



## THE GROW COACHING MODEL

The GROW model was developed some thirty years ago by the late Sir John Whitmore, with his colleagues. It was publicised through his book 'Coaching for Performance' and, since the book has been translated into 19 languages, GROW has become the most prevalent coaching model in the world today. Most of the other models are based on GROW in one form or another.



A coaching model provides a framework for a coaching session, a conversation or a meeting. It enables us to keep moving forward towards positive solutions and achievements. The GROW sequence illustrates the solution focus of coaching and breaks down like this:

### Goal:

As Alice said, in her conversation with the Cheshire cat:

**Alice:** Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?

**Cat:** That depends a good deal on where you want to get to.

**Alice:** I don't much care where.

**Cat:** Then it does not matter which way you go.

*'Alice in Wonderland' Lewis Carroll*

Identifying what we want to achieve puts us on the path to accomplishing it by focusing on the solution rather than the problem.

The **Goal** section of **GROW** is addressed at the beginning of each session and referred to again from time to time to keep the focus moving forward, especially if the coachee becomes stuck.

Some **Goal** questions are:

*What do you want?  
Over what time frame?  
Where would you like to be on a scale of 1-10?  
Imagine you have achieved it:  
What does it look like?  
How do you feel?  
What are people saying to you?  
What are the benefits?  
What do you want to achieve in 5 years/1 year/3 months?  
How could you say your goal in a few words?  
Which part of that is the real focus?  
How will you know when you have achieved it?  
In an ideal world what do you **really** want?*

### **Reality:**

This is an exploration of the coachee's world at the moment. Time spent here helps people get clear about what is happening and how it affects themselves and others. It provides an opportunity for viewing issues from different perspectives.

Some useful questions here are:

*What is happening at the moment?  
How important is this to you?  
If an ideal situation is 10, what number are you at now?  
What impact is this having on you/how do you feel?  
What have you done so far?  
Who else is affected?  
What are you doing that's working towards your goal?  
What are you doing that is getting in the way of your goal?*

Tim Gallwey, author of the 'Inner Game' series of books, was one of the pre-cursors of coaching. One of his key discoveries was that if he asked clients to 'watch the ball' they would tense up and under-perform. However, if he asked them to count how many times the ball spun as it went over the net, or how many centimetres it cleared above the net, their shots improved significantly. Neither of these measurements matters in terms of technique, but the process of focussing on the detail has the dual effect of forcing the coachee to watch the ball, and providing a distraction from internal 'chatter', like 'I've failed before', or 'I can never hit the ball'.

Exploring the current reality is one of the practices that differentiates coaching from normal conversation, where we tend to go straight from the past to the future: from "*He said I was always late; I said I wasn't; he said I was unreliable,*" to "*I'm going to resign!*" taking all of our emotional baggage into our decision about how to move forward. Reality questions (together with Goal questions, which can be thought of as 'future reality') enable coachees to step off the confused track, gain some new perspectives, and make informed decisions.

It may feel awkward at first to explore current reality, and new coaches are tempted to go straight to the Options or Actions stage of GROW. However, doing this without exploring the coachee's Goal and Reality may well result in the answer 'I don't know what to do'.

All these questions help people dig deeper into their own awareness. They will show signs of energy, for instance, lightness in the voice, brighter eyes, a smile and more upright posture. That is the time to pin the new insights down to Options and Actions, and the chances are that by this time, coachees will spontaneously start originating actions where they were stuck before.

Note that we are exploring the present, and although we may ask what someone has done so far, we are not dwelling on the past or listening to stories about it. We are focusing on what the situation means to the coachee more than on the facts. We are not asking questions to find out what has happened, but to find out what impact it is having on the coachee's work and/or life. When the coachee reaches a new insight or level of understanding, it is wise to explore the new Reality to embed the new awareness and to revisit the Goal. Possibly a new Goal or direction will emerge. Then the 'Options' and 'Will' sequence start again.

When the coachee reaches a new insight, these questions are useful:

*What do you know now that you did not know before?  
 What is your insight about that?  
 What have you learned about yourself from that?  
 Where else could you use this?*

## **Options**

Coachees will move naturally towards the Options stage as their Reality becomes clearer. Often they show a new energy by sitting up and smiling, or a lighter tone of voice. Then it is useful to ask some of these questions:

*What are your options?  
 What could you do?  
 What else?  
 If there were anything else, what would it be?  
 What has worked in the past?  
 What steps could you take?  
 Who could help you with this?  
 Where could you find out the information?  
 What might someone else do in your shoes?  
 Imagine you have achieved your goal; look back on the journey and tell me you got here.*

Notice that most of these questions are almost all open. Keep asking open questions until the coachee has stopped coming up with options on the table. Once it seems that the list is complete, ask the closed question 'is there anything else?' to find out whether it is time to finalise the process. This question often results in new options and can be asked as many times as it continues to deliver results.

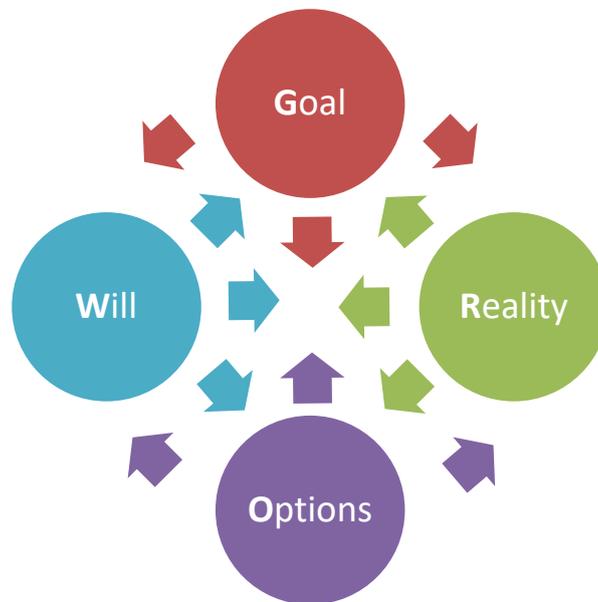
## **Will**

'Will' covers what action coachees will take. It is called 'Will' rather than 'Action' to stress that we must ensure that the action is one the coachee can really commit to.

Some examples of Will questions are:

*What will you do about that?*  
*How will you do that?*  
*When?*  
*What will it take for you to commit to that action?*  
*What could you do to become more committed?*  
*Could you do more?*  
*How many?*  
*How much?*  
*How often?*  
*Where will you find that?*  
*Who will you talk to?*  
*What else you could you do?*

It is crucial to understand that the components of **GROW** do not necessarily follow that order; an effective coaching conversation usually starts by exploring Goal and Reality, but then moves about between all four elements at will:



Since GROW was coined, other coaching models have emerged, including TGROW, where identifying the 'Topic' comes first, and the substitution of 'Wrap Up' for 'Will'. Most of the models available work just as well as GROW – what matters is to have a framework. The actual questions asked are often less important than deciding which stage of the model will be most useful to the coachee at any given moment.

### **References:**

Whitmore, Sir J. **Coaching for Performance**. London, Brealey  
 Wilson, C. (2014) **Performance Coaching: a Complete Guide to Best Practice Coaching and Training**. London, Kogan Page.

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