



Tips for Coaching Someone Remotely

Don't dictate the medium. You may prefer phone or video, or your organization may rely on one more than the other. But for coaching conversations, it's important that both parties choose what's right for the situation, rather than have it dictated by you as the leader or the organizational culture.

Both phone and video can work well for coaching. One isn't better than the other, but they are *different*, and it's important to get a sense of which medium will work best for each relationship (this may change from call to call). Video can provide helpful visual context, but it can also be a distraction, particularly if there's a poor internet connection. Try experimenting with both phone and video to see what works best with different employees.

Email can play a useful role in coaching but must be used in addition to phone or video conversations. You can email clients and students follow-up questions and links to readings and other resources, but it's much less useful for in-the-moment coaching. Text and chat provide a sense of immediate connection, but it's difficult to use them to convey anything more complex than basic information.

Location still matters. The physical setting can have a significant impact on the success of a coaching conversation. When coaching clients and students in person, meeting in a place that will allow for privacy and minimize distractions is the norm. This can take many forms, from a reserved conference room to a long walk outdoors.

Because it's far more difficult to pick up on interpersonal cues when working virtually, it's even more important to ensure that you and the other person are in a private, comfortable space where you won't be interrupted.

Focus, focus, focus. Effective coaching in any setting requires focused attention on the other person. That can be tough when we're coaching virtually because of the pervasiveness of multitasking. A virtual coaching conversation is a special kind of interaction — very different from a typical conference call or online meeting, where we can often just partly tune in and still get the gist. When we're coaching, the most important details are easy to miss. If we allow ourselves to become distracted, we'll be less likely to notice things like a subtle change in someone's facial expression or tone of voice or an unusual turn of phrase that may signify something more. We may also fail to monitor our own emotional responses and instincts,

Adapted from an article by Ed
Batista | March 18, 2015

<https://hbr.org/2015/03/tips-for-coaching-someone-remotely>

Batista, Ed. (2015, March 18). Tips for Coaching Someone Remotely. *Harvard Business Review*.

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which are vital sources of data. Even worse, others can sense when our attention wanders, leaving them reluctant to discuss truly important issues.

Manage the time. In most meetings, including phone calls and video conferences, the discussion goes right up until the end of the allotted time, at which point we rapidly conclude and move on to the next meeting. This is another way in which coaching conversations are different: It's part of your job, as the coach, to track time during the conversation — I usually set a timer to minimize distractions — and stop at a point you've agreed on in advance. Also, leave enough time at the end to plan the action steps between sessions.