

Powerful Coaching Questions

Asking powerful questions is the essence of great coaching. The following are questions, gathered over many years and hours coaching my own clients. Take the ones that appeal to you and make them your own. Then get busy creating your own list!

Establish Focus: (clarifying the goal)

1. What are we here to accomplish today?
2. What would be the best use of our time right now?
3. How will we keep on track?
4. How much time do we have to accomplish our task?
5. How should our time be organized?
6. What are the issues you want to deal with?
7. How will you know we have accomplished our task?
8. What procedural agreements should we make?
9. Are you wanting to: make a decision, close a gap, vent, get feedback, hear yourself think?
10. Anything else...

Exploring Current Reality:

1. What's happening now?
2. How is the current situation affecting you, others, the situation?
3. What are the factors you need to consider?
4. Do we need anyone else's participation in this conversation?
5. How urgent is this situation?
6. How will your success / failure at addressing this affect the rest of the organization?
7. Who else shares your concerns, dilemma, need to find a solution?
8. How will it feel to have this handled?

Discover Possibilities:

1. What could happen?
2. What have you tried to address this issue?
3. Has there been any progress (no matter how small) ?
4. What would you colleagues, friends, customers, children suggest doing?
5. If money, time, people weren't a consideration – what would you do?
6. What do you *really* want to do?
7. What would be the best possible outcome?
8. What potential other outcomes could happen?
9. What might we be able to do in this conversation, beyond what's necessary to accomplish?
10. If you were really creative, what might you discover?
11. By accomplishing our task today, what else will become possible?
12. Do you need to involve others?
13. Who else might be supportive of your efforts?
14. What else...

Plan for Action:

1. Is there any action necessary as a result of this conversation?
2. Of all the options, which ones will work best?
3. What needs to happen now?
4. Which action is the most important now?
5. What should be done first?
6. How will a particular action contribute to achieving your objective?
7. What will the consequences of your Plan be?
8. Who will your Plan affect and how?
9. Who will be responsible for _____?
10. Who else do you need to enlist as a result of our discussion?
11. Who needs to know the outcome of our time together?
12. How will you report your Plan?
13. What will need to happen for you to be successful?
14. What resources will you need?
15. When should you begin?
16. What else...

Remove the Barriers:

1. Are there factors that could get the in the way of your plan?
2. Who might potentially support / oppose the plan?
3. Do you have all the resources you need?
4. What else will you need to change to make this possible?
5. Is it possible to meet the deadlines or projections?
6. What will you do if _____ happens?
7. What's missing?
8. Really? Is this doable?
9. What else....

Recap:

1. What have you decided, created, begun or completed here today?
2. For the items we didn't complete, when do we need to meet again?
3. What would the next step look like?
4. What surprises came out of our time together?
5. What lessons learned from today will be valuable for our next task?
6. What will you do – and by when?
7. Do you need anything more from me?
8. What else...

Great coaches know what kind of question they are about to ask. They follow the context of the conversation and choose wisely the type of question for the situation and place in the conversation. The following are different types of questions and some examples.

Clarifying Questions

Questions which bring clarity to the current situation, problem, need, challenge or goal or which reveal personal feelings, concerns, questions, or anxieties.

"What does the data reveal about your current situation?"

"What market trends should you be addressing right now?"

"What is your personal feeling about this?"

"How important is this, really?"

Discovery Questions

Questions designed to promote self discovery on the part of the client. They are open-ended and should cause the client to pause and reflect before answering. The answers are for the client's benefit, not for your information (to solve their problem)

"What's new or different?"

"What's the gap?"

"What's the current reality?"

"What's the unspoken truth?"

"What's possible?"

"Where should we begin?"

"How brave do you need to be to tackle this?"

"What will happen if you do nothing?"

"Where are the gaps in knowledge, skills, relationships, attitudes and behaviours?"

"What are the unintended results of present attitudes and behaviours?"

Questions about Vision and Strategy

Questions that draw the client's attention to the *bigger picture*.

- "What part of your vision can/should be aligned with that of the organization?"
- "What are some possible strategies to meet the challenge?"
- "How has your past strategy been/not been effective?"
- "What is the next level for you?"
- "If you could design a response with no constraints whatsoever, what would it be?"
- "What will come after this...and after that?"

Open Ended Questions

Questions that invite participation, disclosure and commitment.

- "Tell me more about..."
- "How does this situation, problem, opportunity seem to you?"
- "What are you going to do next?"
- "What else..."

Evocative Questions

Questions that seize upon opportunities, foster a search for shared meaning, or create a new or changed context.

- "What is the opportunity underlying this challenge?"
- "What are you not doing/paying attention to that would altogether shift this situation?"
- "What are we not talking about that we should be talking about to solve this problem/seize this opportunity?"
- "If we were to take a radically different approach to this, what would it be?"
- "If all constraints were removed, what courses of action would be available to you?"

Questions to Gauge Awareness/Understanding

Questions which reveal an individual's understanding of current reality, challenges that lie ahead, as well as current strengths and gaps.

- "What is your perception of the current situation?"
- "What do you see as the biggest challenge?"
- "What will it take to address the challenge?"
- "What are your personal strengths that will help with this?"
- "Where are the gaps in skills, attitudes or behaviors that may get in the way?"

Forwarding Action Questions

Questions which move the individual forward into action.

- "What steps are necessary to move this forward?"
- "What steps will you assume responsibility for?"
- "What is the best way to bridge the current gap?"
- "Who else needs to be involved to ensure your success?"
- "What obstacles to success need to be eliminated?"
- "What's next?"
- "When, where, how will you begin?"

Support Questions

Questions which encourages the client to think about what he or she can do or cause to happen which increases the likelihood of success.

- "What would make the biggest impact and help to ensure your success?"
- "What resources are you missing that would make a difference?"
- "Whose help could you use right now?"
- "Do you need help with...?"

Questions to Determine Readiness, Motivation and Commitment

Questions which reveal the current state of "GO" as well as any obstacles which still need to be overcome.

- "Are you ready?"
- "When will you be ready?"
- "How committed are you to the project?"
- "How optimistic are you about the outcome?"
- "What possibilities are you most excited about?"
- "What's holding you back right now?"
- "What's your uncertainty about, and how could you turn that into readiness?"

Questions about Standards

Questions which are designed to elicit an awareness, or deeper understanding of and commitment to, a client's personal and professional standards.

- "What are your personal standards that impact this situation?"
- "Are they high enough given the urgency, importance, possible impact of your Plan?"
- "How will you maintain or exceed your values or standards?"
- "How will you know you have maintained your values and standards?"
- "What could tempt you to drop your standards?"