

ICMA | coaching program

Being a great coach, and a winning player

Being a Great Coach. Below are some useful actions a volunteer Coach can take to stimulate a productive coaching discussion. See the video *Being a Great Coach* for illustrations at icma.org/coaching-resources-faqs.

Ask “What are your hopes?” Start your relationship by understanding what’s important to the person you are coaching and, most importantly, why. Help them look a little deeper for what truly interests them.

Serve as a generous listener. A generous listener demonstrates curiosity, a suspension of judgment and evaluation, and a desire to understand the meaning and the motivation of the Player.

Identify concerns and tap their experiences. What stands between them and where they want to be? What issues or obstacles need attention? Use reflective listening (paraphrasing what you hear from them) to help them surface underlying concerns. Listening thoughtfully is a big gift. Then, explore how they have addressed similar challenges before.

Encourage growth and resources. How will they need to grow? What resources do they have? Resources and choices encourage and empower people.

Offer stories and experiences...with permission. If you have insights to add to the Player’s own thinking, ask for permission. Rather than telling people what to do, offer stories about what you’ve seen or experienced that may be relevant to them. Stories help people understand the messages more deeply and integrate them into their own thinking.

Invite a stretch. Sometimes people hold themselves back in their careers. They make too many assumptions about what they think can and can’t happen. Tell the person you are coaching what you want for them. Encourage them to consider a big leap.

Target action. Ask them who could help them achieve their objectives and what actions they’d like to take. Most people need a nudge to take flight and really soar. “Would you like to consider [whatever action seems appropriate]?” You’re not telling them what to do, but you are giving them something concrete to which they can react. Always leave the choice to them. Don’t become attached to your own suggestions.

Celebrate the results!

Being a Winning Player. Your self-motivation provides the energy for your success. A Coach can be helpful as a catalyst to stimulate your thinking, but it's your talent story to write. Below are actions you can take to get the most from coaching. See the video *Being a Winning Player* for illustrations at icma.org/coaching-resources-faqs.

Select a topic of interest. What will be useful to you now? Instead of “just in case” learning, coaching is “just in time” support. Some of the topics coaching might address include: advancing in your career, how to handle a difficult situation, grappling with a technical issue, and many more.

Reach out to a coach. Although volunteer coaches are busy people, they want to support talent development in the profession. Here are some ways you can connect with them:

- Take advantage of *Speed Coaching* and other networking events to meet informally with Coaches and see who might fit.
- Mine your relationships or someone in your ICMA State Association to suggest a Coach.
- Search for a volunteer Coach in *CoachConnect* at coachconnect.chronus.com/about.
- Connect with the ICMA Senior Advisors in a state of interest to you to help you find a match and perhaps offer a warm introduction for you to a Coach. You can find them through the state association websites.

Turn your intentions into results. How will you fulfill the actions you intend to take? What has worked well for you in the past to get things done

successfully?

Clarify confidentiality. Are you concerned about confidentiality? Would you like this to be a confidential conversation? How does that fit with the other roles the Coach plays (as your boss, outside advisor, etc.)?

Provide some brief background about yourself. How would you succinctly describe what's relevant for the Coach to know about you and the topic you've selected. Remember, coaching is about writing the next chapter of your talent story (not rehashing the past).

Express your hopes. Coaches need to know what your hopes are about the topic you've chosen and why they are important to you. This anchors the discussion in what will be fulfilling for you not someone else.

Enjoy the discussion – let the Coach do the coaching and you the playing. One of the great joys of coaching for a Player is that you don't need to have all the answers. It's not a quiz. You can be engaged and yet be relaxed to see what new insights and opportunities arise for you.

Thank your coach for the insights and support. How did the discussion help you clarify your thoughts or galvanize you into action? What did the Coach do that served you especially well?

Find more resources for you and your agency including a template for a **Talent Catalyst coaching conversation**, and more on on the Talent Development page at icma.org/talent-development.

Don Maruska, MBA, JD, Master Certified Coach
Visit the ICMA Coaching Program at icma.org/icma-coaching-program.