



Coaching Skills – the 'how' behind the process

Coaching is in...

by Jo McCreedy-Fallon

In many walks of life coaching is now the 'in thing', in terms of training. From the medical profession through to education and in many businesses, coaching has been adopted as having something significant to add regarding the development of people.¹ In the world of sport and indeed, in the outdoor world, coaching has been recognised for quite some time as having a significant part to play in helping people achieve success, qualifications and learn about themselves.^{2,7}

In the world of outdoor learning, coaching has played an important role especially in the development of leaders and their impact on others. Anyone who has been through the LPIOL process knows that the coach can play a significant role in challenging their thinking and level of reflection.

In the last couple of years, IOL has decided to widen this approach by adopting the coaching process as part of APIOL to compliment the mentoring process. The latter is now carried out by managers and mentors close to the candidate. The coaching is carried out by coaches registered with IOL with contact maintained between the coaches via online meetings and correspondence to share best practice and maintain standards.

This article is written in the spirit of sharing part of the ethos behind coaching as well as providing an insight into some of our coaches' thoughts behind the skill of questioning. The ability to ask the right question at the right time whilst juggling a number of other processes, thoughts and actions should not be underestimated.

The table below represents part of this process. All the coaches were contacted and asked about their approach regarding coaching skills. This part of coaching represents the 'how' of coaching, i.e., some of the technical aspects of coaching. The following coaches were kind enough to share their thoughts with me. I have recorded their responses in full to indicate the range of skills they believe to be important and to show the variety our coaches are able to offer.

Who	Suggestion #1	Suggestion #2	Suggestion #3
Rachel Jones	Dig deep - challenge people to explore the 'why' and 'so what' of their 'what'.	Take time to find out about the person as well as the practitioner. One informs the other.	Value difference - share what you are learning from the experience.
Nick Winder	I always start with, 'tell me about your career so far, particularly the 'wow' moments' or something similar.	Then active listening and challenge the tale with, whys, hows as required to tease out the deeper meanings, and what is not being covered. "Why is that so important to you?"	I sometimes read some of their section work out loud to them, so they can really hear what they are saying and decide if it makes the true point aimed at. If I am reading it, I am suggesting it may need tweaking.
Samantha McElligott	Always draw the conversation back to the question in hand (i.e. If they go off at tangent, a simple 'tiller' action of repeating the question, or asking how that relates back to the question is helpful).	Ask them how they might advise their best friend in such a situation. Often we are most critical of ourselves, so asking what they would say or do if their very best, most beloved friend/family member was in the same position gets them to be a little more forgiving.	On a similar note, often we get told 'I don't know' in answer to a question. I sometimes respond with 'what would you do if you did know', or 'what would you offer as advice for your best friend?' This creates a 'shift in the room', i.e. Makes them think in a more pragmatic and problem solving way, rather than submitting to being trapped in a situation that they can't get out of.
Lun Roberts	I find it useful to offer a summary of what I think people have said and ask if I've got it right. This is when it's stream of consciousness stuff and they are just working things out in their heads as they go along and making new connections. When it's offered back to them they're usually surprised at what they've come up with.	I also find it helpful to look at changes in their body language and feed that back to them. Stuff like 'You looked really happy when you said that' or 'your shoulders slumped when I asked you that'.	I find it useful to pick up on throw away or jokey statements. Often they are things people feel strongly about but don't have the confidence to state seriously.
Jo McCready-Fallon	Using an engaging opening question to start the conversation off.	Active listening - really paying attention to what is being said and, just as importantly, not being said.	Killer questions - questions that stop people in their tracks and make them think.

The main themes that emerge are the importance of thoughtful, active questioning, listening and follow up in the form of further questioning, reframing and summarising. These are essential skills that effective coaches work hard at both in attaining them in the first place then maintaining them via regular usage and on-going continual professional development.

Coaching is a process which aims to help people think, reflect and possibly make decisions regarding their life and work. Now as an integral part of the APIOL process, this will hopefully raise the status of the award, contribute to the development of practitioners as well as aid the drive towards higher professional standards in outdoor learning.

This article is the first in a series of articles exploring coaching as an aid to the development of practitioners and outdoor learning. By sharing the thoughts and insights of IOL coaches, hopefully the coaching process will both become more transparent and make people aware of the powerful impact it can have.

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About the author

Jo McCready-Fallon has been working, delivering and playing in the outdoors for nearly 30 years. He is currently a Professional Development Officer for IOL with particular

responsibility for the area of coaching. He holds an ILM Level 7 Executive Coaching and Mentoring Certificate and is undertaking a Ph.D with UCLan in Elite Performance specifically investigating the effectiveness of coaching. Whilst not doing all of this, he runs his own coaching company and takes on marathon open water swims.