

Coaching Team Members

Research shows the single most important managerial competency that separates "average managers" from "high-performing managers" is coaching! Managing is **not** about telling people what and how to do something. A "coaching" manager raises the bar by helping team members develop their strengths, improve their skills, increase their accountability, and in the end, get better results.

WHY IT MATTERS

Why coaching makes a better manager? Joseph Weintraub and James Hunt of Babson College found four reasons:

Good managers see coaching as an essential tool for achieving business goals. If you invest in their coaching early on, you reap the benefits later. They'll start solving more of their day-to-day problems, freeing you to focus more on strategic issues.

Good managers enjoy helping people develop. Team members look to you to provide them with coaching to grow as professionals. They will feel motivated and perform better if they know you are supporting them. You want to enable your team members to find their own solutions rather than continuously come to you for answers.

Good managers are curious. Coaching involves asking questions. Good managers want to find out more about how things are going, what kinds of problems people are running into, where the gaps and opportunities are, and what needs to be done better. Knowing these things makes their jobs easier.

Good managers are interested in establishing connections. Relationship building is a critical skill for a manager at any level. A manager who coaches their team members demonstrates empathy, an ability to listen, and to build trust. Team members look to you to provide them with coaching to grow as professionals. They will feel motivated and perform better if they know you are supporting them. While coaching may seem time-consuming, not coaching means you will not be able to empower your people. You want to enable your team members to find their own solutions rather than continuously come to you for answers.

HOW IT'S DONE

Tip: To start learning how to coach, find someone in your organization who you think is a good coach and ask them to tell you about it. What do they do? Ask why they coach. Listen and learn.

Coaching sessions are conversations between you and your team members in which you ask questions (before dispensing advice), identify areas for growth, provide support for performance, address challenges, give effective feedback, create development plans, check on progress, and generally engage your employees and foster their independence and growth.

Taking a coaching approach as a manager means focusing on the skills that help team members grow as individuals and make progress in their work. To accomplish this:

- Ask open-ended questions
- Provide feedback that is specific to continuous improvement
- Cultivate accountability by gaining commitment

Ask open-ended questions

Open-ended questions often begin with “what” or “how”, to help a team member problem solve. For example:

- What is the problem or challenge?
- What is the goal of this project?
- What obstacles do you anticipate?
- How can we rise above or manage the obstacles?
- How do you recommend we proceed?
- What support or resources do you need?
- What would you do differently next time?

Provide feedback that is specific to continuous improvement

Provide feedback specific to improving, focusing on what CAN be improved vs. what not to do. For example, say:

- “Let’s explore how you can develop a more thorough plan.” vs. “You aren’t good with details.”
- “How will you provide regular status updates?” vs. “You don’t communicate enough with me or your team.”
- “Before you submit your final report, what can you do to get another set of eyes on it and help you proof?” vs. “Your reports are usually too long and loaded with typos.”

Cultivate accountability by gaining commitment

Cultivate accountability with your team members. Coaching helps team members develop their own solutions. Remember, you don't have to have all the answers. For example:

- Agree to an achievable outcome within a realistic timeframe.
- Schedule regular follow-ups to check progress and stay on track.
- If a team member expresses interest in developing a certain skill, ask them to identify a project or class that will help them do that.
- If a team member says they don't have time to focus on development, ask them for one or two small things they can do that would get them closer to their goal.


The G.R.O.W. Coaching Model

At BetterManager, we have adapted the GROW model as a coaching framework for managers.

The original GROW model was first developed in the 1980s in the UK, by Graham Alexander, Alan Fine, and Sir John Whitmore.

GROW stands for:

- **G**oal – what do you want to achieve?
- **C**urrent **R**eality – where are you now in relation to what you want to achieve?
- **O**ptions – what options can you explore to reach your goal?
- **W**ay Forward (aka Will) – what actions will you take to move toward your goal?



The G.R.O.W. Model Coaching Structure

- **G**oal – What specifically do you want to achieve? By when? What will it look/feel like when you are there?
- **C**urrent **R**eality – Where are you now in relation to what you want to achieve? What inner/outer obstacles do you perceive?
- **O**ptions – What options can you explore to reach your goal? Are you open to suggestions? What would your role model do?
- **W**ay Forward – What is the path to your goal? When will you begin? What is your level of commitment? How can I support you?

When you use the GROW model with your team members, approach these conversations integrating the coaching concepts in this best practice.

PRACTICE

There are many excellent resources you can tap to learn how to be a good coaching manager. One of the best tips we have is to work with your Better Manager Coach to practice how you want to coach your staff. Here are some tips to keep in mind when you are in a coaching conversation with a team member.

- Maintain eye contact with the other person. This shows you are interested and listening.
- Unless there is an emergency, do not interrupt, check your phone, etc.
- You don't have to know all the answers; you just need to ask the right questions. As a rule of thumb, ask more than you tell. Aim for a ratio of 4 to 1.
- Offer feedback as needed to move things forward.
- Identify a specific strength or skill the team member could develop to achieve the outcome. If applicable, identify a project or role that will enable the team member to develop this strength or skill.
- By explicitly connecting your team members' skills to big picture needs, you'll give them a sense of purpose and belonging that will motivate them to grow and succeed.
- Do not blame or judge, keep in mind they are probably doing their best.
- Always assume positive intent, even when dealing with difficult or challenging behavior.
- Whatever your biases, recognizing them allows you to move past them by inquiring about intent rather than jumping to conclusions. When in doubt, ask questions!
- Using a sports analogy, the role of a coach is to develop the players to their full potential. As a manager, you need to establish a developmental alliance where you agree to provide opportunities for your team members to demonstrate and show their strengths. Make sure they know you have their back, especially when they stretch themselves.

RESOURCES

- [HBR Guide to Coaching Employees](#)
- [Why the Coach Approach Beats the Manager Mentality](#) - Entrepreneur
- [The Key to Effective Coaching](#) - Forbes
- [What is Coaching? How to be an Effective Coach](#) - MindTools
- [Managers Really Excel by Coaching](#) - Gallup