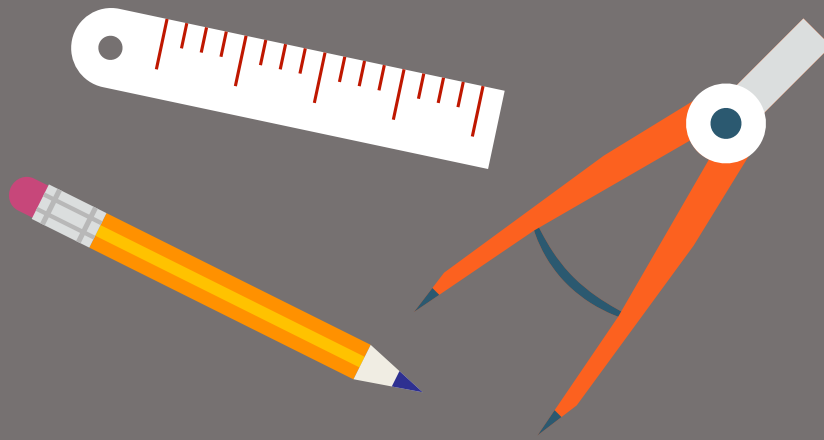


7 Critical Coaching Questions



PRACTICAL TOOLS

7 Critical Coaching Questions



Effective coaching depends in great measure on the ability to ask probing questions that uncover why the employee being coached is not achieving the desired degree of success.

In his book, "The Coaching Habit: Say Less, Ask More and Change the Way You Lead Forever," Michael Bungay Stanier says even the busiest manager who might object that he or she has no time for coaching, can indeed effectively coach an employee in 10 minutes or less by asking seven questions.

The author says that most attempts to train managers and supervisors to be coaches are more theoretical than they need to be. The coaching proposition doesn't need to be complicated, he says.

Here are his seven questions:

1. "What's on your mind?"

A good opening line can make all the difference. Charles Dickens knew that when he wrote his great novels, and the guys in the bars know it, too. To open an insightful conversation, avoid small talk and get right to the heart of the matter.

2. “And what else?”

Another version of this is “When you say that, what do you mean?” But that might sound slightly accusatory to the employee who needs the coaching, as if he or she had not expressed himself or herself clearly enough. The point is that the answer to the first question is probably not going to be the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. The employee is very likely holding something back, or simply didn’t say everything. You want to let him or her know that you’re not quite satisfied with the first answer and you want to drill down deeper to the next level. This follow-up question also avoids the common mistake of jumping in too quickly to start giving advice, which may not address the employee’s real problem.

3. “What’s the real challenge here for you?”

This is another follow-up question. It assumes that in answer to the second question, the employee has come close to admitting there is something bothering him or her. Now the employee is being asked to think about it a little more and analyze the deep-down “why” of this problem.

4. “What would you like to see happen?”

This powerful question puts the employee being coached in control of the situation. He or she is now visualizing what success looks like in his or her own eyes. They will most likely be a willing fellow-traveler along the road that will take them to that desired success – after all, it’s what they themselves wanted.

5. “How can I help?”

Once again, this question puts the employee being coached seemingly in control of the situation and the remedy for the problem. The underlying assumption is that help will be needed to overcome the problem, and the manager or supervisor is offering that help. But it’s not being foisted on them against their will – they’ve asked for it, so they’re much more likely to accept it. It prevents managers from imposing their own advice, which may or may not be what the employee wanted.

6. “If we are going to do this, what are we NOT going to do?”

This question forges the team between the manager and the employee and creates the pact that together they have decided on a solution to solve the problem that the employee has admitted to. But every action must have implied choices. There were other alternatives available to the employee. He or she could have decided to look for a job elsewhere, ask for a transfer, give up, just do the minimum and hope to slide by for a while. The answer to this question implies a commitment to trying to solve the problem instead of continuing to sidestep it and hoping it will go away.

7. “What’s the main thing you’re taking away from this?”

This question reinforces the main conclusion and seals the employee’s buy-in to the agreed-upon plan to solve the problem. And the remarkable thing is that it all came from the employees themselves. The managers never had to suggest or impose anything. The questions drew it out of them.