Coaching Questions Supercharged



Knowing how and when to ask the right types of probing questions is at the heart of all of the major approaches to professional coaching. ***Asking interesting, challenging and inspiring questions brings out the best in everyone, including coaches and clients.***

As a coach, thinking about what types of questions to ask next provides a natural guide to the coaching process while ***keeping your clients in the driving seat of their own professional and personal growth.*** As clients, considering a coach's questions helps move past passively accepting the opinions of others when it comes to moving forward. When coaches uses them effectively, questions can:

- **Define the Coaching Relationship**
- **Level the Playing Field of the Coaching Process**
- **Maintain Your Professional Role as a Coach**
- **Provide a Sense of Authenticity to a Client's Progress**



Questions also level the playing field during the coaching process. In a way, your role of as your client's life or business coach can be perceived as being his or her superior. In a healthy, effective coaching environment, most clients find themselves as their coach's equals because good questioning techniques quickly reveals that they're the ones who have the experience, knowledge and strength to overcome their obstacles.

This focus on the importance of questions also constantly keeps you in check in your role as a coach. Even the most experience life and business coaches find themselves tempted to tell clients what they think they should do from time to time. By making a commitment to asking your clients right types of questions, you'll remember that it's up to your clients to decide which paths are right for them.

Socratic Questioning



With the surging popularity of the coaching methodology, it is easy to forget that the core principles of modern coaching have when us with since the dawn of Western philosophy. Once you filter out all of the trendy terminology, pop psychology and navel gazing of many self-improvement systems, ***one of the most effective coaching methods of all time has been passed down for millennia in the form of Socratic questioning***.

One of the highest watermarks of the culture of ancient Greece comes in form of the philosopher Socrates's approach to the problems of life, politics and thought as they were recorded in a series of texts written by Plato.

Although Socrates is best remembered as a philosopher, he was at his core more of an educator during his career. ***He developed a questioning technique called ex duco in Greek, which can be translated as leading out or drawing out.*** Ex duco is the etymological root of the term education and refers to how the best teachers educate their students by drawing out their understanding of a problem or issue through a series of probing questions.



Thinking back, you can probably remember a handful of teacher, mentors or managers who seemed to have a natural knack for this type of incisive questioning. ***By probing our assumptions, rationals and viewpoints, socratic questioning leads us to consider the implications and consequences of our thoughts and persuasions.*** In many ways, this is what coaching is all about.

Funnel Questioning



Funnel questioning is a specific approach to coaching that allows coaches to ***increase or decrease the degree of detail that they are requesting by using certain types of questions***. This technique allows coaches to broaden or narrow the focus of the coaching process based on what kind of information they need to move forward. Professional coaches use funnel questioning to focus the discussion on particular areas until a client's goals, circumstance, problems and solutions are clearly delineated.

Narrowing the Funnel to Increase Detail

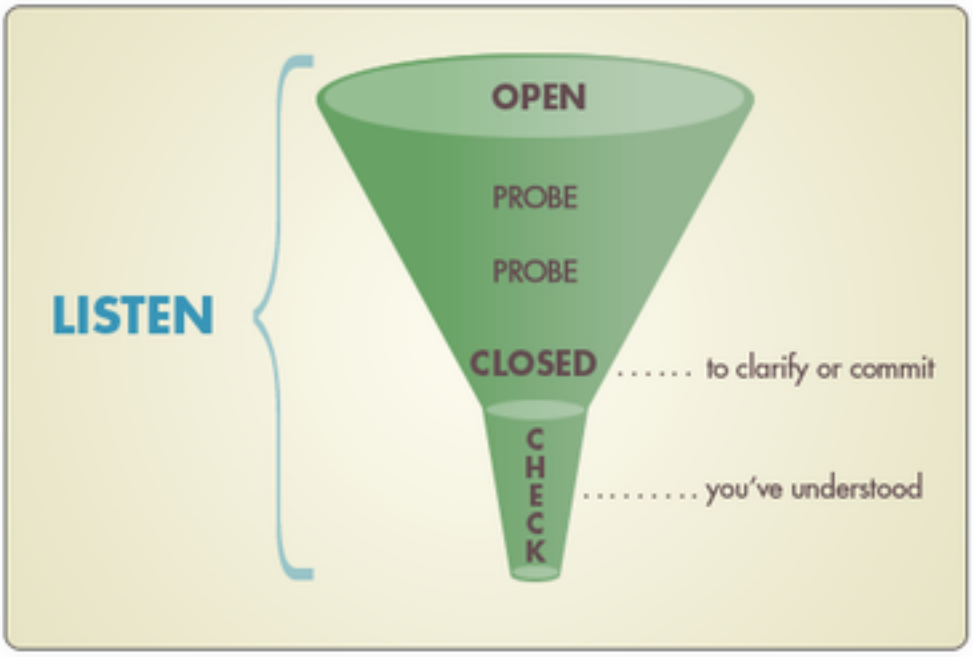
When you need very detailed information from a client about one or two topics, you can use funnel questioning to narrow down the discussion. This line of questions relies upon open ended questions that requires clients to use deductive reasoning skills to move from general thinking to detailed analysis. Here are some prime examples of great questions to use to focus on the details of on particular topic:

