

High impact coaching tools

In the fourth of this series of articles, **Nick Austin** and **Richard Churches**, of CfBT Education Trust, present some interesting coaching tools to support coaches. Coaching tool can create greater insights and provide different perspectives for coachees to consider. They also offer some tips to support your coaching.



When to use a coaching tool?

Sometimes in a coaching session, a simple coaching tool can dramatically change a person's thinking and move them forward in their thought processes more effectively than sticking to a basic coaching structure or simple questioning approach. Using novel and unusual way of challenging thinking is not effective in ensuring high impact coaching outcomes but can also be a lot of fun!

Have you ever been in the situation where you find yourself listening to a colleague talking about an issue they have with a pupil in class, or they may be struggling with a new initiative they have been asked to lead in school, and no matter what questions you seem to ask you simply can't seem able to help them move forward? You may perhaps be searching for that crunch question that can unlock new thoughts for your coachee (see our previous article), or something that will get them thinking in a new way. Without a range tools in your tool bag the more you are thinking about these things when you are coaching, the more frustrated you can get. Below you can find two approaches for just these occasions.

For coaching to be truly effective, the coach will be constantly looking for different strategies and tools that will enhance the experience of the coachee, to be able to provide a framework within which the coachee is able to

explore more possibilities and to take responsibility for their own actions and thoughts. Coaching tools extend the repertoire of a skilled coach, and can be used in supporting coachees to tackle positive change, enhance performance and solve problems. Since some tools are active in nature, they can also provide variety of interest, and a different kind of input.

For a coach the challenge is threefold. Firstly a needs to be awareness when such a situation arises (for example, when someone seems stuck on a point or stuck thinking about a problem. Secondly, the selection of the most effective tool, and thirdly the skills needed to apply the tool effectively (see diagram below).

The tools describe below will give you a flavour of the sort of things that are available and that can be easily applied in coaching situations (in later articles we will talk about team and school improvement and will give you even more tools for your toolkit).

The first tool (Reality Hexagon) is an excellent tool for gaining an overview of the current internal map of the coachee - in relation to the issues and areas that could be explored and evaluated. The second (Phone a Friend) is a tool that can be used when a coachee is short of new ideas and cannot see passed their own thinking in order to come up with options and ideas.



The Reality Hexagon

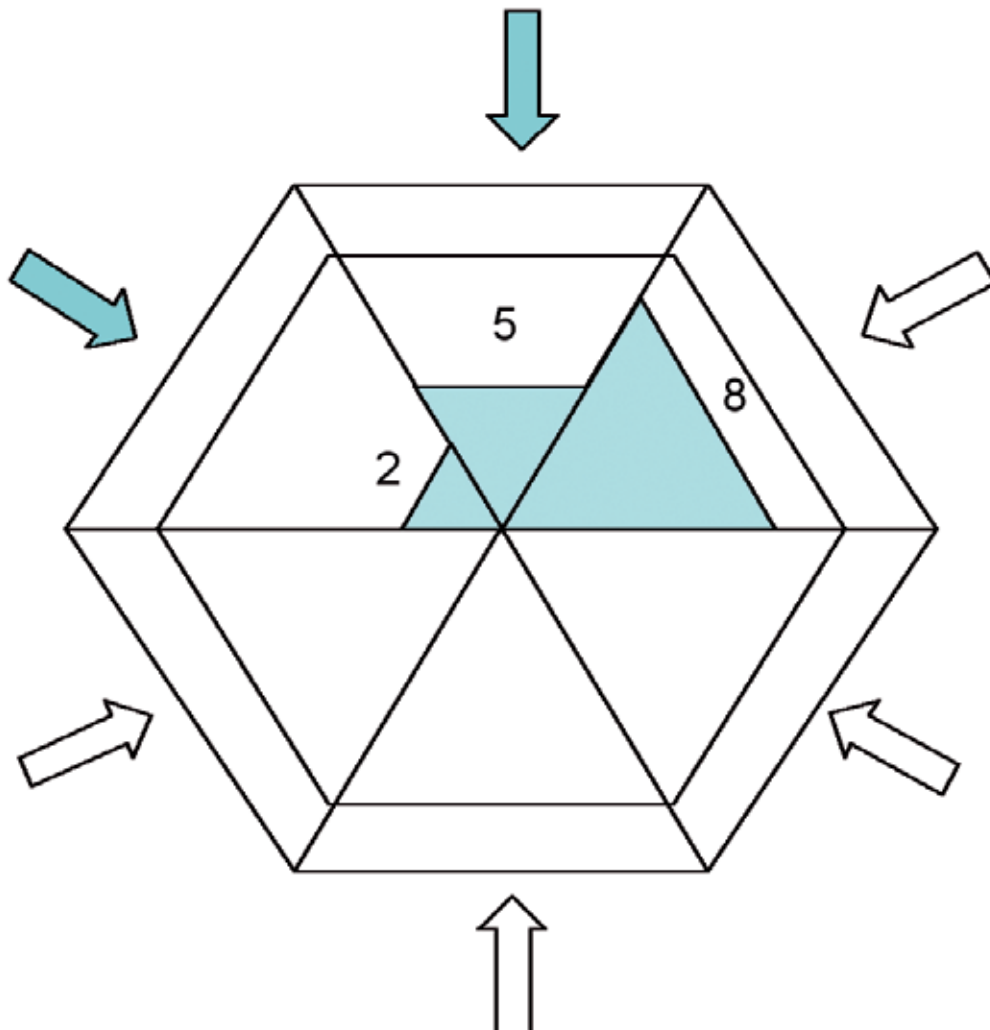
When a coachee is assessing their situation and discussing their current reality, the picture can get quite complex and confusing as they jump from one area of their life/work to another. On occasion, coachees can get fixated on one aspect of their lives without being able to see it in relation to other areas and the big picture. In this case, the coach may start to get the sense that the balance of their colleague's life is out of kilter, or that links between areas are being overlooked or not addressed. Either way, the hexagon is a great tool to use, as it provides a frame for mapping out all the key areas and then evaluating which of these are in most need of addressing.

