

Nesta...

PEER COACHING

Learning Manual

This guide to Peer Coaching has been developed by the Social Enterprise Academy to support learners taking part in the Nesta Creative Enterprise Programme delivered in partnership with the British Council.

The Creative Enterprise Programme provides practical materials and skills training for people who want to plan, build, communicate and launch a creative business. Learning from peers at a similar stage of business development is also invaluable in terms of knowledge sharing and network building. This coaching framework has been designed for creative entrepreneurs to support each other and help each other face their business challenges.

This guide is not designed to be a definitive text on all aspects of coaching skills. It is an introduction to the main concepts and offers guidance towards your personal and organisational development.

As such it seeks to cover the most common questions on the subject. The guide aims to highlight key areas for consideration when developing your skills, yet further advice may need to be sought for more complex or bespoke issues.



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PEER COACHING

What is Peer Coaching?

“Peer coaching is about bouncing ideas off a trusted thinking partner.”

Peer coaching (also known as co-coaching) is a confidential process where two people, who are at a similar level, support each other to work through challenges they are facing.

Peer coaching is based on an equal relationship between peers.

Rather than giving advice or providing solutions, a peer coach's role is to actively listen, provide a sounding board, and most importantly, help the other person find insight and solutions for themselves.

It is therefore a different approach from mentoring or advising. A peer coach is not someone who is more experienced, has more knowledge, or knows better what the other person should do.

During a coaching session, peer coaches take turns to coach each other. A peer coach actively listens without judgment, reflects back what they are hearing, asks incisive questions, and supports their peer coaching partner to decide on a course of action.

A peer coach is neutral and has no vested interest in the outcome of the coaching discussion, other than they want to support and encourage their peer coaching partner to find a solution to the challenges that have been shared.

What you gain from Peer Coaching

There are many benefits to be found from taking part in peer coaching.

- A peer coach can provide you with a chance to talk confidentially about your challenges, and offer encouragement and support. This can be especially useful if you work on your own and can therefore feel isolated.
- A peer coach can help you to figure out what to do next, releasing your own understanding and confidence in finding your own solution, without any hidden agenda or vested interest.
- A peer coach can hold you to account, as you feel obliged to report back to him/her on progress on the actions you have discussed. This can help to give you the push you need to try something new or carry out a difficult task.

- When it is your turn to be the coach, you may find that talking through someone else's challenges provides you with useful insights about challenges you are facing, as it provides a completely different perspective.
- Coaching skills are useful in many different areas of work and life. Being a peer coach enables you to practice and hone these skills so that you will be able to transfer them to a different setting.

Peer Coaching principles

1. Peer coaching takes a **non-directive approach**, where a peer coach's role is to control and facilitate the process of coaching (e.g. by following a coaching model) but not to influence in any way the content of the session.
2. Peer coaches take **equal time** during coaching sessions, each taking turns to be coach and coachee, one after the other.
3. Peer coaches are **equals**. There is no hierarchy during the peer coaching session, even if the people are, in the workplace, at different levels of seniority.

