

**Personal Growth And Transformation**

# How to Become Your Own Career Coach

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Illustration by Ibrahim Rayintakath

**Summary.** Coaching helps us understand ourselves, uncover new options, and get unstuck, but the opportunity to spend time with a qualified coach is only available to a fortunate few individuals and organizations who can afford it. Self-coaching is the skill of asking... [more](#)

There's no such thing as a straight line to success in careers today, and the past few years have created an environment where we've all had to become accustomed to constant change and increased

complexity. Coaching is a valuable way to create clarity and deal with the uncertainty of an increasingly squiggly world of work.

Coaching helps us understand ourselves, uncover new options, and get unstuck, but the opportunity to spend time with a qualified coach is only available to a fortunate few individuals and organizations who can afford it. We know coaching can make work better, but we need a better way to make it work for everyone.

To make coaching accessible, we need to widen its definition from a person to an approach. An important part of taking a coaching approach is learning the skillset to be able to coach *yourself* in your career. This doesn't replace the value of career conversations with other people — if anything, it does the opposite by putting you in a position to have more meaningful coaching conversations with a wide variety of people, like managers, peers, and mentors. Self-coaching skills accelerate your self-awareness and your self-sufficiency, helping you navigate your career with more confidence and control.

Self-coaching is the skill of asking questions to improve self-awareness and prompt positive action. Everyone can learn to coach themselves, regardless of experience or expertise. It takes practice and might feel uncomfortable at times, but the hard work will be worth it. When we develop our own ideas and actions in response to the challenges we experience in our careers, we increase our resilience and reduce our dependency on other people.

To get started coaching yourself, work on developing these three skills.

### **Self-Awareness**

To achieve high levels of self-awareness, we need to see ourselves clearly and understand how other people see us. Self-awareness doesn't arise by accident — we make it happen. Here are two ways

to improve your self-awareness that you can integrate into your workday.

### **Create a five-minute mind-map**

Focused time to think about ourselves rarely makes it to the top of our to-do lists. However, when we increase awareness of how our values and beliefs drive our actions, we can be more conscious about the choices we make in the future.

Creating a five-minute mind-map can help you quickly gain insight into your reactions to a career challenge. To do this, write down your challenge in the center of a page, then note down any reflections you have about the what, who, when, and why of the challenge, and see what you notice. For example, if you have a difficult relationship with someone at work, you might reflect on your need to be liked by people (a “why” insight), or you might come to the conclusion that the people you find difficult just happen to work differently from you (a “who” insight). The more regularly you do this, the more you’ll notice patterns in your thinking that could be working for or against you at work. This self-awareness will help you get unstuck as you learn to coach yourself.

### **Understand intent vs. impact**

To spot the self-awareness gaps we need to work on, we need to understand whether what we want to be known for is consistent with how we show up at work. To explore this for yourself, think about three important situations in your week where you have a clear view of how you want to show up. For each scenario, summarize your intention using just one word. For example, you might want to be “credible” in a presentation or “collaborative” in a team meeting. After each situation, ask at least one person who was involved to describe your impact from their perspective in one word. This question might sound like, “What word would you use to summarize my approach in today’s meeting?” or “What one word would you use to describe my impact when presenting?”

Comparing your intent with the feedback you receive on your impact will help you see whether you have self-awareness alignment or a potential gap and opportunity for growth.

## **Coach-Yourself Questions (CYQs)**

Asking yourself insightful coaching questions will unlock your thinking and support you to identify actions that will help you make positive progress. You can assess the quality of your questions using the three O's below:

### **Open**

CYQs start with who, what, why, where, when, or how, not a closed question with a yes-or-no answer. If you find yourself asking a closed question, such as, "Do I enjoy my job?" ask it again in an open way: "What do I enjoy about my job?" You'll find you get more insights as a result.

### **Ownership**

CYQs focus on ownership and always include "I." Instead of, "How has that person progressed more quickly than me?" the question becomes, "How could I accelerate my progression?" If you find yourself blaming other people or external factors when coaching yourself, it's a signal that you need to refocus on what you can control. By identifying your own actions, you'll be more committed to making change happen.

### **One-at-a-time**

Avoid question "stacking," where you ask multiple questions at the same time. Instead of asking, "Why am I missing deadlines and feeling so out of control of my time?" you ask and answer each question in turn: "Why am I missing deadlines?" and "Why do I feel out of control of my time?" One-at-a-time questioning helps you generate more options and actions as part of your coaching approach.

Here are five CYQs to get you started:

1. What gives me the most energy at work?
2. When do I let my self-belief hold me back?
3. How can I increase the frequency of the feedback that I get?
4. Who could offer me a different perspective on my career challenge?
5. What do I want to be true in 12 months' time that isn't true today?

## **Listening to Yourself**

In order to coach ourselves, we need to become skilled at listening to the thoughts and beliefs that inform our actions. However, distraction and discomfort can make our minds wander or gravitate toward things that are easier to work on. When our attention is diverted, we don't achieve the depth of reflection that will help us think or act differently. There are a couple of techniques you can practice as you learn to listen to yourself.

### **Find your friction**

We all get distracted. Understanding when and where this happens is an important part of making sure you don't get in your own way when you're learning to coach yourself. Finding ways to increase the friction between you and your distraction downfall can prevent it from affecting your self-coaching efforts. For example, if technology is your weakness, you can find friction by leaving your devices in another room. If other people create a problem for your focus, try coaching yourself in a café or at the start of a day before the demands of your job distract you.

### **Become your best friend**

Part of coaching yourself is learning whom to listen to inside your head. We all have an inner coach and an inner critic, and there will be times when your inner critic will creep in and start to take

control. This might sound like “I’m not smart enough to figure this out” or “I can’t do this so I should give up now.”

To quiet your inner critic, try talking to yourself in the same way your best friend would talk to you. Imagine yourself having a conversation with that person and write down three supportive sentences they would say. Perhaps they would remind you of previous successes or how you’ve overcome adversity before. Or maybe they would talk about how much they admire your determination or bravery. Keep this person in mind when your inner critic creeps in.

Our careers can frequently feel uncertain, but self-coaching is a capability we all have control over. Committing to the development of your self-coaching skills can help you overcome obstacles and open up more opportunities for your growth. If there’s one skill you spend time learning, practicing, and improving in 2022, coaching yourself is a good place to start.

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