Using the diagram below, get your coachee to identify the key areas of their life, or their work, depending on the context of your coaching. Each key area is written into the box above each segment of the hexagon. For example, areas might include health, time, family, paperwork, departmental team, extra curricular work, etc. Then they should score that area out of ten for how effective / satisfied they are with each of the aspects identified. They can write the number scored

into that segment, and/or shade in the proportion of that segment that represents their satisfaction level.

When this has been completed, it will become clear which areas are most in need of attention, and they can shade in the arrows for those areas. To be even more specific, it can be helpful to select one of the priority areas and draw a new hexagon subdividing it into its component parts. For example, paperwork could be subdivided into report writing, planning and preparation, marking and assessment, administrative paper, budgeting etc. Scoring for each of these would then identify which aspects of paperwork were the least effective and so improvements can be targeted to have maximum impact on the whole. Remember to use a questioning approach throughout the processes. Ask things like:

- *What does this mean?*
- *Tell me more about the difference between x and y?*
- *What could you do instead?*
- *Is there an area that you not mentioned yet that may be important?*



Once the hexagon has been completed, it is useful to revisit it from time to time (in later sessions) to see how actions taken have improved the balance of the hexagon, and whether other areas have improved or not over time. This can provide a useful checklist to come back to, as well as a snapshot in time to measure success and impact.

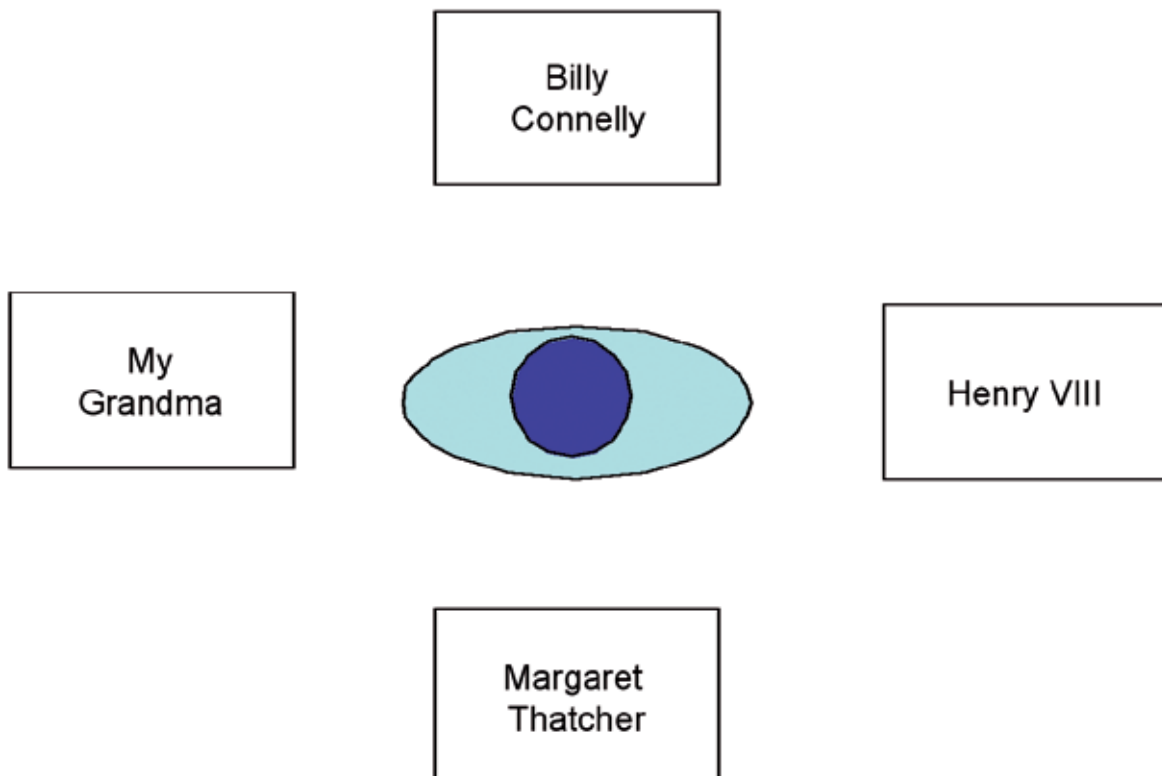
Another use for the hexagon is to explore a coachee's values in relation to what the coaching is for. To do this the coachee should first consider what is important to them about their work/life etc. and then to put each value into a segment, before rating how satisfied they are with each within the overall context. Where there is imbalance, these can then be explored and the coachee can start to address some of the fundamental issues that they may not have identified if they had not been through this process.

