

AN INTRODUCTION TO  
**COACHING  
SKILLS**  
A PRACTICAL GUIDE



SECOND EDITION **CHRISTIAN  
VAN NIEUWERBURGH**

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# 1

## FIRST THINGS FIRST



### WELCOME

Welcome to the start of an exciting learning journey! This book will be an important part of your development as a coach – but not the only element. Like many other forms of personal and professional learning, coaching requires determined practice and intentional reflection. On the one hand, by the time you have read the entire book, watched the related video clips and completed the suggested activities, you will be ready to coach others. On the other hand, learning the ‘coaching way of being’ discussed in this book is the endeavour of a lifetime. Importantly and fortunately, if you have chosen this book for yourself, it will be an enjoyable endeavour. By embarking on your own learning journey, it is very likely that you will inspire others to do the same.

### WHAT IS COACHING?

Before going any further, it is important that we agree a working definition of the word ‘coaching’. The fact that you are reading this suggests that you have some idea of what it means already. And in many ways, what you believe it means is more important than the tentative definition proposed below.

#### **ACTIVITY** One-sentence definition



Here is the first activity! Take a few minutes to jot down your own one-sentence definition of coaching. Try to restrict yourself to just one sentence. Once you’ve completed this, make a note of the sentence and compare your definition with those presented below.

## 4 PART I – CONTEXT

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At the time of writing, there is no legal definition of coaching. This fact is often cited as a weakness of the ‘profession’ of coaching. There is little doubt that the very fact that anyone can call anything they do ‘coaching’ can be confusing and potentially unhelpful for others who call themselves ‘coaches.’ At the same time, this allows for a certain freedom for each coach to define her practice in a way that is meaningful to herself and her clients.

### Find out more



#### The history of coaching

The most comprehensive outline of the foundations and history of coaching can be found in a seminal book by Dr Vikki Brock entitled *Sourcebook of Coaching History* (2012). A shorter overview can be found in *The Hidden History of Coaching* by Leni Wildflower (2013).

Over the last 20 years, a number of key definitions have been proposed. A few notable ones are listed below:

The art of facilitating the performance, learning and development of another. (Downey, 2003: 21)

This definition is interesting because of its characterisation of coaching as an ‘art.’ This is in contrast with many that suggest that there is a science of coaching. For example, I have taught on a ‘coaching psychology’ programme within a school of psychology – and psychology has fought hard to establish its credentials as a science. Having said this, I believe that coaching is both an art and a science. In this book, we will consider both angles. The tools, techniques and processes may be seen as more *scientific* whereas the ‘coaching way of being’ can be considered more *artistic*. There has been an increasing amount of credible research into coaching to provide evidence for its effectiveness. This will be brought into the discussion lightly throughout this book, when appropriate.

Downey’s definition goes on to suggest that coaching should focus on performance, learning and development. This emphasis on performance is a feature of much of the early literature on coaching, perhaps because of the desire of early adopters to convince others of its suitability in the workplace.

Unlocking people’s potential to maximise their own performance. It is helping them to learn rather than teaching them. (Whitmore, 2009: 11)

Like Downey, Whitmore highlights the performance-enhancing nature of coaching. This is probably one of the best-known definitions in the field and it often captures the imagination of people wishing to become coaches. The first sentence suggests that every person has the

potential within herself and the wording implies that the coachee must take responsibility for maximising her own performance. The second sentence is less frequently quoted, perhaps because it is more controversial. Whitmore explicitly juxtaposes coaching (helping people to learn) with teaching (telling people what they need to know).

Coaching is a method of work-related learning that relies primarily on one-to-one conversations. (de Haan, 2008b: 19)

In a definition that has a clear bias towards executive coaching, de Haan proposes that conversations should focus on work-related learning and development. His use of the phrase 'primarily on one-to-one conversations' alludes to the existence of 'group' or 'team' coaching. This book will focus on coaching as a one-to-one conversation, which is the foundation of powerful relationships. Many of the skills, tools and techniques you develop as you learn to become a coach will be immediately transferable to other aspects of your life. Furthermore, in principle, the skills of coaching are the same, regardless of the context in which they are used (van Nieuwerburgh, 2016). This book will help you to develop your ability to coach in any arena – within organisations, as a life coach, within educational or health settings or as part of a leadership role.

