

QUESTIONING

Coaching Essentials

COACHING CONVERSATIONS





Your coach should ask you powerful questions to help challenge your thinking and help you see other possibilities. You will be taking an inward look and thinking critically. As you work on achieving your goals with your coach, you will be challenged to get out of your comfort zone.

Michelle Braden, 2018

SUPPORTIVE YET CHALLENGING

Coaching conversations should be both supportive and challenging in a balance that invites the team member to create new options that they come up with themselves. The challenging part of a coaching conversation is there to stretch your team member's thinking so that seeing things differently will encourage them to experiment and do something differently.

The skill in challenging is getting the balance just right so that the team member feels able to act without being too scared or unconfident because the proposed change is too difficult, or too comfortable to do anything because the action is too easy. This level of 'stretch' will create the best chance for their learning, increasing their confidence and their sustained improvement and success.

Initial questions

- How does the team member feel about their issue?
 - stuck/frustrated/scared (Is it too big? Very important?)
 - supremely confident/bored (Is it too easy? Not meaningful?)
- On a scale of 1 to 10 how confident does the team member feel about the next step?
 - If it is less than 8, how motivated and engaged is the team member to take on the challenge?
- What skills and resources do they have and how supported do they feel? By you? By others?
- What have they done so far, that makes them hopeful? Where else have they done something similar and what worked then?

Challenging does not mean making the team member feel wrong, shamed or guilty, nor is it about offering a different view or solution they have not thought of or pushing them in a direction you think is important. It is about creating just enough discomfort (with an effective question or silence) to create the opportunity to stretch their thinking and therefore create options they have not considered before.

You also need to consider that someone with low self-esteem may find a slight nudge really challenging, whereas someone else with lots of confidence may respond better to a question more strongly phrased.

Questions to follow the scaling framework include:

- On a scale of 1–10 (where 1 = awful and 10 = great) where are you now (x)?
- What is it like at x? What is working?
- Why is it not 1? What have you done already that shows progress/improvement?
- What skills/resources are you using already?
- What would 10 be like? How would you, or others notice?
- At what number would you be content/confident?
- Thinking about success describe what x+1 would look like?
- What action(s) would take you to x+1? (or x+2?)
- What support/help have you got, or do you need?
- What is the first small step, in the next 72 hours?"
- On a scale of 1-10 how committed are you to taking it?

For example, instead of saying "Won't that be difficult given your home situation?" ask:

"What are the obstacles that you may need to address here?"

or more gently

"How might that affect your home situation?"

Timing is also important. If you challenge too soon then your team member may disengage from the conversation, if you leave it too late you may have missed the moment they are most open to change.

THE SCALING FRAMEWORK

Taken from the solutions-focused approach to coaching, this tool offers a basic structure for encouraging your team member to make small, but significant, movements.

The scale is not a measurement tool but a way of helping your team member talk through in a concrete and real way what is working and what success, and progress towards it, looks like. It is not about agreeing a score, and you do not have to agree with the number they give.

TOP TIPS

- Ensure you build the relationship, have a purpose and focus, and provide encouragement before you try challenging
- Find the right balance of support and challenge for each individual to optimise learning and confidence building
- Ask about what you notice, yet avoid being judgemental or confrontational
- Think about the purpose of your challenge? Would a question or suggestion be better?
- Create options for your team member to help them relax and therefore challenge their self-limiting beliefs. For example:
 - What if you couldn't fail, what would you do?
 - If you were world class, what would you do?
 - What would the 'wiser you' advise here?
 - What if you had unlimited time or money?

REFERENCES

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