

The five golden rules of effective coaching



At Huthwaite International we have done vast research into the behaviours that make someone effective in a particular role. We know, for example, that the behaviours required to be a successful sales person differ from those required to be a successful manager. The same is true of coaching.

Huthwaite International's latest research has identified five golden rules of effective coaching. Head of Thought Leadership, Dr Janet Curran, shares the key findings.

Be present in the room

In today's busy, pressurised world it is so easy to be distracted. People are used to being instantly available and contactable. But when coaching it is

essential to put distractions aside and focus on the other person. The quality of “attention” given by the coach makes all the difference and helps to build a trusting relationship. So when coaching switch off the mobile phone, put all other thoughts out of your head and be present for your coachee.

Ask questions

Overall a “pull” style of coaching, where the coach asks more questions than provides information, is more effective. The only time where this may be different is when the coach has a knowledge that the coachee doesn’t have. On these occasions it is acceptable to share the knowledge provided it is relevant, credible and provides a different perspective or reframing of the situation for the coachee to consider.

Seek to understand, not judge

It is important to seek to understand the other person, rather than judge them. Behaviour that implies a judgement from the coach is not usually effective. Giving negative feedback, such as “You didn’t do that well”, is one such example. Much better to ask more probing questions, even using the word ‘Why’. The key to using ‘Why’ effectively lies in the way that it is asked. When children ask ‘Why?’ we see them as being curious. Coming from adults,

especially adults in authority, it can be seen as judgemental; the person on the receiving end feels that they need to justify themselves. But curiosity is a key attribute for a coach, as indeed it is also essential for a salesperson. Stay with the not knowing is an oft quoted adage in coaching. The deeper you understand a person the more likely you are to help them change their behaviour.

Listen

There is no point asking questions if you don't listen to the answers. And the quality of listening is absolutely key in coaching. You need to be able to listen to the whole person and not just the surface level noise. You also don't need to hang on to every single word. Good coaches know to listen out for those "ooh" moments; the one phrase from the coachee that really strikes you.

Listening to the first 100 words will also give you clues as to what is top of brain for the coachee right now.

Focus on action

Effective coaching is about raising the coachee's awareness of themselves and their behaviour and enabling them to take responsibility for change (Whitmore, 2002). Our research has found that the most effective coaching

sessions contain more proposals for action, and that the majority of those proposals come from the coachee. This means that there is less information exchange, and less feedback. Good coaches do a lot of Seeking Proposals from the coachee, encouraging them to come up with ideas.

In summary, effective coaching is about focusing on the coachee, building a trusting relationship through demonstrating attention to their needs, seeking to understand them rather than judge, listening to what they say, and encouraging them to come up with ideas on how to move forward.

Written by [Dr Janet Curran](#)

Dr Janet Curran is a research specialist, verbal behaviour expert and coach. Working with companies around the world she helps them to optimise their performance in key business interactions. Recent projects include evaluating the relationship between sales and marketing, identifying the challenges faced by procurement professionals in building internal relationships, and the critical role of coaching in behaviour change. She is a speaker and a key contributor to the Management Consultancy Association's Consultancy Buyers Forum.