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5-Word Coaching

ACTIVITY BRIEF

This can be done virtually or face-to-face, with all levels of leader and experienced or new coaches.

Set Up

- 1. Explain the objectives.**
To demystify the coaching process, to practice listening, develop greater skill at being present, and become more precise and concise with coaching statements and questions.
- 2. Get three volunteers.**
They will demonstrate this five-word coaching activity.
Ask them to turn their cameras and microphones on.
- 3. Explain that (insert name) would like some coaching around a specific topic.**
Before running the activity, ask a volunteer to help you demonstrate. The volunteer should be prepared to discuss a current issue (not a problem that has been resolved; not someone else's issue) that is challenging enough to warrant coaching.
- 4. Explain the process.**
The volunteers will take turns. Their goal is to help the coachee gain a deeper understanding of the issue and possibly to identify some actions to take around it.
- 5. Explain the twist.**
Each time a coach speaks, they are limited to a **maximum of five words**.
 - Use correct grammar.
Rather than speak like Tarzan ("Talk now why boss problem?") convey intent in complete sentences ("Say more about your boss.")
 - They can ask questions or make statements.
 - Raise hands (actual hand, not virtual hand) to "go" next as the coach.
- 6. Frame the exercise for the observers.**
Observers often learn more than coaches. After the demo, the observers can share in the chat what they found valuable about the five-word limit.



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Run the Demonstration

- Tell the volunteers you may periodically side-coach with suggestions or reminders to stay below the five-word limit.
- End the coaching demo in 5 to 10 minutes, at a helpful stopping point in the conversation.
- The coachee can speak freely with no word limit.

Run Five-Word Coaching in Trios

1. Send them to breakout rooms in groups of three.
2. Rotate through the following roles:
 - Coach (limited to 5 words)
 - Coachee (no word limit)
 - Observer
3. Each round will last 10 minutes
 - 7 minutes for coaching
 - 3 minutes to discuss what you noticed about the process

Sample Debrief Questions

- What surprised you?
- What was most challenging about keeping to the word limit?
- What do you gain from the word limit? What do you lose?
- What would you do differently next time?
- What will you do differently in your regular conversations or coaching conversations?



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Sample Five-Word Coaching Statements and Questions

What is your goal?

Describe success.

What is the real challenge?

Why is this important now?

Who else is affected?

What benefits do you see?

What challenges do you see?

Name three things to try.

Think “blue sky,”...infinite resources.

What other options are available?

What haven't you tried?

Who else can help out?

Tell me more.

You appear ____ (excited, frustrated, unsure...).