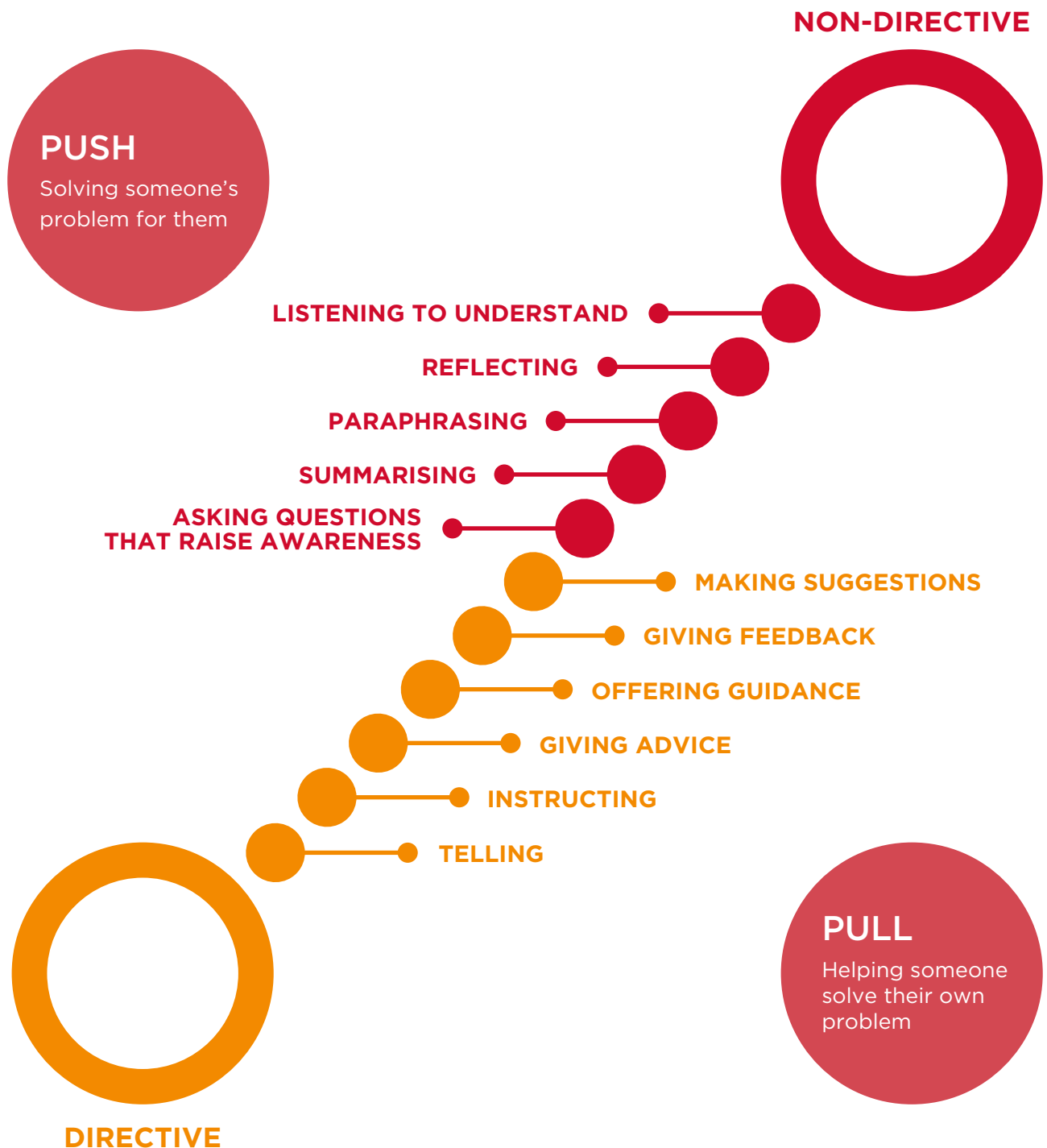
Peer Coaching approach

Where traditional coaching may often be directive in nature, peer coaching is non-directive.

- A peer coach **does not tell or teach the coachee things**. This does not mean that the coach stands by and does nothing, they act as a facilitator for the coachee to come up with their own solutions.
- A peer coach **provides safe space and structured opportunity** - for the coachee to honestly explore and find out things for themselves.
- A peer coach helps the coachee to **review experiences** - so that they reflect on what they have learned.
- A peer coach **asks open questions** - to open the coachee up to a new way of thinking about things.
- A peer coach **holds the coachee to account** - to support the coachee to commit to taking action.

THE COACHING SPECTRUM

One of the core principles of peer coaching is that it is non-directive. Peer coaches aim to use techniques highlighted towards the non-directive end of the coaching spectrum.



COACHING AGREEMENT

Many peer coaches find it useful to make a peer coaching agreement or contract at the beginning of a peer coaching relationship.

