you moved slowly toward your goal?

- Imagine a point in the future where your issue is resolved.
- How did you get there?

To Create Accountability

- What can you do before the next meeting?
- What are you going to do? Who will do that action?
- By when will you do this?
- What will it look like when done?
- How will we know it's done?

