

Peer Coaching Circles

For Ongoing Faculty Development

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Peer Coaching Circles (PCC) are small groups of faculty members from a similar career stage who meet regularly to support each other's personal and professional goals. PCCs are a solutions-focused mechanism, offering self-sustaining, ongoing access to targeted faculty development. This model has been used extensively through the National Science Foundation-funded LATTICE Program and the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke-funded BRAINS Program.

Peer coaching is distinct from mentoring. We define peer coaching as a focused relationship between individuals of equal status (i.e., similar career stage) who support each other through conversations and relationships that develop in a group setting. In a peer coaching circle, each participant serves as both a coach and coachee during each working session; there is no senior coach or subject matter expert in the circle. PCCs offer community and connection with peers, and participants gain coaching skills they can use in a range of contexts.

Successful and sustainable PCCs are viable in a variety of venues, disciplines, and career stages. Successful PCCs require commitment to the structured, intentional process and format.

Mentoring ≠ Coaching

Coaching is ...	Coaching is not ...
• Asking questions • Focusing on inquiry • Supporting self-directed learning • Developing actions (behaviors) to move toward goal attainment	• Giving advice • Offering suggestions • Sharing stories

Dos and Don'ts for Launching a PCC

DO	DON'T
✓ Include participants at a similar career stage ✓ Include participants from different departments or institutions ✓ Meet regularly and frequently enough to maintain momentum ✓ Focus on building relationships, community, and trust ✓ Emphasize asking powerful coaching questions ✓ Use the PCC meeting structure	✗ Have a "senior" lead or guide in the group ✗ Predetermine topics for each meeting ✗ Focus on giving advice ✗ Use an ad hoc meeting format ✗ Let some individuals' work time overtake a meeting, leaving other participants without time to work ✗ Reconfigure established groups without their permission

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During a PCC session, each participant has about 10 to 12 minutes of individual focused work time to address a topic of their choosing with the group.

Structure of PCC Individual Work Time		
ACTION	GOAL	FORMAT
Report back on contract from last session (1 minute)	Foster Accountability.	For my last contract, I said I will [CONTRACT]. I did [ACCOMPLISHMENT].
Dilemma statement (1 minute)	Identify the feeling and problem. Then clarify the goal.	I feel [EMOTION] about [SITUATION] and I want [GOAL].
Discussion (8 minutes)	Support the participant in improving their thinking and identifying potential paths forward that might work for them.	Other participants listen and ask powerful questions (e.g., “How long have you been feeling like that?” or “What has worked well in the past?” or “What would success look like?”).
Contract (2 minutes)	Define concrete action that will be helpful and likely to happen.	For my contract, by [TIME] I will [CONCRETE ACTION].

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More about NINDS-funded BRAINS (**B**roadening the **R**epresentation of **A**cademic **I**nvigators in **N**euro**S**cience) can be found at <https://www.brains.uw.edu>.



More about NSF-funded LATTICE (**L**aunching **A**cademics on the **T**enure-**T**rack: an **I**ntentional **C**ommunity in **E**ngineering) can be found at <https://advance.washington.edu/about/national/lattice>.

Learn more about coaching and faculty development and this peer coaching circles model in Chapter 32: “**Peer Coaching Circles for Ongoing Faculty Development**” in the *Handbook of STEM Faculty Development*.

PCC Basics

Peer Coaching Circles (PCC) are modeled group in the book *Every Other Thursday* (See Chapter 16, “A Group of One’s Own: Pigs, Contracts and Strokes”). The PCC is a forum to **support others in finding workable solutions to problems** and to build your own coaching and listening skills.

Coaching Circle Roles:

- **Host** - 1) Send out email reminder of meeting a few days prior, 2) Arrive a few minutes early to the meeting to welcome people, 3) Host the meeting overall, 4) Invite each person to work. Remind people to report back on their past contract(s), share their work/dilemma statement, and make a new contract, 5) Serve as time keeper when the time keeper has work time.
- **Time Keeper** - Keeps track of individual work time and the meeting overall. Indicates when there are two minutes left in a person’s work time. Becomes host for the next meeting.
- **Theme Noter** – Listens for possible emerging themes across people’s work time and suggested resources. Provides a brief summary of these themes and resources at the end of work time. Becomes the time keeper for the next meeting.

What really happens during a meeting?

Each meeting will follow the same structure and has three components.