A peer coaching contract or agreement will generally cover the following elements:

Specific goals for each person (what do you each want to get out of the peer coaching relationship)

Coaching methods to be used

Confidentiality

Note taking

Timing and how to meet

Measurement of progress

Conditions for termination

Follow-up

Feedback methods in order to ensure both of you are learning and developing as coaches

COACHING PROCESS

Once you have been matched with a partner and have met together (either by Skype, phone or face-to-face) to talk through your coaching agreement, the following guidelines will enable you to get the most out of your subsequent peer coaching sessions.

- **During your coaching session, take equal time as the coach and as the coachee.** Thirty minutes each (for a total of one hour) can work well. However, if you are pressed for time you could shorten the time allocated to each (as long as you both agree!) rather than cancel a session. Even ten minutes each (20 minutes total) can be effective. As you and your peer coach work together, you will find what timings work best for you.
- **As the coachee,** identify what you would like the session to focus on. It could be a work relationship you are finding difficult, a new idea you are thinking of trying or anything else that you would like support in working through. Focus primarily on generating the solutions yourself. The answers you come up with yourself will be significantly more powerful than any advice that someone else – even a skilled coach – can provide.
- **As the peer coach,** give your partner your full attention while they think out loud about what they have chosen to talk about. By giving the other person time and space it enables them to think deeply about the challenges they are facing, allowing deep insights to occur. Provide feedback as needed, but encourage your partner to come up with their own answers.
- **Meetings don't have to be face-to-face.** Face-to-face meetings can be great, but don't let geographic barriers stop you: Skype or telephone calls can also be highly effective.
- **Keep your conversation positive and future focussed.** Don't let your peer coaching sessions turn into a gripe session. It's okay to let off a bit of steam, but limit the complaining if you want the time you invest in peer coaching to be productive and helpful.
- **Focus on action at the end of the session.** At the end of the session it is useful to ask the coachee *"What action are you going to take?"* This ensures the coaching session leads to the coachee doing something new or differently. This will provide the basis for your follow-up next time.
- **Start each session by holding each other to account.** If you close each session by identifying your next action, it becomes easy to start the next coaching session with a debrief about what happened.
- **At the end of each peer coaching session, schedule the next one.** This will help you keep up the momentum.

What should you try to avoid as a coach?

1. RESCUING

It is a basic human impulse to care for the vulnerable. But, if you step in as Rescuer for the coachee, you deny them their ownership of the issue. You are in effect saying they're too frail to solve the problem themselves. So, what if the coachee actually asks you for advice?

Some ways to respond:

- *"What would it do for you to know what I would do?"* In a respectful way, maybe with some gentle humour, i.e. challenge the belief that the answer is 'out there' rather than in themselves
- *"I could tell you what I would do, but you and I are very different people so I'm not sure that would help."* Encourage them to believe that the answer they come up with themselves is the one that will work for them
- Avoid a direct answer and go to a dilemma solving technique such as identifying all the options and then rating them for pluses and minuses

2. COUNSELLING

Counselling often involves 'an emphasis on the powerful comfort of non-judgemental listening....talking (the problem) through extensively, without either counsellor or client feeling any of the obligation to action...'* Peer coaching is much more action focussed than counselling and each session should end with a clear agreement about what action will be taken.

3. MENTORING

A mentor gives relevant opinions or advice based on their level of relevant professional experience. A mentor is more of a 'wise guide'. Generally a mentor is more involved in the content of a conversation, while a coach is more focused on the process of it.*

*Further reading

Starr, J. (2004) 'The Coaching Manual: the Definitive Guide to the Process, Principles and Skills of Personal Coaching.' London: Pearson Education Ltd.

Hill, P. (2004) 'Concepts for Coaching.' London: Institute of Leadership and Management.

PEER COACHING SKILLS AND BEHAVIOURS

Most of the essential skills and behaviours for peer coaching are concerned with being aware of what is going on and helping the coachee become aware of what is going on - in other words, communication.

The main skills and behaviours are listed below.

