

peer coaching guidelines

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DISCLAIMER

This publication contains information which is current as at November 2012. Changes in circumstances after this date may affect the accuracy of the information contained herein. WhyDev takes all due care to ensure that the information contained herein is accurate but reserves the right to vary any information described in this publication without notice.

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Dear Peer Coach,

Welcome to the Peer Coaching Pilot Program! We are delighted that you have signed up to be a peer coach.

The Peer Coaching Program Pilot was put together by [WhyDev](#), with the help of Shana Montesol Johnson of [Development Crossroads](#) in order to support aid workers in connecting with each other across the globe.

The purpose of this document is to give you the information you need to get started as a peer coach. We'll explain what peer coaching is, what to do once you're matched with a partner peer coach, and how to handle your first peer coaching session.

We've also included a section with ideas on how to be an effective peer coach, and a note on what to do if you need professional psychological support during the program.

Since this program is a pilot, we need your input and feedback. We'll be sending you an email in a few weeks to find out if this document is helpful, and how we can make it even more useful and relevant.

In the meantime, if you have any suggestions, questions, or comments, please drop us a line at coaching@whydev.org.

We wish you a rewarding, productive, and fun peer coaching experience.

Best wishes from,

Brendan, Weh, Allison, Daniel (WhyDev) and Shana (Development Crossroads)

10th November, 2012



I'm not suggesting that you become a professional coach, or pretend to be one. Informal coaching connections aren't a replacement for professional coaching or counseling support, which should be sought when problems in your life reach the point where you are unable to deal effectively with them with the resources you've currently got at your disposal. Rather, I'm offering ideas that, short of professional counseling, can help you and your friends, colleagues, and family members help each other in your efforts to create change.

(Friedman, 2010)

What is peer coaching?

You may have heard of professional life coaching, career coaching or executive coaching. A qualified, trained, and paid coach works in partnership with a client “in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximize their personal and professional potential” (International Coach Federation, 2011).

The client is considered the expert in his/her life and work and is seen as “creative, resourceful, and whole” - not someone in trouble who needs fixing or rescuing. The coach discovers, clarifies, and aligns with what the client wants to achieve; encourages client self-discovery; elicits client-generated solutions and strategies; and holds the client responsible and accountable.

Peer coaching is similar to professional coaching in the sense that it assumes that the person being coached (the “coachee”) is the the expert in his/her life and work. Similar to professional coaching, the peer coach will encourage the coachee to discover the answers for him/herself rather than giving advice. The coachee is considered to be “creative, resourceful, and whole.”

One main difference between peer coaching and professional coaching is that the person doing the coaching is not a professional coach, but a peer. A peer coach is someone who is at a similar level to you in your organisation, or in another organisation.

Like professional coaching, peer coaching is different than mentoring or advising. It is not based on the premise that your peer coach knows better or is more experienced than you.

A peer coach's job is not to give you advice or tell you what they think you should do. A peer coach's role is to listen, to provide a sounding board, and to help you find the answers yourself.



Figure 1.0 Unlike traditional coaching or mentoring relationships, peer coaching exists on a horizontal or equal basis.

Peer coaching can help you to identify goals that you want to achieve, and improve your performance in working towards those goals. Being coached by a peer can help you gain clarity, question your assumptions, learn, get unstuck, develop options, and take action.

Peer coaching often leads to the creation of a safe environment, as communication between peers often seems less intimidating than that between people with power differences, such as an employee and a supervisor, or a young professional and a seasoned mentor. Furthermore, you might be surprised that you can learn more from your peer than from senior counterparts or supervisors.



Coaching, to put it simply, is the process of helping others to improve performance now and developing their capacity to perform well in the future...Peer-to-peer coaching is fun, because it involves learning and solving real problems; it's free; and, I've found, just about anyone can do it.

(Friedman, 2010).

