

# The GROW coaching model: What it is and how to use it - Culture Amp

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## Executive Summary

This article examines the GROW coaching model, a framework created by Sir John Whitmore in the 1980s for problem-solving, goal-setting, and performance improvement. The author presents GROW as a four-step process: Goal (understanding what employees want to achieve), Reality (assessing current situation and barriers), Options/Obstacles (exploring potential solutions), and Will/Way forward (committing to specific actions). The article provides detailed explanations of each phase with sample questions managers can use during coaching conversations. Using a promotion-seeking employee as a case study, the author demonstrates how the framework can structure development conversations and create actionable plans. The article concludes with coaching best practices including active listening, realistic goal-setting, focusing on one goal at a time, and regular follow-up. The implications suggest that structured coaching frameworks can help managers provide more effective guidance while reducing the uncertainty often associated with employee development conversations.

## Key Insights

1. The GROW model breaks coaching into four sequential steps that help managers structure development conversations systematically
2. Effective coaching requires understanding both employee goals and current reality before exploring solutions
3. Regular follow-up and accountability measures are essential for translating coaching conversations into actual behavioral change

## Practical Takeaways

- Managers can use specific question frameworks for each GROW phase to guide coaching conversations more effectively
- Combining GROW with SMART goal-setting creates more structured and achievable development plans

## Frameworks Mentioned

**GROW Model** — Four-step coaching framework covering Goal, Reality, Options/Obstacles, and Will/Way forward

**SMART Goals** — Goal-setting approach emphasizing specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound objectives

## Critical Analysis

Strengths include clear explanation of the GROW framework with practical examples and specific question prompts for each phase. The promotion example effectively illustrates real-world application. Limitations include lack of empirical evidence supporting the model's effectiveness, minimal discussion of potential drawbacks or situations where GROW might not be suitable, and promotional bias toward Culture Amp's Skills Coach product. The article assumes all employees want coaching and that managers have time for structured development conversations.

## Organizational Practice

The article describes using the GROW model in regular one-on-one meetings and development conversations, with managers asking structured questions to guide employee goal-setting and action planning

## Strategic Implications

The article's findings suggest organizations are seeking structured approaches to manager coaching capabilities, indicating a trend toward systematizing what has traditionally been an intuitive management skill

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