

A Simple Coaching Guide for Managers

How to Coach Your People,
Not Direct Them



Why coaching matters in leadership



Most people step into management because they're good at their work, not because they were trained to lead people.

Suddenly you're expected to:

- run 1:1s
- give feedback
- build confidence in others
- support growth
- and still get the work done

When to use coaching

Coaching works best when someone has the capacity to think and reflect.

It's not a replacement for direction when safety, clarity, or accountability are at risk.

Coaching in leadership isn't about having better answers. It's about creating better conversations.

At its core, coaching is a developmental mindset.

You're helping people think, reflect, and take ownership rather than relying on you to jump in to fix things.

This guide gives you practical coaching prompts you can use straight away, even if coaching feels unfamiliar or uncomfortable. These phrases help shift your mindset to a developmental leader, supporting the growth of your people.

Start with Curiosity

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Coaching works best when people feel heard before they feel guided.

These questions slow the conversation down and help you understand what's really going on.



Try asking:

- *“Walk me through what’s been happening from your perspective.”*
Builds empathy and context before problem-solving.
- *“If I stepped into your role for a day, what would I notice?”*
Helps surface pressures and invisible workload.
- *“What’s one thing you’d like me to understand better?”*
Invites honesty and trust.
- *“What outcome would feel like a win for you here?”*
Aligns the conversation around what matters to them.

Get to What's Real



Coaching is most useful when it helps people name what's actually getting in the way.



Try asking:

- *“What’s getting in the way right now?”*
Opens up blockers and barriers.
- *“If nothing changes, what do you think the impact might be?”*
Encourages reflection and responsibility.
- *“What have you already tried, and how did that go?”*
Surfaces learning instead of repeating patterns.

Build Ownership and Capability



Good coaching reminds people of their capability, rather than focusing on what's missing.



Try asking:

- *“When have you handled something like this before?”*
Reconnects them with past strengths.
- *“What do you already know that could help here?”*
Builds confidence through experience.
- *“What’s one small shift that would make this feel more manageable?”*
Keeps change realistic and achievable.

Build the Bridge



Connection first, challenge second.
That's how trust works.



Try asking:

- *“What strengths do you want to bring into this situation?”*
Anchors the conversation in capability, not deficiency.
- *“How are you feeling about this, really?”*
Builds psychological safety and honesty.
- *“How would you like me to give feedback, in the moment or later?”*
Models respect and shared expectations.

Look Forward, Not Back



Coaching works best when it creates momentum, not rumination.



Try asking:

- *“What feels most important to focus on today?”*
Reduces overwhelm and sharpens focus.
- *“What part feels clear, and what still feels foggy?”*
Supports understanding and next steps.
- *“If we fast-forward three months, what would you want to be different?”*
Encourages forward thinking.
- *“What’s one insight you’re leaving with today?”*
Locks in learning and action.

A Simple Reminder for Managers

You don't need to ask all of these questions.
One or two, used well, can change the entire tone of a conversation.
Coaching isn't about doing more.
It's about showing up differently.
When people feel heard, trusted, and capable, performance usually follows.

A note on leadership load

One of the biggest myths in leadership is that being supportive means carrying everything yourself. Coaching shifts that. When you ask better questions instead of jumping in with answers, responsibility starts to move back where it belongs, with your people.

They think more clearly. They own their next steps. They build confidence through action, not dependence. Over time, this reduces leadership load. You're no longer the fixer, the rescuer, or the bottleneck. You're creating leaders who can carry their part of the work, and that's what makes leadership more sustainable for everyone.

You don't need all of these questions. One or two, used well, can change the tone of a conversation. Coaching isn't about doing more. It's about shifting responsibility without withdrawing support. When people feel trusted to think and act, leadership gets lighter, not harder.

If this guide helped

Try choosing one question to bring into your next 1:1 and notice what shifts it creates.

If you want support building coaching into your everyday leadership in a way that reduces load rather than adds to it, that's the work I do through collabbWAY. Small shifts. Shared responsibility. Leadership that feels human, not heavy.

collabbWAY

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