

Coaching Questions That Produce Revealing Answers



The key to asking probing questions in coaching sessions is to use open-ended questions that require the employee to give more than yes-or-no answers. You want – and need -- answers that reveal a bit about what they're thinking and what their motivations are.

To construct open-ended questions, it is often useful to think about the first word of the questions. "What," "how," "who," "where" and "when" can all lead to excellent open-questions, but try to stay away from "why."

Questions starting with why often sound antagonistic and can feel confrontational and judgmental – an impression you desperately want to avoid in coaching.

You can often achieve the same goal with a rephrased question, such as: "What was your intention when you said or did that?"

Be authentically curious

You have to show you are authentically curious about what makes the other person tick – you are much more interested in them than in imposing or asserting your own point of view. That's what will build trust with the employee.

Experienced coaches are very adept at not letting coaching sessions degenerate into blaming sessions (it's someone else's fault) or a venting exercise.

They redirect the conversation toward solutions.

Example: "I hear how frustrated you are. What do you think is going on that may have led to this?" or "What does the business need all of us to do?"

17 conversation starters

Here are some other conversation starters, from a collection of professional coaches, compiled by the consulting firm 15Five and tailored to fit several distinct coaching situations, to get the employee to reveal something about what's going on inside his or her head:

1. "When do you have the most fun at work?"
2. "What or who inspired you this week? How?"
3. "Was there a recent team discussion where you did not get to share your thoughts? Please share them with me now."
4. "If you could choose any colleague, team member or professional to coach you on any particular topic, who would it be and why?"
5. "What would an even more joyful workplace culture look like to you?"
6. "On a scale of 1 to 10, how satisfied are you with your own progress on your specific areas of focus?"
7. "Are there any key priorities that you feel you're not making enough progress on? What needs to happen for that progress to occur?"
8. "What creates a sense of making progress for you?"
9. "What would a 10% increase in your own productivity look like, and how do you think you could achieve that?"
10. "What's one personal goal of yours that you feel comfortable sharing here that the whole company can support you in achieving?"
11. "What could distract you next week from making progress on your goals? How can we minimize those distractions?"
12. "Is there anything in your work that's less than stellar and that may be causing frustration or delays?"

- 13.** "Reflecting back on the past week, is there anything that you could have gone better?"
- 14.** "Are you crystal-clear on your role and what you should be working on? If not, what aspects aren't clear?"
- 15.** "From 1 to 10, how has your personal energy level been at work? How can we move that number up?"
- 16.** "How are your meetings going? How can we make them more productive?"
- 17.** "Are you clear about what it takes to advance your role in this company?"