- *What particularly inspires you to work toward this goal?*
- *Could you be more specific?*
- *How were circumstances different when you have been more productive on this project in the past?*

Broadening the Funnel to Decrease Detail

In other cases, you can use funnel questioning to get a small amount of information about a number of topics. This is particularly useful when you are running the intake process of working with a new client. In order to get a clear picture of what new clients are looking for out of the coaching process and a general picture of their current reality and present problems, start out by asking some broad, open ended questions like:

- *What aspects of your personal or professional life seem to offer the best opportunities for improvement?*
- *What do want out of your (life, career, home environment, etc)?*
- *If you could snap your fingers and start doing things differently, what would change?*



Common Types of Coaching Questions



As a professional coach, there are a wide variety of different types of questions at your disposal. Let's take a look at four key types of questions at your disposal: probing questions, clarification questions, leading questions and empowering questions.

- **Probing Questions** - Probing questions are the meat and potatoes of every successful coaching practice. James McKenzie compares asking probing questions to taking on the role of an archaeologist or doctor who knows full well that the answers and the truth are never on the surface of things.
- **Clarification Questions** - When you are listening to a client's answers to your probing questions, it's often necessary to follow up with clarification questions to ensure that you have properly understood everything that has been said. If a client's answer seems to be a bit muddled, asking some closed ended, either/or questions will encourage him or her to commit to clear, factual statement.
- **Leading Questions** - Leading questions are used when you have something that you want to say but want to hear a person say it for themselves. While these can helpful at time, you do need to keep yourself in check from using these types of questions to lead your clients down a path that you think is best for them.
- **Empowering Questions** - Professional coaches frequently use empowering questions to encourage their clients and inspire them to continue making their way forward. These questions have are nearly rhetorical but clearly request a client's feedback on the matter. A great example of an effective empowering question is "*I think you've made a lot of progress in a short amount of time, don't you?"*



The Power of Silence



In addition to mastering the art of asking the right types of probing questions, every life or business coach should have a solid understanding of the power of silence. ***Coaching should never be a constant competition of coaches and clients firing off questions and answers at one another.*** Instead, successful coaching requires moments of silence to reflect on what has been said and consider the proper way forward.

In many ways, finding the perfect moment to harness the power of silence is nearly as useful in professional coaching as applying the proper questioning and listening techniques. During a coaching session, moments of silence can be used to:

- **Reflect on Progress or Breakthroughs**
- **Give Clients Time to Consider a Difficult Question**
- **Clarify Muddled Thinking**
- **Provide a Natural Pace to Your Coaching Sessions**
- **Gauge a Client's Commitment to a Strategy**



One of the most common pitfalls that many new coaches make when they are working with their initial clients is giving in to the temptation to placate a client when a difficult or challenging topic arises. When your find that a client appears to be uncomfortable about a particular question, do not try to placate your client by changing the subject or continue to pry with additional probing questions. I***nstead, be silent for a moment and allow your client to give some consideration to his answer, and you'll find that he will come to a meaningful answer on his own.***

Silent moments also lighten the pace of your coaching sessions. While coaching is a professional process, continually confronting clients with various probing questions can give a clinical tone to a session. By slowing down and pausing to digest the various questions and answers that have come up so far, you can provide your clients with a less formal coaching environment that will help them feel at ease and comfortable with giving open, honest answers rather than feeling as if they are constantly being put on the spot.

The power of silence gives both coaches and clients a moment to appreciate the progress and accomplishments that have been made during a coaching session. When you have helped

clients clear up their muddled thinking about their aspirations, obstacles and promising options for the way forward, consider simply recapping everything that you have accomplished in a concise statement and fall silent for a moment.

By meditating on everything that has been discussed, your clients will have time to solidify their commitment to reaching their goals. Wait for your clients to break the silence and use their statement to gauge where you should take the session next.