Coaching is a human development process that involves structured, focused interaction and the use of appropriate strategies, tools and techniques to promote desirable and sustainable change for the benefit of the coachee and potentially for other stakeholders. (Cox, Bachkirova and Clutterbuck, 2014: 1)

This definition is more comprehensive, recognising the important role of coaching as part of a developmental process. Sustainability of the change achieved during coaching is picked out as a significant consideration. There is acknowledgement that there may be benefits to 'other stakeholders' in addition to change for the coachee. In executive coaching situations, it is hoped that both the coachee and her organisation will profit from coaching sessions.

## OUR DEFINITION OF COACHING

Considering the quotes above, it is evident that there is some variation in definitions. However, Bresser and Wilson capture the essence of coaching by honing in on the notion that it is about 'empowering people by facilitating self-directed learning, personal growth and improved performance' (2010: 10). Currently, there seems to be broad agreement that coaching:

- (a) is a managed conversation that takes place between two people;
- (b) aims to support sustainable change to behaviours or ways of thinking;
- (c) focuses on learning and development.

Coaching is a conversational process and a set of easily learned techniques. The skills needed to be a coach, you possess already: the ability to listen to others, to ask questions and to summarise. From here onwards, it is simply a case of honing these skills in order to effectively facilitate thought-provoking one-to-one conversations with others. Taking into account that you are reading this book, it is likely that you already possess an essential and necessary attribute: a desire to support others to achieve more of their potential. And yet this simplicity does not prevent coaching from being a powerful and rewarding activity. In some cases, it can be life-changing – for you as well as the coachee! This comes from another factor that will be discussed in this book: the relationship between the coach and the coachee.

### COACHING AND MENTORING

Many words, spoken and written, have been expended in trying to tease out the differences between coaching and mentoring. As I hope you will discover as you read through this book, the key skills, many of the approaches and the need for a particular ‘way of being’ are similar in both activities. In an attempt to distinguish the two approaches, Passmore (2010) suggests some differentiating factors. First, he proposes that coaching is more formal than mentoring. According to Passmore, mentoring tends to be an informal arrangement between two people. Compared to mentoring, coaching is seen to be a shorter-term engagement. Coaching is considered a more appropriate intervention for skills or performance enhancement while mentoring is better suited to career development. It is proposed that the most significant difference between the two approaches is the need for a mentor to have a high level of expertise and knowledge about the topic being discussed. Bresser and Wilson (2010) helpfully highlight two factors which differentiate the approaches:

1. A mentor has ‘experience in a particular field and imparts specific knowledge’ while a coach does not necessarily have specialist experience in the field and does not impart knowledge (p. 22).
2. A mentor acts as an ‘adviser, counsellor, guide, tutor, or teacher’ while a coach’s role is to ‘assist coachees in uncovering their own knowledge and skills’ and ‘facilitate coachees in becoming their own advisers’ (p. 22).

In addition to a shared set of skills, the intentions of coaches and mentors are often closely aligned – supporting others to achieve more of their goals and aspirations. Garvey, Stokes and Megginson agree that ‘coaching and mentoring are essentially similar in nature’ (2009: 27). Further, a piece of research into this question by Willis (2005) found that coaching and mentoring were similar activities with coaches and mentors sharing the same skills and practices.

I have argued elsewhere (van Nieuwerburgh, 2012) that the terminology is unimportant as long as it is recognised that both approaches can support people to develop their skills and

performance. However, the confusion surrounding this terminology can lead to frustration with, and poor experiences of, both approaches; so it may be helpful for us to become more consistent in our use of the words ‘coaching’ and ‘mentoring.’ For the purposes of this book, it may suffice to conclude that both approaches are broadly similar. Here, we are interested in coaching and propose that it is a non-directive intervention.