Peer coaching is:

- *Trust-based.* Perhaps the most important aspect of any peer coaching partnership is trust. To get the most out of your partnership, to be able to open up to your coach, you need to trust them.
- *Confidential.* It is crucial that everything said and shared in the context of the coaching relationship is confidential and not discussed outside your peer coaching partnership.
- *Supportive.* A peer coach may acknowledge his/her coachee (e.g. "You have worked really hard to find ways to communicate effectively with your boss") and show empathy ("You are feeling really frustrated by this latest project set-back").
- *Reciprocal.* Peer coaches take turns coaching each other, usually during set periods of time (e.g. you coach me for 30 minutes, and then I coach you for 30 minutes).
- *Mutual learning.* Both the coachee and the coach can learn a great deal through a coaching session.
- *A lot of listening.* During a coaching session, the coachee will typically do most of the talking. Your role as a peer coach is to actively listen without judgment or evaluation.
- *A little reflection, paraphrasing, and questioning.* A peer coach will paraphrase what he/she is hearing (e.g., "So you're saying that you would really like to have more responsibility at work, specifically in terms of interacting with X stakeholders on Y project."). A peer coach will share a reflection or observation, e.g. "You said in the beginning of the session that you really wanted X but I have heard you mention three times how much you are trying to Y." A peer coach will ask questions (for more on this, please refer to "[How to be an effective peer coach](#)" on page 9)

Peer coaching is not:

- *It is not giving advice.* A peer coach does not tell his/her coachee what to do, or even suggest his/her own ideas. A peer coach elicits the ideas from the coachee - "What are your options? Let's make a list."
- *It is not mentoring.* A peer coach is not, by definition, more senior or experienced than the coachee. A peer coach does not advise or guide the coachee based on his/her more extensive experience. A peer coach does not say, "I have been there and done that, and I will help you to do it too."
- *It is not hanging out with a friend and complaining, bragging, or whinging.* A peer coaching session is a time for you to share your thoughts, feelings, struggles, musings, questions, doubts and triumphs. However, it is not merely a conversation with a friend. Your peer coach will be doing a lot more listening than the typical friend does, and a lot less sharing, opining, and talking. Make the most of your peer coaching session by treating it as such.
- *It is not one person sharing their technical expertise with another.* Peer coaching is not an opportunity for your peer coach to teach you what they know about monitoring and evaluation, global health, microfinance, or putting together project budgets. There is a place for that and a need for those kinds of conversations, but those are not peer coaching. Please see the "[Peer Coaching forum on AidSource](#)" on page 14 to learn how you can connect with others to discuss broader issues.
- *It is not counseling.* Although coaching is sometimes confused with counseling or therapy, there is a distinction. Peer coaching is intended for individuals who want to take action and make behavior changes in working towards their professional and personal goals. Psychotherapy is a health care service that diagnoses and treats mental health issues. Please see the section on "[Professional support during the program](#)" on page 13 for more information on what to do if issues surface during your peer coaching that are more psychological in nature.

I have been assigned a peer coach, now what?

1. Make contact with your partner (via email or Skype)
2. Set up a time for a getting-to-know-you Skype call. This will not be a coaching call, but just a time for you to get acquainted with your partner and talk about how you want to conduct your coaching partnership. **We suggest about an hour for this conversation.**
3. Before your call, be sure to finish reading through WhyDev's Peer Coaching Guidelines (the document you are currently reading) to learn more about peer coaching. If you have any questions, please send them to coaching@whydev.org.
4. Before your call, read, and work through, the Peer Coaching Agreement provided separately. This document lists several aspects of the coaching partnership for you to consider and decide on. The interactive document will guide you through a set of options for each of these, which you can select within the document, and print out to have on hand to discuss in your call with your peer coach.
5. Have the first getting-to-know-you call with your peer coach. The purpose of the call is to become acquainted with each other, and also to discuss and agree on your Peer Coaching Agreement.
 - Allot time to get acquainted; don't simply focus on discussing the Peer Coaching Agreement. You may want to ask your peer coach to share a bit about where they're from, where they live now, what their work is like, who the important people in their professional and personal lives are, what they do for fun or why they signed up for the Peer Coaching Program.
 - Feel free to share your own information with them, and you may even wish to go deeper and discuss some of your current goals, what worries or stresses you, what motivates and inspires you. Remember that you are just getting started, laying the foundation for a trust-based partnership. Share what you feel comfortable sharing at this stage.
 - If each person has completed the sample agreement document on their own, the two of you can compare notes and see where there are any areas of differing opinion. Discuss these and come up with an agreement. You can then go back to a blank sample agreement, populate it with your agreed-upon choices, and print out (or save) copies for each of you.

