

How coaching can support teachers' return to school

In this column, education coaches explain how different coaching techniques could help teaching professionals tackle an issue

MARGO CUNNINGHAM

As practitioners we want the best for our learners and the return to our workplaces in August will be like no other. It is important to be mindful that the “interference” that is either within our own minds or within the system can be a barrier to reaching our potential which in turn can affect our performance. This is summed up in this equation:

$$\text{Performance} = \text{Potential} - \text{Interference}$$

A quote from one of my favourite books by Timothy Gallwey about coaching captures this well: “A tennis player first confronts the Inner Game when he/she discovers that there is an opponent inside his/her head more formidable than the one across the net.”

Coaching is a positive and proven approach for helping yourself or others explore a goal or an outcome. The coach has the ability to raise the coachee's awareness and generates responsibility for the coachee to act. As a coach, I believe that the coachee has the answer within themselves: they can achieve the success and realise their goal.

A helpful model is the 4S Model (see right) as GROW (Goal, Reality, Options, Will) questions can be used in conjunction with it. The coach wants to enable the coachee to establish a clear goal (Success): *what do you want to achieve?* For the coach to discover more about the coachee and their talents/strengths (Self) they may simply ask: *what would you say are your three greatest strengths?* If it was appropriate you may want to use a coaching wheel to help the coachee identify their strengths (refer to issue 84 of *Teaching Scotland* for a coaching wheel template).



The 4S Model

Getting the coachee to think outside of themselves is also helpful, finding out if others have the same or similar goal: *how can they use this and their strengths to share with others?* (Synergy) Ask the coachee: *what would others say your top three strengths are? Who have you worked with in the past? How effective was that working relationship? Who could you work with now? What would be the benefit of working with X?*

Thinking about how the coachee will use their three identified strengths to enable them to achieve their goal relates to the decision and action the coachee will need to make (Strategy) in relation to their goal.

CLAIRE LAVELLE

During the lockdown, I have been aware that everyone has had their own experience, impacting differently on their emotions and thoughts about work and themselves as educators. Some recalibrated from reconnecting with family life; others found home/work pressures overwhelming. Some spent lockdown alone; some felt challenged by time in Hubs, although enjoyed the routine. Sadly, some of us suffered losses and the full impact may not yet be fully realised, but compassion for self and others will be essential.

It made me revisit the ideas of compassion at work and our relationship with work, as we each have our own meaningful connection with it. In times of adversity, we may tend to default to old, unresourceful responses making internal attributions such as, “not doing enough” or “not feeling supported”, or unkindly comparing ourselves to others and feeling we should do more. With uncertainty surrounding the new term, we will want to be in the most resourceful place mentally and emotionally to deal with the challenges.

Having a coaching conversation can provide us with the safe, mental space to express our doubts and fears while also resourcefully exploring and re-evaluating our relationship with work. It may also support our self-care at this time.

“We will want to be in the most resourceful place mentally and emotionally”

Compassion may be something that we believe is necessary for others, but not always for ourselves. Yet, “coaching with compassion” is an effective approach developed by Richard Boyatzis to help the coachee articulate a compelling personal and professional vision. This model places a great focus on engendering empathy and providing space for understanding, amidst our perceived limitations. This approach can also allow a coachee to reduce their stress. Professor Paul Gilbert describes this as: “where the role of compassion reduces our feelings of threat and soothes us instead.” Having a supportive connection with a trusted other, therefore, increases our cognitive functioning to explore possibilities in making enduring changes.

Engaging our emotions, as well as thinking our way towards an “ideal self,” enables us to feel positive emotions about life and work changes. These aim to outweigh negative emotions that may be associated with perceived challenges. We are asked to consider our “actual self” - how does our situation feel right now? What are the realities for us at this time? From this discussion, the coach supports the coachee to develop a learning agenda made up of intentions which will aim to reduce the gap between actual and ideal. Critical to the success of the learning agenda is the flexibility and adaptability of intentions which will continue to motivate the coachee. This flexibility allows us to experiment and practise with possibilities as we move towards the ideal self.

Finally, we identify the resonant relationships that will support us to move forward. We may find a compassionate coaching relationship offers new ways of thinking, working and wellbeing for August.



ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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