1. LISTENING

Listening is one of the most important skills needed for coaching. It involves:

- Receiving information.
- Attaching the correct meaning to it.
- Acknowledging it.

It includes listening with our eyes as well as with our ears. Many feelings are expressed in ways other than verbal, in what we call **non-verbal** behaviour or **body language**. Very often we need to 'hear' the sum of all the verbal and non-verbal information in order to interpret what is being said. As well as listening to what is being said, it is important to listen to **how** it is being said. It is also important to **note what is not said**.

2. ATTENDING

Attending is closely associated with listening. It is concerned with showing that you are listening and demonstrating that you care about what the other person is saying. It is important because the better you attend, the more the other person will be prepared to tell you.

Helpful attending behaviours include sitting facing the other person, maintaining helpful eye-contact, keeping a relaxed posture, not interrupting, using encouraging responses like nodding, saying "*mmm*", "*I understand*", "*I see what you mean*", etc.

Non-helpful, non-attending behaviours include doing something else while you are listening, looking away from the other person, interrupting, fidgeting, doodling, sitting at an awkward angle, etc.

3. CLARIFYING

Clarifying is also associated with listening. It means being absolutely sure that you understand what the other person is saying. It includes asking questions, repeating statements, and asking the other person to give more details or to repeat something in a different way.

Obviously the manner in which you clarify things is very important. Questioning must be done in a sympathetic way, and not sound like an interrogation session. Done carefully it has a useful spin-off: it helps to show that you care about what the other person is saying.

4. REFLECTING

Reflecting is linked with clarifying. It consists of repeating back to the other person, in your own words, what you think they have been saying or feeling. It is a means of showing that you have understood what they have said and how they feel.

It takes considerable skill to reflect well. It is important that you really capture the meaning of what has been said and how the person is feeling and that you do not merely repeat it back in the same words. It is also important how you say it.

5. RECOGNISING FEELINGS

Recognising feelings is also linked with listening. It is important that the coach is aware of how the coachee feels about the task, related problems, his/her own abilities, or other people. The coach needs to understand the influence of these feelings.

It is also important for the coach to be aware of, and to recognise his/her own feelings and how these might be influencing the situation.

Feelings are sometimes expressed by what is said or not said, and by actions that are done or not done. They may have to be brought to the surface by careful discussion.

6. SUSPENDING JUDGEMENT

It is very easy, when listening to thoughts and ideas being expressed, to place our own immediate personal value judgements on them. This immediately affects the way we are going to listen (or not to listen) to what is being said.

If we express our value judgements, whether verbally or non-verbally, we will also influence the other person in what they will say or feel.

Although it is difficult, it is therefore very important for the coach to keep an open mind, and to show the other person this, and to suspend judgement for as long as possible until all the relevant issues are explored and revealed.

7. DRAWING OUT

There may be occasions when the coachee is not very forthcoming, or just 'dries up'. In such cases the coach will need to draw them out. Careful use of open questions is required, questions designed to help the coachee focus on relevant issues, to examine their thoughts and feelings, and to express them. Questions such as "*Why?*", "*How do you know that?*", "*What makes you think that?*" are often helpful.

8. SUPPORTING

Sometimes a coachee may go through a period of low confidence in themselves. A coach needs to be able to recognise this and to help the coachee out of it by using supporting behaviours: giving encouragement, helping the coachee recognise the areas in which they have succeeded, declaring confidence in them.

9. USE OF SILENCE

People often feel uncomfortable with silence. When a gap occurs in conversation, they have an urge to fill it, to say something, no matter what. This can hinder a coaching situation. Just as we need paragraphs and gaps on a printed page, so too do we need punctuation in our conversation to allow time and space for reflection, to examine ideas, to get used to concepts, and to develop our thoughts.

A good coach manages silence, using it to ensure that adequate time is given to explore issues, and that the coachee does not feel rushed into things. It also gives the coach time to assess the situation, to reflect, and to think through the next step of the coaching process.

