



## Purpose

This job aid has two purposes. It helps coachees select and prepare to share a coaching topic and it provides essential information for those learning how to use a coaching approach, particularly the participants of Introduction to Peer Coaching (TRN401) and Coaching for Effective Leadership (TRN402).

Throughout this document, the term coach can refer to an individual using a coaching approach or a group of peer coaches.

## Starting Point

Whether in a one-to-one or peer group context, the starting point for any coaching conversation is the topic. Effectively selecting one is a valuable skill for ensuring a powerful coaching experience.

Taking time to thoughtfully select a topic in advance of a coaching conversation allows the coachee to:

- develop self-awareness and curiosity about their life
- take responsibility for their own growth
- bring conscious intention to their coaching experience

Some coaching sessions will be part of a coaching engagement on a longer term and the coaching topics may fit into a larger vision or set of goals. Other coaching sessions will be limited to a single conversation. It is not uncommon in a longer coaching engagement to revisit the same topic multiple times, exploring it in a deeper way or from a different perspective each time.

The most important thing to remember is that it is the **person** who is being coached, not the topic or a related issue.



## Focus, Responsibility and Scope

A coaching topic can be focused on a challenge, a dream, a desire for change or a curiosity. It can be broad in scope, or very specific in nature. The beauty of the coaching process is that it can turn a general topic into something concrete and actionable, or it can take a very specific topic and help the coachee step back to see the bigger picture.

In a typical coaching relationship, the coachee takes responsibility for selecting and preparing to share the topic. The coach and coachee then work together to clarify and refine the coachee's stated topic at the beginning of the coaching conversation.

Further exploration of the topic, such as developing the goal, understanding motivations or creating a longer-term vision, is not part of selecting the topic. This happens during the coaching conversation, which is structured using the GROW model. It is not uncommon for the coaching conversation to reveal new potential areas of focus. In this case, the coach and coachee mutually decide whether to set them aside for a future conversation or to address the new topics or priorities right away.

While most coachees benefit from preparing their coaching topic in advance, it is not necessary to always come with a clearly defined topic. Spontaneous topics can also be coached effectively. Topics that arise in the moment are often based on very recent interactions or have a lot of energy associated with them at the time of the coaching session.

Please note that any topics related to mental health should be discussed with a mental health professional.



## Selecting the Coaching Topic



Once the coachee is familiar with the process of selecting a coaching topic, it will typically take a minimum of 20 minutes to choose and prepare the topic for a coaching session.

The following section will help the coachee select their topic.



## Considerations when Selecting a Topic

Deciding on a topic for a coaching conversation can be challenging. An ideal topic will have the following qualities:

- authenticity, meaningfulness and relevance to the coachee at the time of the coaching conversation
- the conversation is motivated by a desire for change
- the coachee can take responsibility for and influence their topic
- the coachee is prepared to discuss their topic and explore actions to take



## Common Topics

When receiving coaching in a professional setting, selecting a topic that focuses on a work-related issue can be helpful. However, it is also acceptable to bring a topic that appears to be more relevant to one's personal life. The truth is that we bring our whole self to work and addressing an issue in one's personal life can free up our attention and energy at work, improving professional productivity and performance. Some examples of work-related coaching topics include, but are not limited to:

- implementing change
- career progression
- dealing with a difficult person
- imposter syndrome
- influencing others
- delegating
- speaking up
- setting boundaries
- work-life balance
- improving team cohesiveness and morale
- personal productivity



## Prompts to Generate Potential Topics

The following prompts can be helpful when exploring a potential coaching topic. They can be used as related inquiries to explore a particular area or as stand-alone questions.

- What do I want more of?
- What is my dream?
- What is holding me back?
- What am I resisting?
- What am I tolerating?
- What do I want to be different in my life?
- Where is my life out of balance?
- Where do I want more clarity in my life?

Using the information from this job aid, the coachee chooses a topic for their coaching conversation.

## Sharing the Coaching Topic

This section will guide the coachee in preparing to share their coaching topic with their coach or group of peer coaches at the start of a coaching conversation.



## How to Share a Topic

The coachee has a few minutes to state their topic and share a small amount of context related to the topic. Sharing a lot of context about the topic is discouraged as this can become a distraction in the coaching process. Remember, the coach is there to coach the coachee, not resolve the topic.

Notice that in the process below, sharing the context of the coaching topic is the last step. Often, the coachee will be eager to share their story about the topic, giving background and examples. If they start with this step, they risk never clearly stating their challenge or desire.

The coach can get hooked by the story and jump into the conversation without understanding clearly what the coachee wants. By hearing the challenge or desire first, the coach can keep this in mind while listening to the broader context. This will help the coach know where to begin and how to focus the coaching conversation.



## Example

### 1. My topic

Having difficult conversations with colleagues about our project files.

### 2. My challenge or desire

I want to be able to sit with discomfort and influence others in areas that are important to the success of our project.

### 3. The context of this topic in three sentences

The file I share with one colleague has been mismanaged in the past and my colleague does not want to work on it anymore. This person focuses their energy on blaming others for the state of the file and tries to get off the file instead of trying to make the file a success. I want to find a way to engage my colleague in working on the file constructively.



## Sharing my Topic

The coachee is encouraged to share the following completed statements with their coach or peer coaches at the beginning of the coaching session.

1. My topic: \_\_\_\_\_

2. My challenge or desire: \_\_\_\_\_

3. The context of this topic in three sentences: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_