Your first peer coaching session

Once you've had your initial Skype call with your peer coach, and have reached a consensus on your Peer Coaching Agreement, it's time for your first peer coaching session.

1. Prepare for your session

- Don't just schedule the session, and then forget about it until the time of the call. Think in advance about what you want to discuss with your peer coach. This will help you make the most of your time during the session.
- Review the "[How to be an effective peer coach](#)" section of this document, starting on page 9.
- Listen to the recording of the sample peer coaching session, which can be downloaded from WhyDev [here](#). This sample will give you a sense of what peer coaching is like.

2. Sample agenda for the call

- **Decide who will coach first and who will be the coachee.**
You may decide this at the start of each call, or you may simply agree to alternate, so that if you coached first in the previous session, you will be the coachee first in the following session.
- **Take care of any logistics or housekeeping matters before you begin coaching.**
For example, conduct a quick sound check to be sure your audio is acceptable, let your peer coach know if for some reason you don't have the full allotted time for the call.
- **Ask an opening question.**
If you are peer coaching first, help your partner get started by asking him/her an opening question such as "What do you want to talk about today?" or "What would you like to get out of our session?" or "What would you like to focus on?"
- **Coach your partner.**
Refer to the "[How to be an effective peer coach](#)" section of this document, starting on page 9.
- **Take your turn as coachee.**
- **Before you end the call, take a few minutes for a quick debrief.**
Each partner can share thoughts on what worked well for them, and what could be improved next time.

3. Follow up after the call

- The amount of interaction between coaching sessions is up to you and your peer coach.
- If, as a result of the peer coaching session, you have agreed to take a particular action, you may wish to update your peer coach about your progress. This can enhance the accountability dimension of peer coaching, and encourage you to take more action.
- If your peer coach has agreed to take on a particular action, you may wish to touch base with him/her between sessions to check in and see how it's going - as long as you have gotten his/her permission during the coaching session to do so (otherwise, it may be perceived as nagging).

How to be an effective peer coach

To have a successful and meaningful peer coaching partnership, you will need to act as both a coach and a coachee. To be an effective coach requires certain skills and techniques. It is not simply a matter of winging it. It takes time and practice.

Don't let that scare you off. If you are willing to *actively* listen, you can be a great peer coach. Active listening is the core skill that a peer coach needs in order to be effective.

“Wait a minute!” you might be thinking. “Doesn't a peer coach need to give brilliant advice, help their coachee see things in a different light, and provide feedback and tips?” Don't underestimate the power of listening. Consider this:

“Real help, professionally or personally, consists of listening to people, of paying respectful attention to people so that they can access their own ideas first. Usually the brain that contains the problem also contains the solution -- often the best one. When you keep that in mind...people around you end up with better ideas.

This is not to say that advice is never a good thing or that your ideas are never needed. Sometimes your suggestions are exactly what the person wants and needs....But don't rush into it. Give people a chance to find their own ideas first. That chance will take more time than you probably feel comfortable with.

(Kline, 1999 p.39).



Five active listening skills for effective peer coaching

Active listening is a person's willingness and ability to hear and understand what others are saying. Most of us know what active listening is but we don't necessarily know what to do to be really good at it. By learning and practicing the skills and behaviors of active listening, we can all become better listeners and as a result better peer coaches (and leaders, team members, parents, friends, spouses/partners...the list goes on!).

1. Pay attention

One of the main aims of active listening is to set a comfortable tone and allow time and opportunity for your coachee to think and speak. As you listen, do your best to remain focused; avoid letting your mind wander. One trick to doing this is to constantly set before yourself the goal of being able to paraphrase back the last sentence your partner has said.

Since you'll be peer coaching at a distance, you won't have the cues of body language and other non-verbals. Pay attention to their tone of voice, speed of speech, and volume. Notice if there are shifts in the other person's language, voice, even the energy level you sense in their speaking.

Above all, keep your focus on what your coachee is saying, and try not to let your attention switch to what you would say in response, what advice you would give or what question you would ask.

2. Hold judgment

Active listeners keep an open mind. They are open to new ideas, perspectives and possibilities. Tell yourself, "I am here to understand how the other person sees this situation. I need to wait before expressing my opinion or making a judgment." Don't jump in immediately with advice or to solve the problem. Listen and pay attention.