Phone a Friend

Have you ever been in the situation where the problem you are confronted with seems so big you can't see or feel anything except your own 'stuckness' and all your ideas just don't seem to overcome it? When a coachee is stuck, their thinking can become narrow, or focussed on the problem or what they perceive as the 'right' solution, so much so that it inhibits alternative ways to view the problem.

One way to unstick people is to imagine what someone else might say to you in the way of advice. Particular if that is a person who you see as a role model. Get your coachee to think of four people whom they admire and respect – they don't have to know them personally but they should be from different walks of life. For example, it could be a family member, a trusted work colleague, a sports star, a comic, a celebrity, a politician, someone from history, a fictional character etc. Once they have chosen who they want, they should write the names onto separate pieces of paper and set them out around them and stand in the middle (see diagram below).

When they are ready, they should stand on the paper of one of their 'friends' names, and face the space where they were standing in the middle. If possible, they should also adopt the physical stance of the person and see whether they can adopt that person's persona. Then the coach can ask, "What advice would you like to give X?" It is truly amazing how different the pieces of advice can be, and often so different from what the coachee has previously come up with. Each time some advice is offered, the coachee should go back into the middle, thank the friend for the advice and reflect how the advice might help them. Of course, the coachee can opt for more than the four friends, and then more possible pieces of advice may be benefited from.



Five Top Tips for coaches

Finally, we are often asked on training course and when doing keynotes on coaching skills what tips we could give that we have learned through our coaching experience for would-be or current coaches. Here are five that many people have found to be useful.

1. Rapport, rapport, and more rapport!

As we stated in one of the earlier articles in this series, rapport is the glue that keeps the coaching relationship together, it is vital to invest time and attention to building and maintaining rapport with your coachee. If someone is to explore some of their innermost thoughts, to question deeply held values and beliefs, to reconsider behaviours that they habitually do, they need to be able to trust and count on the support of their coach. This will only happen if rapport between coach and coachee is strong, there is mutual trust and respect, and that the coachee believes that the coach really believes in them.

2. Be curious and questioning

As a coach, your main objective is to facilitate the learning of the coachee by asking them questions that will allow them to seek their own solutions. Your questions should open new avenues of thinking, encourage new connections and give interesting insights for the coachee. Every question you ask should yield a new perspective, information, or new light on the internal map of your coachee, and that in turn help you to support change.

3. Remember to challenge

In order for change to happen, people may need an element of challenge. When you ask a good question people have to think, and when they are thinking there is the potential for behaviour to change. While coaching is a supportive relationship, it is also a professional one aimed to improve or change performance and impact, so there is often the need to move the coachee out of their comfort zone. The coaching conversation without the element of challenge is just a cosy chat – and this will not facilitate change.

4. Remember the power of silence

When you ask a question, sometimes the answer comes back quickly and the conversation flows. However, you will sometimes ask a question that gets the person to have to really think hard and long before responding. As the person thinks, the silence fills the room, and as it does the temptation to fill the silence with sound can be very strong. Perhaps you may be tempted to ask the question in a different way, break it down into a smaller step, or even offer an answer yourself? Resist it – thinking time is precious, and it can take time for someone to process several things and work it all through in their own mind. If you ask a question or interrupt their patterns of thought half way through, they may not think their way through to the end of the process, and their learning opportunity could be compromised.

5. Responsibility for any outcome rests with the coachee

The responsibility for both problems and solutions lie with the coachee. Even if you think you have the answer, or decide that you know exactly what issue the coachee should be addressing is, it is important not to take control of the agenda and drive the coachee towards your solution. Asking leading questions, giving unsolicited advice or directing the coachee ultimately disempowers them and passes the responsibility for success to the coach.

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