- A. **Work.** Work time rotates and each person will have the same amount of time (based on meeting length and number attending). Begin with a **work/dilemma statement** and ask for the kind of feedback you want. Group members next ask **coaching questions**. The timekeeper will indicate when there are two minutes left in your work time, and the host will then invite you to make a **contract**. You will report back on your contract next time at start of your work time.
- B. **Themes.** When all individual work time is done, share themes or patterns.
- C. **Appreciations.** At the end of the meeting, each person shares an appreciation with the group.

Structure of individual work time:

1. Worlds sentence: 1 sentence about your current world, state-of-mind, etc.
2. Prior contract(s) report out
3. Work/Dilemma statement: *I feel [emotion] about [situation] and I want to [goal].*
4. Coaching questions
5. Contract: *For my contract, I will [concrete action] by [timeframe].*

Interaction Guidelines and Expectations:

- PCCs *support* others in finding workable solutions to problems themselves rather than *offering* solutions.
- PCCs are a place to start before you are ready and stop before you are finished. It is a safe space for exploring half-baked feelings, ideas, thoughts, concerns, etc.
- Group members will make no judgmental statements, will relinquish expectations of what the other individuals can or should do, and will not insert their own stories into another person’s story/work time.
- Each participant must make a commitment to the group and to themselves to participate in the PCC. PCCs are a regular commitment to reflect on one’s career and work to improve one’s

experience. This time and reflection often fall into the important but not urgent category. Individuals may occasionally have to miss a meeting, but each participant is strongly encouraged to try to make as many meetings as they possibly can.

Members must commit to the following:

- Confidentiality. Everything said and heard in the PCC must remain confidential to create group trust. There must be no element of competition between group members.
- Honesty. Individuals will be honest in presenting their own issues and give honest feedback with care.
- Commitment. Individuals are committed to meeting regularly and actively participating in the process of empowering others and group problem solving.
- Listening. Participants will listen without judgment and with care to reflect what we are hearing and create mechanisms for individuals to find their own best solutions.

Terms you should know...

- **Work/Dilemma Statement** = *"I feel [emotion] about [situation] and I want to [goal]."* Your work/dilemma statement can be ANYTHING and any size!
- **Contracts** – Concise objectives at the end of work time. Define a concrete action that will be helpful and likely to happen. *"For my contract, I will [concrete action] by [timeframe]."* Avoid phrasing like "I will try" Or "I should/ought to" Contracts can be for any length of time.
- **Appreciations** = Positive observation about someone that usually stems from the work on that call. Appreciations describe something about someone else – not the appreciator. For example, "I liked the feedback you gave."; "I liked how you framed your problem."; "I like the energy you brought to the conversation today." The response to receiving an appreciation is "THANK YOU!"
- **Pigs = PIGS (Personal, Internalized, Gnawing Statements)** PIGS are "internalized oppressions," personal judgments or criticisms. PIGS can be used to let yourself feel bad about yourself instead of changing your behavior. A common characteristic of a pig is "always" or "never" phrasing and "could have" or "should have" regret statements. Some common PIGS include "frog pig" (i.e. fraud pig) and the guilt pig.
- **Rescues** = Rescues are not allowed in coaching circle meetings. What does this mean? Don't solve someone else's problem. Instead ask coaching questions to help them solve their problems by themselves. Remember, rather than try to protect someone else, please do not hesitate to ask for what you need.

Sample Coaching Questions:

Coaching questions help the person figure out what will work for them and understand their issue from new perspectives. Sample questions:

- What would success look like?
- What would you like to see or experience moving forward?
- What have you tried so far?
- What support do you want to move forward?
- How do you like to make decisions?
- What do you need to know to make a decision?
- What has worked for you in the past?
- When you say you think you know what you must do, what is it?
- Who could you ask for help?

Common Coaching Question Errors:

- Focusing on too many details
- Asking questions for the coach's curiosity rather than for the coachee's understanding of their work/dilemma statement
- Trying to scope out the problem to be able to give advice
- Disguising advice in the form of a question ("can you, do you, are you, have you ...")

Resources:

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Peer Coaching Circles Worksheet

Worlds Statement: I am [current state].

Work/Dilemma Statement: I feel [emotion] about [situation] and I want [goal].

Notes on Coaching Questions and Reflections:

Contract: By [timeframe], I will [feasible action/behavior].