## HOW WILL THIS BOOK HELP?

This book should help you in a number of ways. For some readers, the book may introduce new ideas and concepts. For others, it may reaffirm existing practices and behaviours. Hopefully, all readers will find this book’s focus on practice helpful. Ultimately, this book should give you the skills needed to be able to coach others and support you to feel more confident about your ability to do so effectively. To aid you in the process, this book provides a clear structure (outlined below), which starts with the key skills before focusing on tried and tested conversational processes. This is followed by some practical techniques and tools that can be used during different stages of the conversation. The section on a ‘coaching way of being’ captures the ‘art’ element of coaching, and this is discussed once readers are familiar with the skills and processes involved. You will be supported on your learning journey with a number of learning aids and a Companion Website ([www.sagepub.com/coachingskills2e](http://www.sagepub.com/coachingskills2e)) which will enhance the practical dimension to this book. Turn back to page xviii if you would like to remind yourself about each of these additional practical resources.

### ACTIVITY **Creating a reflective learning journal**

Create an electronic or hard copy learning journal as a companion to this book. At various stages during your reading, journal entries will be suggested. In addition, it may be helpful to capture your own thoughts, reflections and questions as you read through this book.

In the first entry of your new reflective learning journal, note down your thoughts and feelings about the chapters which are described briefly below. A few bullet points will be sufficient for each chapter.

- What thoughts come to mind when you read the brief description of each chapter?
- What are you curious about as you read through the brief descriptions?
- How much are you looking forward to reading each chapter? Perhaps rate this on a scale of 1 (dreading the chapter) to 10 (cannot wait to read the chapter). Please enjoy the process of capturing your reflections. If possible, take your time with note-taking. We can learn so much about ourselves through this kind of reflection.

### CHAPTER OUTLINES

To give you a sense of what is to follow, here is a brief synopsis of every chapter. I would recommend that you read through the chapters in order first, and then use the brief descriptions below in future when using this book as a reference as you are coaching others.

#### Context

##### 1. First things first

This is the chapter you're reading. This provides an introduction to the book, an overview of the related resources and this brief overview of each chapter.

##### 2. Becoming a coach

This chapter introduces the three elements of becoming an effective coach: having the necessary skills; knowing a conversational process; and adopting an appropriate 'coaching way of being'. Most readers will already have some of the skills of coaching which are defined as 'listening to encourage thinking', 'asking powerful questions', 'summarising and paraphrasing' and 'giving and receiving feedback'. This book will support readers to strengthen and refine these skills. One of the key roles of the coach is to manage the conversation by facilitating a process. This can be done by learning and adopting one of many coaching models. These are easy to learn, and take practice to master. This book will present readers with two coaching processes that they will be able to use straight away. Finally, the best coaches demonstrate a particular 'coaching way of being'. This cannot be taught, but can be learned over time and with practice. If readers can develop all three elements, they will be able to confidently support others to achieve more of their potential.

#### Key skills

##### 3. Listening to encourage thinking

Listening is an underrated skill. When used effectively, listening can make people feel valued, respected and resourceful. Different levels of listening will be discussed. Particular approaches to active listening are explored. The premise of this chapter is that skilful listening can encourage others to think more creatively and purposefully.

## 4. Asking powerful questions

This chapter highlights the importance of using questions intentionally. The appropriate use of both open and closed questions will be considered. Four types of questions are proposed. There is a discussion of particular types of questions appropriate to specific coaching situations.

## 5. Paraphrasing and summarising

Paraphrasing and summarising play an important part in a coaching conversation. This chapter considers how best to 'play back' information to coachees. The importance of summarising or paraphrasing to demonstrate attentive listening is explained. The chapter provides some useful phrases to use when coaching.

## 6. Giving and receiving feedback

As coaching is about increasing self-awareness in the person being coached, the coach needs to know how to give helpful feedback. Providing high-quality, objective information to the person being coached can help to increase understanding of her situation. In addition, the coach needs to be able to positively accept feedback to improve her own practice.

## A conversational framework

## 7. Coaching processes

This chapter begins this section by introducing a simple coaching process (GROW). The use of the GROW model (Whitmore, 2009) is discussed in relation to supporting people to change their behaviours. The GROW model is described in detail (with diagrams) and with sample questions to help the reader. A more sophisticated adaptation of the GROW process (GROWTH) is also presented.