Use empathy. Empathy is the ability to be aware of, understand and appreciate the feelings and thoughts of others. It shows respect for the other person and his or her views and experiences. Empathy statements often begin with "You." For example, "You feel excited about working on this new project."

Be patient. In normal conversation, when there is a lull or a silence, we rush in to fill the gap. In coaching, silence can be enormously productive. It can signal that the coachee is thinking. Try to let the silence last a bit longer than what you would normally be comfortable with. If you're not sure of it, you can ask, "What more do you think, or feel, or want to say?"

Minimise distractions. Close windows on your computer other than Skype or whichever tool you are using for your peer coaching session. Do not multi-task! Do not check emails, tweet, or look at LOLcatz while you are peer coaching.

Allow pauses and be comfortable with silence. Great listening also involves being comfortable with silence.

3. Reflect

Imagine you are holding up a mirror; reflect the information and emotions without agreeing or disagreeing. For example, “You were feeling overwhelmed last week by all the event planning tasks.”

Paraphrase. Show that you are following the conversation and keeping track of the facts by paraphrasing - a brief periodic recap of key points. Statements such as “What I’m hearing is...” or “Let me check that I understand you correctly...” allow you to check that there are no miscommunications and demonstrate to the other person that you understand their perspective. Rephrasing your coachee’s perspective may help him/her to: (a) feel heard, which can be encouraging and empowering; and (b) refine his/her own thinking.

4. Ask questions

Questions are important tools in a coaching conversation. They can help further a coachee’s thinking, or highlight their limiting assumptions, or bring greater clarity.

Open-ended questions draw people out and encourage them to give additional information or ideas. They can also allow you to uncover hidden issues. They encourage people to reflect rather than become defensive. Some examples of open-ended questions include:

- “What could you do?”
- “What impact is this having on you?”
- “What is stopping you from doing that?”

Questions can help your peer coachee to think further about a particular topic. Don’t worry about making your questions too fancy - the simpler, the better. One of the most powerful questions a peer coach can ask is “What more do you think, or feel, or want to say?”

5. Summarise

At various points in the coaching session, and certainly at the end, the peer coach may make a brief statement of what has been said by the coachee. This can help the coachee to see and reflect on what they said. Briefly summarize what you have understood from the session: “It sounds like your main concern is....”

You can also ask your coachee to summarize what they have said. Especially if their sharing has been far-ranging, this can be helpful in consolidating their thinking.

A few notes on questions

- Avoid asking “Why?” This tends to put people on the defensive. If a “why” question comes to mind, simply rephrase it. Instead of asking, “Why did you do that?” you can ask, “What was the thinking behind that decision?”
- Avoid double-barreled questions or questions within questions. Try to keep your questions simple and to the point. You aren’t trying to look smart by asking questions, you are trying to help your peer coachee improve his/her thinking.
- Avoid leading questions. The purpose of asking questions is to help your coachee to think more clearly, discover his/her own answers and the best path forward for them. Don’t use questions to subtly (or not-so-subtly) convey your opinion or give advice. For example, “Don’t you think you should...” or “Wouldn’t it be better if you...”
- Questions are great, but don’t treat a peer coaching session like an interrogation, or even an interview. Let your coachee drive the session in the direction they want it to go.

Coaching should lead to action

Ideally, the coaching process will lead to the coachee taking action to change or improve a critical area of his/her work or life. The chances that this overall action will take place are better if each coaching session leads to a specific action.

This is not a hard-and-fast rule. There very well may be some coaching sessions that are mostly talking, questioning, sharing, and reflecting, and there may be no specific action that emerges as a result. (Although even in this kind of coaching session, a follow-up action could be “think more about this.” Yes, “thinking about” qualifies as an action.)

To support your peer coachee in taking action, you may want to ask him/her questions such as:

- “What is your next step in terms of [topic being discussed]? By when will you accomplish this?”
- “How will you measure progress?”
- “What stands in the way, and how will you overcome these barriers?”
- “How will you generate needed support/energy/resources?”

You may also ask your peer coachee if he/she would like you to follow up via email before your next session to check in on progress in this area. This type of accountability can be helpful to some people, while others may feel nagged. Find out what your peer coachee’s preference is, and feel free to share yours as well.

