

INSIGHT GUIDE # 7

EXECUTIVE EDUCATION

How can I use GROW to help my coaching clients?

Developed by Sir John Whitmore, Graham Alexander and Alan Fine, the GROW model was tested in organisational settings, where it produced business and individual benefits. Its origins are in behavioural thinking and it focuses on outcomes. While the GROW model is action-oriented, it also enhances learning.

The model comprises four phases, which are deployed flexibly by the coach. While the coach may use GROW to structure a session, the conversation may involve movement back and forth between phases to strengthen the outcomes.

GROW can be integrated with other coaching techniques and is also used beyond coaching as a problem-solving process.



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G – establishing the goal

The first phase involves you helping your coachee to establish the desired outcome of the coaching conversation. The GROW model enables your coachee to act based on a deeper understanding of their topic and the options for addressing it. Helping them establish a clear purpose for the conversation is an important start to this process. This might be straightforward if your coachee has a specified topic they want to explore. However, they may be unsure what would be a useful focus, or have an unclear notion of a useful outcome.

Your role is to help your coachee establish clarity about the purpose of the coaching conversation, taking account of the time you have available. Wider contextual factors will shape the goal, particularly in a workplace setting where the coaching effort will be focused on enhancing performance.

Sometimes the goal emerges, or needs to be amended, once your coachee has explored the next phase of GROW – the **reality** of the situation. The model is intended to be flexible and adaptable to the requirements of a particular coachee. Another key aspect of this phase is enabling your coachee to get a strong sense of what a good outcome will look and feel like, as a means of evaluating progress.

While the GROW model offers an effective problem-solving method, the conversation might focus on a success story, rather than a challenge or difficulty, to identify learning that is transferable to other settings.

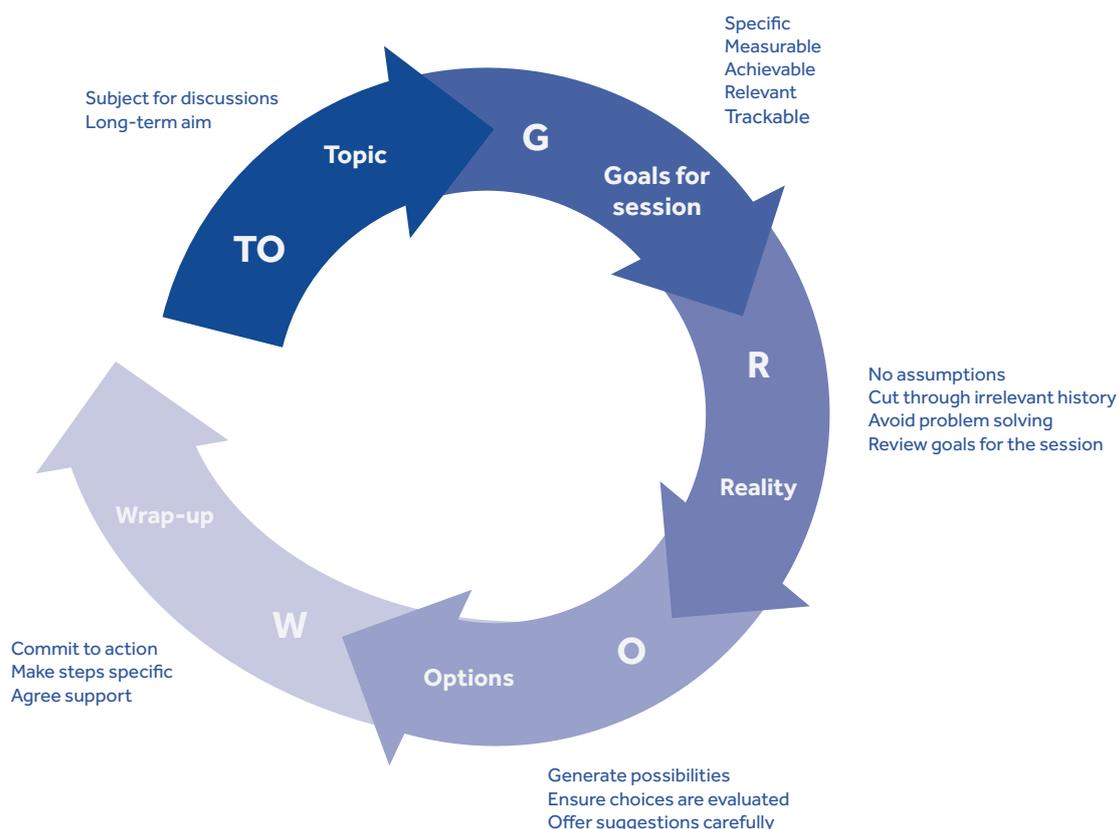
Some helpful questions:

- 'We have an hour together, what do you want to leave the room having achieved in that time?'
- 'What are you hoping to achieve through this goal?'
- 'It's 6 months from now and you've achieved your goal – what does that look and feel like?'
- 'How does that goal help you fulfil your role in the organisation?'

