

INTRODUCTION TO ESSENTIAL COACHING SKILLS FOR LEADERS

THE ROLE OF INQUIRY IN COACHING

Questions serve several functions in coaching including:

- 💡 To confirm or clarify.
- 💡 To engage someone more fully in present moment.
- 💡 To trigger creative thinking.
- 💡 To invite truth to surface.
- 💡 To uncover obstacles to success.
- 💡 To strengthen accountability and commitment.

Depending upon **why** you ask what you ask, and **how** you ask it, inquiry can cut to the bone, touch a heart, open eyes, expand a mind, and create a perspective shift that becomes a pivot point in someone's life.

The Power of Curiosity

Your curiosity is a large part of what distinguishes the coaching approach from other approaches like mentoring and consulting. Even when you have subject matter expertise beneficial to your coachee, your ability to remain curious is essential.

Curiosity shapes listening and inquiry. What you hear and what you ask come through the filters of your personal curiosity.

We talked about being present and how that shapes what you notice and how you listen. Now let's look at the quality of your curiosity.

You can begin to identify the quality of your curiosity by noticing what you tend to be curious about when interacting with others.

For example, as you engage with someone else, you can be curious about when they will (finally) stop talking so you can make your point. Or you may be curious about how to elicit sufficient data from the other person so you can offer an informed solution.

You might be wondering how to convince the other person of something, or how to win their approval. If you are listening through filters (a.k.a. mindset) of blame and judgment, you could be curious about how and where to point out the other person is at fault, mistaken or inadequate.

On days when your schedule is really full and you feel pressured to make progress with a monumental task list, your curiosity during conversation with someone else may be, *"What is the fastest way out of this interaction so I can get back to wrestling with the stack on my desk?!"*

Your curiosity can also lead you to wonder how to improve or innovate in some way, or how to enlighten or empower someone.

Ideal qualities of curiosity in a coach include:

- ✓ Receptivity
- ✓ Willingness to be a partner in discovery
- ✓ Commitment to learn with and from your coachee
- ✓ Patience
- ✓ Compassion, lack of judgment

Avoiding the New Coach Mistake with Questioning

New coaches are often curious about the shortest path to a solution or how to eliminate a discomfort. When you recall the central purpose of coaching – to support human development – it becomes easier to see the shortest path may not always be the most effective one for achieving permanent growth. And when you desire sustained change, growth and learning are required.

The primary purpose of inquiry in coaching is to facilitate exploration and discovery leading to insights and awareness. These in turn lead to the learning and growth required to sustain change needed to achieve desired outcomes.

Tease this apart and you can more clearly see the following:

- Inquiry prompts discovery.
- Discovery brings about new awareness, insight, or perspective shifts and makes learning possible.
- Learning applied leads to growth.
- Growth is the development of inner structures making sustained change possible.
- Sustained change supports the behaviors and actions required to attain desired outcomes.

Distill this and you get:

Inquiry → discovery → learning → growth → sustainable change → desired outcomes.

Remembering the role of inquiry in coaching will shape your curiosity. Instead of defaulting to curiosity about the shortest point from a to b, or the fastest way from pain to no pain, be curious about the opportunity for growth. When you orient your curiosity in this way, you will naturally wonder what change is required and what growth supports that change, in order for your coachee to be successful.

So notice:

**When you remain curious about the opportunity for growth,
you are far more likely to be a co-discoverer with your coachee
even when
you have massive subject matter expertise relevant to the situation at hand.**

If you're wondering why, as a coach, you don't simply take the shortest path and give the answer when you have it, consider:

***Have you ever given the answer to someone only to find
it makes NO difference in their situation?***

When this occurs, the odds are the lack of change is because:

**Simply bequeathing upon someone the benefit of your expertise
does NOT result in the necessary growth.**

If you think about a toddler learning to walk, this becomes apparent. You don't teach a child to walk by telling them what to do. Human beings learn to walk by experiencing the component actions required to build strength and coordination necessary for walking.

This example of teaching someone to walk can challenge your ability to be curious, especially if little effort or thought is required for you to walk. If you do something so easily it is transparent to you, this very ease can limit your curiosity about why you do it so well or what it takes to be able to do what you do.

In terms of performance, behavior and even thought processes, a major curiosity block occurs when you assume others will automatically be able to do what you do the way you do it. This sort of assumption results in frustration for all parties involved.

But what is the impact on your curiosity if the opposite is true, if you don't have expertise in what you want someone else to develop? Go back to the proposed task of helping someone walk. If you do not use walking as your method of personal locomotion, you can feel inadequate to teach someone else something you don't do.

So how do you use your curiosity and inquiry to help others learn, whether you are or are not an expert in what they need to learn?

Let's explore.

Curiosity Practice 2 – Coaching Someone to Walk

Imagine you need to coach someone on learning or improving their ability to walk. For the sake of this exercise, imagine your coachee is capable of verbalizing, self reflection and self awareness.

As you imagine yourself in this situation, notice your curiosity. What do you want to know, and why? And how will this help your coachee?

In the space below, write what you are curious about as the coach of someone learning to walk.

Turn your curiosity into inquiry. For each item you noted above, translate that curiosity into a question you might pose this particular coachee. Use the space below to write at least 3 questions.

How will the answers to these questions help you support your coachee in achieving his/her objective?

Inquiry Practice – Notice the questions.

Practice observing and noting questions using either the recorded coaching demo from earlier in your class or a live demo during class. Using the space below, capture as many of the questions as possible from the observed coaching demo and note how each question was used.

Avoid These Pitfalls in Coaching Inquiry

- ➔ **Do Not** assume.
- ➔ **Do Not** ask questions based in your need to look good or know the answer.
- ➔ **Do Not** project your negative anticipation into your coachee’s mindset.
- ➔ **Do Not** use inquiry to lead or manipulate.
- ➔ **Do Not** judge, discount or in any way undermine.
- ➔ **Do Not** defend your attachment to an outcome through the use of inquiry.
- ➔ **Do Not** allow unconscious filters and mindset to shape your questions.
- ➔ **Do Not** explore only facts and details about the situation or the solution.
- ➔ **Do Not** ignore emotions, silence, what is left unsaid.
- ➔ **Do Not** shy away from using your inklings, insights and intuition.
- ➔ **Do Not** avoid challenging or asking uncomfortable questions.
- ➔ **Do Not** fire multiple questions at your coachee without giving him/her time to reflect and respond.
- ➔ **Do Not** interrogate vs. inquire.
- ➔ **Do Not** complicate a question by incorporating context or recapping into the question.

Use the following space to capture any additional “don’ts” you hear in class:

- ➔
- ➔
- ➔
- ➔

Tips for Masterful Use of Coaching Inquiry:

- 💡 Be aware of where you source your curiosity: Ego, need to self justify, need to convince, desire to connect with truth, or ...?
- 💡 Be aware of your mindset: Are you in negative anticipation or delighted discovery?
- 💡 Notice if your questions are for your coachee or for you. Are you inquiring to spark discovery or gather enough information for you to reach a conclusion or formulate a solution?
- 💡 Be willing to touch a heart or nudge someone’s thinking vs. cut to the bone.
- 💡 Get present. Get present. Get present.
- 💡 Notice what you notice.

