

Coaching

Month 4 Leadership Practice

Purpose

This month's leadership practice invites you to expand your leadership toolkit by incorporating coaching behaviors into everyday interactions. While expertise, advising, and teaching remain important leadership functions, coaching can help individuals develop their own problem-solving abilities, confidence, and judgment.

The goal is not to replace other leadership approaches, but to build greater skill and flexibility in choosing when a coaching approach may be most helpful.

Why This Matters

Expertise, judgment, and experience remain essential leadership assets in academic medicine. At the same time, leaders are often called upon to help others develop their own capacity to navigate challenges, solve problems, and make decisions.

In environments where evidence evolves, priorities shift, and problems are increasingly complex, coaching can help individuals and teams build adaptability, confidence, and professional growth. Rather than immediately providing solutions, coaching creates space for reflection, learning, and development.

Research suggests that coaching can support professional growth, well-being, resilience, and engagement while helping individuals strengthen their own problem-solving capabilities.

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Coaching Takes Practice. Like any leadership capability, coaching develops through intentional practice and reflection. Many leaders have received extensive training in teaching, mentoring, advising, and problem solving, but relatively little formal training in coaching. Developing comfort with coaching often requires experimentation, reflection, and repeated practice over time.

When to Coach—and When Not To. Coaching is valuable, but it is not always the right approach. Skilled leaders move fluidly between coaching (nondirective) and directive approaches based on the situation. **Coach when:** The person needs to develop their own thinking. There's time to explore. Learning matters more than speed. The problem is complex or novel. You want to build long-term capability. **Be directive when:**

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Patient safety or urgency requires immediate action. The person lacks foundational knowledge. There's a clear right answer and time is short. You're correcting a critical error.

Coaching Is Different from Mentoring, Peer Support, and

Psychotherapy. **Mentorship:** Unlike mentors, coaches need not be more experienced in the same field; they focus on self-developed, goal-oriented change rather than providing experience-based guidance. **Peer support:** While peer support relies on shared experiences, coaching is a professional skill focused on navigating professional choices and behaviors. **Psychotherapy:** Coaching does not rely on a medical model to diagnose or treat mental illness.

This Month's Leadership Practice

Over the next several days, look for opportunities to incorporate coaching behaviors into everyday leadership interactions.

1. **Practice core coaching behaviors.** In one conversation, focus on how you show up: listen attentively, remain curious, allow space for reflection & ask open-ended questions
2. **Explore the GROW framework.** In another conversation, experiment with elements of the GROW framework:
 - Goal — "What would be most helpful for you to get out of this conversation?"
 - Reality — "What have you already tried?" & "What's working and what is not?"
 - Options — "What else have you considered?" & "If you had a magic wand, what would you change?"
 - Way Forward/Will — "What feels like the best next step?" & "On a scale of 1–10, how confident are you that you'll follow through?"
3. **Model curiosity and learning.** In a meeting, huddle, or team discussion, demonstrate leadership behaviors that encourage inquiry, reflection, and shared problem solving.

Reflection Questions

After completing this month's leadership practice, reflect on the following:

1. What did you notice about your coaching conversations? What felt natural and what felt less familiar?
2. When did you find yourself moving toward advice, teaching, or problem solving? How did you decide which approach to use?
3. How did the other person respond to a coaching approach?
4. What did you model publicly, and what message did that send about how learning and problem-solving happen here?
5. What did this experience teach you about your leadership approach and the situations in which coaching may be particularly valuable?