R – exploring the current reality

In the second phase you are encouraging your coachee to explore the current situation as it relates to their chosen topic. Often, busy people want to move to action quickly with a limited understanding of the issues involved. Here, you are helping your coachee to stand back and, through your open questions, take time to reflect on all the ramifications of the situation, based on Charles Kettering's maxim: 'A problem well-stated is a problem half-solved.' In addition to broadening and deepening your coachee's understanding, the rich picture produced will form a strong foundation for the next phase, generating **options**. Likely points of focus might include actions to date, blockages to achieving the desired outcome, examining the situation from a number of different perspectives, identifying causes and effects, and thinking about impacts on the coachee's performance and that of their colleagues. Possible solutions may begin to emerge from these considerations. It will be important for you to help your coachee to 'park' these and return to a focus on the *current* reality.

Figure 1: GROW model





their range of options, evaluate their potential and come to some well-substantiated conclusions about possible ways forward. Deciding which option(s) to pursue happens in the final phase of GROW, so encourage your coachee to stay focused on generating and evaluating possibilities.

Some helpful questions:

- 'What could you do to move towards your goal? What else could you do? And what else?'
- 'What would happen if you did nothing?'
- 'Have you encountered something like this before? What worked then that might work now?'
- 'Think of someone who does this kind of thing really well – what do they do that you could try?'

W – establishing ways forward and the will (commitment to action)

By this point in the GROW conversation some effective ways forward may have emerged. The **W** phase involves you in helping your coachee to pinpoint specific options they will take forward. Clearly their action plan needs to lead to the achievement of the goal for the conversation. Encourage your coachee to think about any obstacles they may encounter and how they will address them. It is also helpful to focus them on the support they may need from others and how this will be mobilised. You may need to help them assess how realistic the scale of their action plan is given their circumstances. Getting them to identify how they will action the very first step in their plan will enable your coachee to make a concrete start.

The W also stands for **will**, or your coachee's commitment to following up on the outcomes of the conversation. This may involve checking their motivation to act. Some coaching writers suggest that rehearsing the next steps will help to consolidate their commitment (Hawkins & Smith, 2006).

Bear in mind that while follow-on action from the session is important, particularly for changing behaviour and enhancing performance, some conversations will produce learning or insights that are valuable but do not readily translate into specific action points. For example, there may be less focus on 'doing' and more on increasing understanding of a situation or awareness raising of the coachee's feelings about the topic and their impact on their performance.

Some helpful questions:

- 'Which of all the options you've come up with will you take forward?'
- 'What support do you need from your organisation? How will you go about getting that?'
- 'On a scale of 1–10 (where 10 is high), how committed are you to your plan of action?'
- 'What's the **very first step** you're going to take?'

Remember that the coaching conversation is in the service of your coachee. Be wary when asking questions. The purpose of questions is not to elicit factual information that builds your own understanding; in coaching, it is to deepen your coachee's self-awareness and understanding.

Some helpful questions:

- 'What have you done so far to move towards your goal? What have you learned from that?'
- 'What is happening now? What is the effect of that?'
- 'What is working well right now?'
- 'What constraints stop you moving towards your goal? What's **really** stopping you?'

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O – generating options

As with the **reality** phase it is vital here that you create the space for your coachee to explore, avoiding any temptation to jump to quick conclusions. They need to take time to brainstorm as many options for moving forward as possible so they have a range of alternatives from which to choose. If a very detailed picture has been created at the **reality** phase, your coachee will have a good foundation for generating ideas. It can be helpful to encourage your coachee to think of 'off-the-wall' ideas as well as those that may seem more obviously feasible. Sometimes there is the kernel of something very useful in the apparently crazy possibilities. Through this process you are enabling your coachee to look at things from new angles.

They may come up with ideas that are completely novel, or the options they generate may be adaptations of, or help to confirm, existing thinking. What is important here is that you enable your coachee, through your open questions, to expand

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The Centre provides formal accredited coach training through our *Professional Certificate in Coaching* and *MSc in Coaching and Behavioural Change*, and accredited supervision training through our *Professional Certificate in Supervision*. These programmes are delivered in the UK at our Greenlands campus, and at venues across the world.

The Centre provides continuous professional development for coaching professionals through masterclasses, webinars, conferences, and via online access to journals, ebooks and coaching research. These are all delivered through our online learning platform, meaning coaches can connect from anywhere in the world to engage in professional development.

The Henley coaching team consists of leading practitioners and academics who have shaped the coaching profession since the late 1990s. They have written many of the most popular coaching books and they continue to publish in leading management journals and to contribute at conferences worldwide. Their writing, thinking and research informs our teaching and ensures our programmes are at the cutting edge of coaching practice.

The Centre offers annual membership to all professional coaches, providing a virtual-learning environment where the members shape research and practice in coaching. Check out our website for details on how we can help you and your business come to life.



David Love

David is a visiting tutor on the Henley coaching programmes and co-author of *Advanced Coaching Practice*.

References

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Henley Business School

For more information, please contact:

Henley Business School
Greenlands
Henley-on-Thames
Oxfordshire
RG9 3AU

coaching@henley.ac.uk
Tel +44 (0)1491 418 767
henley.ac.uk/coachingcentre



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