



# The GROW Coaching Model

A guide for leaders and managers on coaching their people.

GROW is the simplest, most widely used coaching framework in the workplace. Developed by Sir John Whitmore and colleagues in the 1980s, it provides managers with a four-stage structure for a coaching conversation that helps a team member think for themselves, take responsibility, and commit to action.

Used well, GROW shifts the manager from being the person with the answers to being the person who asks the right questions. The result: better thinking, stronger ownership and faster development.

## The Model at a Glance

	Stage	What you are exploring
<b>G</b>	<b>Goal</b>	What does the person want to achieve, by when, and why does it matter?
<b>R</b>	<b>Reality</b>	Where are they now? What is actually happening, and what have they already tried?
<b>O</b>	<b>Options</b>	What could they do? Generate as many possibilities as possible before evaluating them.
<b>W</b>	<b>Will / Way forward</b>	What will they actually do? Commit to specific actions, timescales and support.

A typical GROW conversation takes 20–45 minutes. You can also use it informally in a five-minute corridor conversation. The above stages give you a mental checklist to keep the dialogue purposeful.





## Working Through Each Stage

**GOAL - Purpose:** Clarify what the person wants from the conversation and the wider outcome they are working towards. A good goal is specific, positive and within their influence.

### Useful questions to ask:

- What would you like to get out of this conversation today?
- What does success look like for you?
- How will you know when you've achieved it?
- Why is this important to you right now?
- By when do you want this in place?



**REALITY - Purpose:** Build a clear, honest picture of the current situation. Stay curious and resist the urge to problem-solve. This is where most of the insight happens.

### Useful questions to ask:

- What is happening at the moment?
- Who else is involved, and how are they affected?
- What have you already tried? What was the result?
- What is getting in the way?
- On a scale of 1–10, where are you now compared with where you want to be?

**OPTIONS - Purpose:** Explore possible ways forward. Help the person generate ideas before evaluating. Offer your own suggestions only after they have exhausted theirs and ask permission first.

### Useful questions to ask:

- What could you do?
- What else? (Ask again until you are satisfied they've realised everything; or help them.)
- If resources, time and permission were unlimited, what would you do?
- What has worked for you, or someone you know, in a similar situation?

Would you like me to add a couple of options to the list?

**WILL/WAY FORWARD - Purpose:** Convert thinking into action. Pin down what the person will do, by when, and how they will know it has worked. Agree on the support they need from you.

### Useful questions to ask:

- Which of these options will you take forward?
- What is your very first step, and when will you take it?
- On a scale of 1–10, how committed are you to doing this? What would make it a 10?
- What might get in the way, and how will you handle it?

What support do you need from me, and when shall we review progress?



## A Worked Example

Scenario: Sam, one of your team members, has missed two project deadlines in a row. Instead of giving instructions, you choose to coach.

Stage	You ask	Sam responds
G	“What would you like to get out of this conversation?”	“I want to find a way to hit my deadlines without working late every night.”
R	“What’s actually happening at the moment?”	“I keep getting pulled into ad-hoc requests. I start the day with a plan and lose it by 10am.”
O	“What could you try?” ... “What else?”	“Block two hours in the morning. Triage requests rather than say yes straight away. Ask you to redirect non-urgent things.”
W	“Which will you do, and by when?”	“I’ll block 9–11 from tomorrow and trial the triage approach for two weeks. Can we review at our 1:1 a week on Tuesday?”

Notice how the manager never told Sam what to do, and yet Sam left the conversation with a clear plan, owned the actions and felt trusted.

## Do This, Avoid That

Do	Avoid
Listen far more than you speak. Aim for around 80% listening.	Don’t jump in with advice, opinions or your own story.
Ask open questions that begin with What, How, or When.	Avoid “Why” questions — they can feel like an interrogation.
Let silence do the work; pause after asking a question.	Don’t fill silences or finish the coachee’s sentences.
Reflect back what you hear to check understanding.	Avoid leading questions disguised as coaching (“Have you thought about...?”).
Hold the person as capable, resourceful and able to find their own answers.	Don’t skip the Reality stage — it is where insight happens.
Agree clear, specific actions and a follow-up date before closing the conversation.	Don’t end without a clear commitment and a date to review.



## When to Use GROW — and When Not To

GROW works best when the person is empowered to act and just needs help thinking it through. It is excellent for development conversations, problem-solving, career discussions and performance dips.

It is not the right tool for every situation. Use a different approach when there is a safeguarding, conduct or disciplinary concern (which needs a more formal process, not so much coaching); when the person genuinely lacks the knowledge or skill (they need teaching or training first); or when there is a true emergency (give clear direction, then coach afterwards to embed learning).

## Reflection for the Manager

**Before your next 1:1, take five minutes to consider:**

- Which of my team members would benefit most from a coaching conversation this week?
- Am I using questions as often as time permits, rather than just “tell”?
- Which stage of GROW do I tend to rush through, and what happens as a result?
- How will I know that my coaching is making a difference?

## Further Reading and Support

Whitmore, J. (2017). *Coaching for Performance: The Principles and Practice of Coaching and Leadership* (5th edn). Nicholas Brealey Publishing.

Rogers, J. (2016). *Coaching Skills: The Definitive Guide to Being a Coach* (4th edn). Open University Press.

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