## 8. Beyond behaviour: exploring our thinking

Having described some conversational processes, the way in which coaches can support the thinking of coachees is discussed. While many people seek coaching in order to change

behaviour, more often the coachee may need to change her way of thinking before sustained change in behaviour can occur. Reference will be made to the concept of the ‘inner game’ (Gallwey, 1974).

### 9. Bias towards the positive

Coaching is essentially a conversation about focusing on the positive and building on existing resources. As a result, the field of positive psychology has much to offer coaches. A brief overview of the field is followed by some positive psychological interventions that may be helpful to coaches and coachees. The solution-focused coaching framework is presented as an alternative to the GROW model.

### Practical tools and techniques

### 10. Body language and emotional intelligence

This chapter discusses the role of body language and emotional intelligence in coaching conversations. The importance of remaining alert to body language (as additional ‘data’) is highlighted. Emotional intelligence (Salovey and Mayer, 1990) is also essential for a coach, as she will need to be aware of the emotions of the coachee as well as her own. By making educated guesses about how the person being coached is feeling, the coach is able to adapt her own behaviour accordingly.

### 11. Inspiring creativity: let’s talk

For novice coaches, the ‘Options’ stage of the GROW model can be the most challenging. Three chapters propose a range of tools and techniques for increasing the creativity of the person being coached. The first of these chapters considers conversational approaches. Clear directions are provided for each of the activities.

### 12. Inspiring creativity: let’s draw

Coaching is primarily a conversational tool. That is why it is sometimes helpful to include activities that might appeal to visual learners. Drawing is also a way of accessing new ideas or exploring situations differently. The chapter covers a broad range of drawing and writing activities.

### 13. Inspiring creativity: let's play

In addition to conversational and drawing activities, some coachees like to get more active during coaching sessions. It takes more confidence on the part of the coach to 'play' during a coaching session but this is often a good way of generating new ideas and perspectives in a non-threatening way.

## Coaching way of being

### 14. Being human

The 'coaching way of being', necessary for the most effective practice, cannot be *taught* in the traditional sense of the word. Instead, this can only be learned by people for whom it is important. This chapter describes the key attributes of a 'coaching way of being' by outlining the person-centred approach to coaching and discussing a series of 'partnership principles'. The chapter concludes by providing some aspirational goals for coaches.

### 15. Inspiring others

Coaching is an ideal way of inspiring others to strive towards success. Coaches can do this through their coaching, but also in everyday interactions. In other words, the skills and the 'coaching way of being' are readily transferable into other areas of life. This can be achieved by adopting a coaching approach. Some ways of doing this are suggested.

## Conclusion

### 16. Reflecting on practice

This chapter suggests that growth and maturity of coaches can be developed through reflective practice. This reflection can take place individually, in peer groups or during supervision. Becoming the best coach you can be is a lifelong endeavour. The importance of ethics in coaching is highlighted and readers are invited to start thinking about their future development as coaches. This chapter will suggest ways of continuing to develop your skills and 'coaching way of being' through practice, formal learning opportunities and supervisory conversations.

My intention is to provide a resource that is both practical and evidence-based. While the focus remains securely on the skills, processes and ‘coaching way of being’ needed in order to support *others*, I am confident that you will benefit personally and professionally from learning to become a coach. This view is supported by recent research that showed that students who were trained to become coaches (and subsequently coached other students) showed increases in levels of emotional intelligence (van Nieuwerburgh and Tong, 2013). These students reported that they had developed their own communication skills and felt that they had gained many transferable skills. Practising coaching can help you to develop the ‘way of being’ that can be particularly helpful in coaching as well as in everyday life, at work, at school, with friends and with family. As you learn to become a coach, you will find that you start to listen more authentically to others, ask thought-provoking questions and become better at building rapport and meaningful relationships. Whatever else we do, we need to remember that coaching is a human interaction that has as its ‘underlying and ever-present goal’ the building of others’ self-belief ‘regardless of the content of the task or issue’ (Whitmore, 2009: 19).

### Website



To access additional online resources please visit: <https://study.sagepub.com/coachingskills2e>.

Here you will find a summary of this chapter, relevant videos and activities.