10. SUMMARISING

There are times, during as well as at the end of the discussion, when the essential elements and issues need to be brought together in context and restated or summarised.

A good coach summarises regularly during discussion with the coachee to help them clarify issues, to focus on those that are important, and to guide them in the appropriate direction.

GOOD QUESTIONING TECHNIQUE

Good questioning technique means not only using 'open' questions, but also the skill of posing questions in a way that the other person feels able to answer them fully and freely.

It also means asking appropriate questions at the appropriate times.

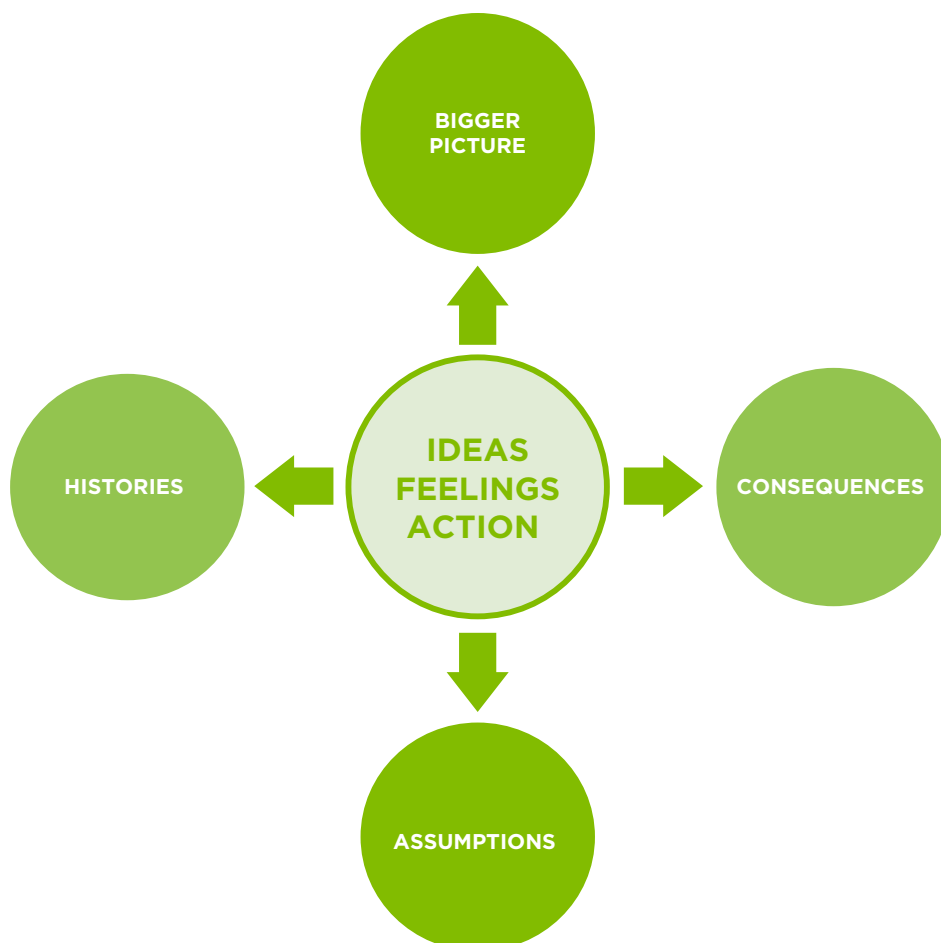
Helpful Questions...

- Provoke constructive thoughts.
- Help the other person to identify and challenge their assumptions.

Unhelpful Questions...

- Trap the other person into limited answers
- Make the other person feel defensive (these tend to be the questions that begin with "why" such as "why did you..." or "why do you...")

There are several tools available which may help you to develop good questioning technique. One of these is to consider the four directions of questions helping the other person to look at the issue from all four angles.



Questions with a clear sense of purpose

An effective coaching question has a clear purpose or objective.

For example, that purpose maybe to gather more information, to encourage ideas or to motivate someone to act. When we don't have a clear sense of purpose behind our questions, the question will often be confused or get a result we didn't want. In coaching this is important as we want our questions to help the other person progress in some way.

