

# How coaches can engage clients to empower performance



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Wirtzfeld D. How coaches can engage clients to empower performance. *Can J Physician Leadersh* 2024;10(2):62-63  
<https://doi.org/10.37964/cr24782>

The Canadian Physician Coaches Network (CPCN) is a not-for-profit organization whose coach members serve the needs of clients who are physicians. All members have previous experience working with physicians and recognize the unique challenges that come with being a member of the medical profession. Because engaging with a coach is an important aspect of achieving full leadership ability,<sup>1-3</sup> the CPCN has chosen to come together with the Canadian Society of Physician Leaders to produce a quarterly Coaching Corner. Each article explores a potential physician leadership challenge and how a coach might engage with a client to assist them in empowering their performance. This article uses a fictitious person in a realistic scenario with the author as the coach.

## Physician leadership challenge: time management in a new leadership role

Scenario: Dr. X is a 47-year-old physician who became chief medical officer in a medium-sized healthcare authority six months ago. He feels overwhelmed and that he doesn't have enough time to be successful in his new role. He has held other leadership positions in the same organization and has always felt somewhat overwhelmed with leadership work, although not to this extent.

The following represents an approach that might be

taken by an executive coach. The engagement is for six months, and not all the questions listed below would be asked in a single session. Much of the work would happen between sessions.

1. What are the top three priorities of a leader in this position?
2. What three things currently take up your time?
3. Please rate on a scale of 0% to 100%, with 0% being no overlap and 100% being complete overlap, the degree to which the priorities of the position reflect where you spend time?
4. What one step could you take to better align where you spend time with the priorities of the position, even by 1-2%?
5. What do you need to give up?

Dr. X had never considered priority setting. Quantifying the gap between where he is now (60%) and where he wanted to be (100%) helped him gain clarity around what activities he needed to keep doing, what he needed to take on, and what he needed to give up. Asking him to think about making it 1-2% better allowed him to start to think about small steps he might take to start improving things. It did not pressure him to be perfect or to take on more than he could manage. As he began to see success, he was able to consider more and move to what might make things 5-10% better. Asking him about what he would give up allowed Dr. X to consider what and to whom he could delegate to enhance impact.

6. What strengths do you bring to this position?
7. Where might others bring greater strengths?

Dr. X took almost two months to complete this exercise and begin to recognize that leadership is a team sport where greater influence can be achieved through supporting others' strengths. We used this information to develop a strengths matrix for the team, which allowed Dr. X to consider where and when there was opportunity for delegation.

8. What aspects of this position are within your control?
9. Where do you have influence?
10. How do you set boundaries?

In my experience working with physician leaders, they often assume they have more control than they

actually do. They often think they have control over others' thoughts and actions. In this case, it was eye opening for Dr. X to realize that the actions of others were beyond his scope of control. Conversely, what was under his control was active listening and setting boundaries around timelines and obligations. This was an area that Dr. X needed to consistently and consciously continue to work on.

11. **How do you determine what to delegate, when, and to whom?**
12. **How do you deal with urgent issues?**
13. **How does your team determine what activities should be eliminated from the portfolio?**

Dr. X took these questions to his team and continued to refine where responsibilities and accountabilities could be shared. He saw greater influence, even though he was spending less time in the role, and he felt more effective.

Dr. X was provided with some time-management tools to help him use his time more effectively.

## Conclusion

The benefits of working with a coach with respect to time management include the ability to align efforts with the priority areas of a particular role or portfolio, achieving enhanced influence through appropriate delegation, allowing team members to speak to their strengths, and recognizing the power of setting appropriate boundaries. A coach can also help identify the contribution of other issues, such as working outside of one's scope of control or potential lack of resources. It is important to note that difficulty with time management may stem from issues that are outside the scope of practice of a coach. In this situation, a coach can work with the client to redirect them to more suitable resources, where appropriate, such as a mental healthcare provider.

### How do I find an appropriate coach?

Many physicians find a coach through recommendations from others or word of mouth. The CPCN website ([www.coach4md.org](http://www.coach4md.org)) lists the biographies and areas of interest of accredited coach members who have worked with physicians. It is

readily searchable by those interested in finding a coach. You may reach out to any number of coaches and explore whether there is a potential match, either in person or more commonly through virtual options.

## References

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**CSPL Coaching for Physician Leaders**  
resource website

The site will provide you with contact information for various coaches and their areas of expertise.

Each coach is credentialed and has healthcare experience. Our coaches will cover a variety of topics, including career planning, wellbeing and leadership.

For more information contact:  
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