When do I get to tell them what I think?

It is hard work to listen without giving advice, suggestions, or opinions. It is not how most of us have been socialised and educated. However, it can be very powerful for the coachee to be listened to without agenda, without someone trying to swoop in and fix things or give an opinion.

If you have an idea or suggestion that you are just dying to share, you may consider, towards the end of the coaching session, asking your coachee, “Would you be interested to hear an idea that may be relevant to your situation?” If you wait until the end of the session, you may find that the coachee covers this idea in their sharing, or you may find, as you listen and find out about the situation, that it is less relevant.

If you do share an idea with your coachee, you may wish to follow up at the end of the session or via email afterward, to find out how they received it, and how it affected the coaching experience for them.

Professional psychological support during the program

Research has clearly shown that aid/development workers can develop, and suffer from, high levels of stress, compassion fatigue, burnout, and other mental health issues. We do not expect peer coaches to be able to address such issues during the program. This is beyond the scope of the program, and beyond your ability as a peer coach.

If you feel that you would like to seek professional psychological advice, WhyDev can put you in touch with Alessandra Pigni. Alessandra is an accredited psychologist and founder of [Mindfulness for NGOs](#).



Please contact the WhyDev team at coaching@whydev.org and we will be more than happy to refer you to Alessandra. She offers a free introductory session over Skype. Please note that Alessandra's services, after an initial session, are fee-based. WhyDev does not cover the costs of her services, nor does WhyDev financially benefit from referrals. Alessandra is providing technical advice and support to WhyDev, is informed about the peer coaching program, and will be ready to respond to any requests.

If, at any time you feel that you, or your peer coach, may want to chat about mental health issues, do not hesitate to contact us. All communication is confidential and respect for your privacy is paramount.

Peer Coaching Forum on Aidsource

Although peer coaching is not about social chatter, sharing technical expertise or where to find the best coffee in Nairobi, there is a space for it. WhyDev has teamed up with the creators of AidSource, the humanitarian social network, to give all the peer coaches a private space to open the discussion to broader issues.

AIDSOURCE
(The Humanitarian Social Network)

All Groups My Groups

WhyDev Peer Coaching
Created by AidSource Send Message View Groups

INFORMATION

This group is for WhyDev Peer Coaches to hang out, chat, share and learn with one another during the program.

If you have any questions, comments or feedback related to peer coaching, you can contact the WhyDev team at: coaching@whydev.org

Otherwise, this space is for you!

Website: <http://www.whydev.org/peer-coaching>
Members: 4
Latest Activity: Sep 27

SHARE Edit

+ Add Text - Put text, HTML, videos, photos, or any third-party widgets here.

DISCUSSION FORUM Edit

+ Add a Discussion

WHYDEV BLOG Edit

Catapult: The exciting new crowdfunding platform for NGOs
Catapult, which went live in beta form on October 11, is dedicated to promoting equality for women and girls by giving women and girl-focused organizations a place to campaign online. Tanya Cothran caught up with Maz Kessler, founder and creative director of Catapult, about the new crowd-funding platform and how it is changing the game.

Did the Global Citizen Festival end global poverty?
WhyDev's Brendan Rigby won the lottery to attend the Global Citizen Festival in New York. However, as he does not live anywhere near New York, Brendan

BRENDAN RIGBY

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Alerts
Friends - Invite
Settings

Send Message to Group
Leave Group

MEMBERS (4)

Follow New Members

+ Invite More View All

PAGES (0)

+ Add a Page

Follow @AidSource1

Find us on Facebook

AidSource
Like You like this.
573 people like AidSource.
Rishita Dave Casey
Facebook social plugin

LATEST ACTIVITY

What are you doing?
140 Share

Soledad Muñoz shared J.'s blog post on Twitter
Of missionaries and misfits
4 hours ago

This is your space to chat, share, and learn during the program. You can even connect with the WhyDev team, who will be on hand to moderate and share.

To join, please [sign up](#) to AidSource, and then apply to be part of the WhyDev Peer Coaching group here: <http://aidsource.ning.com/group/whydev-peer-coaching>. This group is exclusive to members of our Peer Coaching program only.

If you have any questions or comments, please contact coaching@whydev.org

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