

# HeartWood

*Centre for Community Youth Development*

## Professional Development Resource

### Coaching ~ A Hip-Pocket Guide To The Coaching Role

#### What is Coaching?

Coaching is about supporting others to discover and develop their vision and capacity. The coaching role is different in every situation. Included here are a few guiding principles that we have found helpful in our work as coaches. This information applies equally to organizations and to the role that supportive adults can take with young people who are volunteering with an organization, especially for the first time.

The following tips and stories emerged as several community-based organizations undertook a collaborative learning and action initiative to involve young people in meaningful ways as volunteers in programs and services, as well as organizational structures (e.g., governance bodies) and processes (e.g., development of programs and services). The initiative was anchored in coaching relationships between the organizations and, as a result, much was learned about the underlying principles of coaching and the coaching role.

#### Building The Relationship

Relationships are the foundation of coaching. In both individuals and organizations, the growth and development require equal amounts of support and challenge.

*“I think that the support we have had from an organization like HeartWood being constantly behind us and supporting what we are doing has helped the YWCA say ‘yes we are ready, we want to engage in strategic planning’”-YWCA Program Staff*

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| Respect | Balanced, reciprocal relationships are the foundation of coaching. Mutually agreed upon outcomes must be developed through collaboration and respect.  |
| Trust   | It's good to have a good program design, appropriate organizational structure, and strategy, but what is most important is the process of building relationships. Increased trust sets the stage for innovation. |

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Patience Change takes time. It takes time for ideas to permeate an organization, and for action to occur. The logistics of getting people together is challenging within a limited time frame, particularly in working with volunteers. The coach should facilitate discussion as goals are achieved and obstacles continue to emerge. Make long-term as well as short-term goals so that people can see results.

Preparation Preparation time is important. The coaches themselves need to be engaged from the start of the project, and know that they will gain as much from the experience as those being coached. It is also vital to invest in preparation with partners. Taking the time to build relationships of support and trust will lay the foundation for successful coaching.

Learning Coaching is a learning process. Take time to reflect and to document ongoing learning that can help evolve your process.

Roles Organizations face challenges in mobilizing resources, and often have multiple levels of authority through which decision-making occurs. Coaches can play an important role in facilitating discussion around decision-making authority and getting clarity about roles within the organization.

*At the Metro Food Bank Society a task team was assembled to work with HeartWood to engage youth as volunteers. At the initial planning stages it was unclear whether this committee was empowered to make decisions to see the project through to completion, or whether they needed approval from the Executive Director. The coach organized a planning meeting with the ED and committee where decision-making authority was given to the task team which empowered them to make an action plan for the next stage of the project.*

Coaches need to be clear about what their own role is and isn't. Coaches don't have all the answers; rather they provide support and resources and draw on existing assets.

Success Success in your coaching role is independent from program goals – your success as a coach is not dependent on specific organizational outcomes.

Clarity Work towards clearly defined goals and action plans so that outcomes can be easily measured, and learning can be captured.

Flexibility Coaching roles and relationships are emergent: circumstances will change and learning will continue as you go along. Be prepared to adapt to the needs and objectives of the organization and individuals involved.

*Working with the Metro Food Bank Society the coach had to adapt as original program goals completely changed. A youth-run food delivery service for the homeless transformed into a youth-led school brunch program. Since there was significant energy and excitement around the new plan the coach had to revisit original goals and be willing to initiate a new planning process.*

Commitment In order to ensure a sustainable impact there must be broad organizational commitment to fundamental goals (e.g. engaging youth as volunteers).

- Balance Building capacity for change in individuals and organizations requires a balance between support and challenge.
- Play Balance tasks with fun and games when working with youth and adults.  
*“You’re the fun behind it. The name games, the ice breakers...we would just go in and say ‘hi nice to meet you lets get down to business!’ Your encouragement and positivity is encouraging to us.” – Metro Food Bank Society staff*
- Process Take time to ensure inclusive group processes; don’t assume that people know how to have a good meeting.

## Support

*“What I appreciated most about this experience has been knowing that an organization like HeartWood is there to help, to give support and info to meet our objectives”*

*-Participant HeartWood ‘Engaging Youth as Volunteers’ Workshop*

A coach must provide support before challenge. People must trust that they are supported in a relationship of openness, fairness and mutual respect before they are willing to take risks and make changes.

- Listen Through active listening, coaches are able to encourage meaningful reflection by asking good questions.
- Resources Be prepared to be a source of knowledge and experience.  
*At the YWCA in Halifax, the coach worked with program staff to ground their youth leadership program in principles and theory rather than specific program activities, to encourage flexibility and growth as the program evolved.*
- Empower Encourage and model an asset-based approach that focuses on the existing capacities of organizations and individuals to achieve goals. Remind them of what they are doing right, and work together to build on that where gaps exist. This puts current resources to work, often in new ways, while sending the message that people don’t have to be “trained” to be competent in the specified task. Training becomes knowledge exchange.  
*The Nova Scotia Girl Guides already had an abundance of skills and resources in working with youth when they entered into the CVI Engaging Youth as Volunteers Project. The coach’s role was to draw on, and develop these towards the specific goal of forming a Provincial Youth Council. By asking the right questions and affirming existing knowledge and skills, we could build on their already strong foundation of youth leadership development.*

## Challenge

Challenge helps to develop confidence and decision-making skills. In order to foster innovation and creativity we must let go of the fear of taking risks.

- Motivate Part of the coaching role is to provide encouragement that can move an

organization from talk to action. Through listening and relationship building, a coach should help organizations to feel safe in making smart, accomplishable changes appropriate to their capacities. By seeing success and learning from the results, organizations will be more willing to move forward with next steps towards bigger and deeper change. Without guidance organizations can be drawn to large-scale changes that they may not be ready for which may result in disappointment and move them backwards instead of forwards.

*“ That session with Council was very useful because previously the youth engagement committee had just made a couple of reports to council and it was the kind of thing where everyone thinks ‘this is really nice but what does it mean?’... whereas as the session the [HeartWood coach] led for council was a really good period for them to think about what it could really mean...and what we can do about it”.* – Commissioner Margaret Galbraith, reflecting on the workshop the Nova Scotia Girl Guides Provincial Council

**Step Back** The coaching role evolves throughout the process. The coach becomes less of a voice as groups take over their own process. Coaches need to be keen observers and listeners and have a good understanding of group dynamics in order to know when to step back.

**Focus** Help the group to be clear on what the objectives are, where they stand in the now in relation to these, and what is a realistic time frame

**Question** Ask good questions that promote reflection

*A challenge for the Girl Guides that though they genuinely desire to empower the youth, it is difficult to provide the space for that within long-standing, traditional structures. The coach asked questions to promote dialogue about what significant changes may have to occur in order to truly give youth the freedom to define their own role in the organization.*

**Be Frank** Provide direct, honest feedback about objectives, outcomes and process.

**Appropriate** Encourage development of accomplishable and measurable goals. Offer appropriate challenges that will stimulate growth.

HeartWood worked with three organizations to engage youth as volunteers. Each organization had unique objectives and experience so the coaching roles were quite different. The Girl Guides had an established structure in place in the Youth Engagement Committee. The coach became a sounding board to their process, and a source of knowledge and experience. The YWCA was in the initial stage of implementation for their youth programs. The coach's role focused on defining clear goals and articulating the philosophical foundation of the programs. At the Metro Food Bank Society, the coach entered at the very start of the development of the youth engagement objectives. Initially this involved direct facilitation, but quickly moved towards more supportive listening and asking good questions.