The following table illustrates questions with clear purpose. They are also nice, simple questions you might use in your everyday work situations.

Purpose	Coaching Question Examples
Gather general information	Can you say more about that?
Gather specific information	Specifically, what is it that you're unhappy about? Can you tell me what actually happened?
Help someone remember something more clearly	What else can you remember?
To refocus someone on what's important, for example keep them on track, calm them down, etc.	Ok, so what's really important about all this? What seems to be the most important thing for us to focus on now?
Understand someone's values	What is important to you about that? Why is that important to you?
Help someone appreciate another person's perspective	What might be Anna's reasons behind asking for this? What's important to Anna? If Anna were here, how would she describe the situation?
Get someone to link two thoughts, or situations, together	How do your work pressures relate to what you said about developing the team more?
Help someone come to a conclusion	What are your thoughts about this now? What is the conclusion you are drawing from this now?
Produce ideas without a sense of pressure	What options are there? What options are available to you? What things might you do? What ideas are you having?
Influence someone to decide	What option do you prefer? What have you decided to do?
Influence someone to action	What could you do about that right now?
Prepare someone to overcome barriers to taking action	What might stop you from doing that? (Follow up) ...so how will you overcome that?

The GROW model

The GROW (Goal-Reality-Options-Will) model provides a simple framework for structuring a coaching session:



Here is a list of questions that you may find useful at each stage of the GROW model. They are in no particular order.

GOAL

- What would you like to work on today?
 - What is in your mind to talk about?
 - What makes this an issue now?
 - If you were to achieve this goal, what would it look like, sound like, feel like?
 - If you were to achieve this, what would be different from now?
 - How much control do you have over this, as a percentage?
 - How important do you think this is, on a 1-10 scale?
 - What would be the impact on others?
-

REALITY

- What is going on now?
 - When this [whatever it is] happens to you, what are you telling yourself immediately before it happens?
 - How do you feel about that?
 - What and how great is your concern about it?
 - Whom does this issue other than you affect?
 - What have you tried already?
 - What stopped you from doing more?
 - Tell me about a time when something like this has happened to you before?
 - What did you do then that worked?
 - What evidence do you have?
 - What are the blocks?
 - What obstacles will need to be overcome on the way?
 - What assumptions have you made about this?
 - What, if any, internal obstacles or personal resistances do you have to taking action?
 - What resources do you already have? Skill, time, enthusiasm, money, support, etc.
-

OPTIONS

- What are all the different ways in which you could approach the issue?
- What are the options for action here?
- Make a list of all the alternatives, large or small, complete and partial solutions.
- What else could you do?

- What are the pros and cons of those actions?
 - What would you do if you had more time, a larger budget or if you were boss?
 - What would you do if you could start again with a clean sheet?
 - What would you do if money/time etc., wasn't an issue?
 - What are the advantages and disadvantages of each of these in turn?
 - Which would give the best result?
 - Which of these solutions appeals to you most or feels best to you?
 - Which would give you the most satisfaction?
 - What else could you do?
 - Where else could you go for help or information?
-

WHAT/WILL

- What action are you going to take?
 - Which option or options do you choose?
 - To what extent does this meet all your objectives?
 - What are your criteria and measurements for success?
 - What is the next step?
 - What steps are you going to take?
 - Describe one small step along the way
 - When precisely are you going to start and finish each action step?
 - What could hinder you in taking these steps or meeting the goal?
 - What personal resistance do you have, if any, to taking these steps?
 - What will you do to limit these external and internal factors?
 - Who needs to know what your plans are?
 - What support do you need and from whom?
 - What will you do to obtain that support and when?
 - If I were to bump into you in one or two weeks' time, what would you tell me had changed?
 - What commitment on a 1-10 scale do you feel you have to taking these agreed actions?
 - What prevents this from being a ten?
 - What could you do or alter to raise your commitment closer to ten?
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