



LEADERSHIP

# There are 4 types of coaching. Here's how to implement them

By Dr. Dana Godek and Michael Moore August 23, 2024



You've got your clipboard, your protocol and you're ready to go. As school walkthroughs get started and evaluation systems are rolled out, it is a good time to revisit what coaching is and how it differs from supervision, mentoring and other types of one-on-one interactions.

First, we will look at the spectrum of coaching approaches that senior leaders use with direct reports across a variety of interactions. Next, we will look at a few specific coaching techniques. Finally, we will discuss ways of designing a coherent model for leadership growth and support.

Consider the definition of coaching. Coaching can be defined as any type of inquiry intended to connect someone's thought process to the choices they are making. Supervision may involve asking questions, but it prioritizes doing the right thing in the right way over reflection or learning. Both of these are different from mentoring, which provides a model for how one should perform a specific role which is why new teacher mentoring is powerful.

If you are working with a direct report and the first thing you say is a statement, not a question, you are not coaching. If the first question you ask triggers reflection—e.g., "What options did you think about when you made that choice?"—then you are definitely coaching.

Coaching builds skills through goal-oriented, strengths-based and solution-focused inquiry. Inquiry means asking for information. Coaching inquiry asks about four things: the evidence



or data; the perspective, beliefs or values; the options considered; and the thought-process behind making a choice.

## Coaching approaches

Below is a useful spectrum of coaching to consider. Choose the type of coaching you will use based on the direct report's experience with a particular challenge or context.

**Supportive, inquiry-based coaching.** When the leader has experience with similar context or challenges (or they lean toward introversion) exploring options through supportive questioning and reflection works well. Recalling times when the leader was successful with similar issues and trusting their reflection process can lead to breakthrough insights.

**Expertise-driven coaching.** When the coach or supervisor has experience with similar issues, it can be appropriate to apply that experience to problem analysis and solution generation. If it devolves into "this is what's worked for me," then it is really supervision, not coaching.

The key is to stay with questioning that deepens understanding, provides additional perspective or generates additional options. The choice of options needs to stay with the person being coached.

**Perspective coaching.** Often a leader who feels stuck or ineffective is grateful for having a coach 'in the balcony,' looking at the challenge from a distance or different perspective. Perspective coaching asks the leader to consider a variety of perspectives other than just their own.

Many of you use 'Problems of Practice' protocols. When done well these protocols allow the leader to see the problem from different perspectives, opening both their understanding of the problem itself and the range of options for addressing it.

**Hybrid coaching.** One myth about coaching is, "If I'm your supervisor, I can't be your coach." Here, we are using the verbs "coaching" and "supervising" not the roles. The best supervisors both coach and supervise in most interactions. An uneven power dynamic can be addressed through transparency, trust-building and naming the boundaries between coaching-inquiry and directive-supervision.

Evaluation is often the hang-up with hybrid coaching interactions. Naming and discussing the difference is important. Even when supervisory conversations are directive, they are not necessarily evaluative.

Coaching and supervision are focused on the present leading to the future. They are focused on process and lead to action. Evaluation is a summative judgment, focused on the past leading to the present. Evaluation is usually about performance against some explicit standard, while coaching and supervision are almost always about the day-to-day work of leadership and management.

## Coaching techniques

Coaching is a discipline. Training and certification programs are available. There are many excellent books about both instructional and leadership coaching. It is a skill worth



developing no matter what your career path. For our purposes, we want to highlight a few key techniques that work universally.

We have already emphasized the importance of inquiry: asking open-ended questions. Here are a few basic questions:

- What is going well?
- Where might you need help or support?
- What are your top priorities right now?
- What have you tried so far? What's working? What's not working?
- What is new or coming up that you want me to know about?
- What is helping and hindering you right now?
- What would it look like if ...?
- How are you taking care of yourself and your family away from work?

We encourage you to start collecting good questions and sentence stems. We are both experienced coaches and we still keep questions on hand for challenging situations.

During inquiry and reflection, it is important to focus on the choices being made and the thought process behind them. Direct attention to behavior, not personalities. Demonstrate growth mindset.

Avoid 'sandwich feedback': tucking negative feedback inside kudos or compliments. Instead, identify strengths and successes, move to inquiry, and close with clear steps that will build momentum.

The GROW Model is a flexible, intuitive framework that is easily practiced, covers all the bases, and leads to clear results. The protocol is its own reflection cycle:

- What is your Goal?
- What is the current Reality?
- What Options are available?
- What is the Way forward?

## Prioritizing coaching

In many ways, coaching is a component of culture: Do you ask before you tell? Culture starts at the top. If you, the superintendent, lead with open-ended questions and inquiry, you will more likely see other leaders do the same.

Coaching needs to balance both individual and organizational goals. As senior leaders' direct attention to organizational goals, problems of practice from less experienced leaders will present themselves. Thoughtful and rigorous coaching will move the organization toward its goals while developing the repertoire and effectiveness of the more junior leaders.

To foster a coaching culture, be explicit about why coaching (and not just supervision) is critical to district success, define roles and responsibilities, identify a few techniques or a model to anchor practices, and measure progress.

The research is clear. When people experience autonomy and see some positive results, they become more engaged and productive. That is the promise of coaching.



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