The Art and Science of Asking Questions

Why ask questions, when you can give advice or mentoring? Quite simply, questions hold the power to cause us to look and discover, create answers we believe in and motivate us to act on our creations.

Our relationship to a question has degenerated to 'fixing/answering'; a question is regarded as something to get rid of. That is a consequence of a society that has forgotten the power of 'living with a question' - to keep a question alive, to use it as something to stand on and look out from, to live 'IN the question' and never allowing a conclusion to end the question.

And as long as the question is held alive, it has its own secret powers. One of these powers is the power to transform you – the holder of the question – into its answer! If a question is held alive long enough (and there is no limit to the time span) it transforms its beholder into its answer.

For example, take the open question: 'Who do I need to be to be happy?' You can take a piece of paper and answer this question by making a list of everything that your mind is able to come up with. Then you have a list of answers. However, if you forfeit the temptation to let the mind answer the question and manage to live with it, you will find yourself being transformed into a happy person over time. The question makes you its answer. You can provoke this process with basically any open question, for example: 'What would need to happen for me to attract one million U$?' or 'Who do I need to be to attract my perfect partner?' etc.

The coaching-questioning approach forces our conversations to become less about our thoughts, our input, and how we can steer the dialogue to the answer we think will work. Instead, we start listening, really listening. We decrease what we say so that others and the Whole can increase. And that's where the magic happens: the more we listen the more we see how capable others are, how much they can do with a little encouragement and what amazing individuals they are. Therefore, the more we ask, the more we open the space for love.

"If I had an hour to solve a problem and my life depended on the solution, I would spend the first 55 minutes determining the proper question to ask, for once I know the proper question, I could solve the problem in less than five minutes." - Albert Einstein

The 7 categories of open questions

By asking these questions we initiate a process of being conscious of new perspectives and possibilities. Ask results-oriented, open-ended questions of our clients to support them in opening up to possibility and to respond freely. These types of questions support people to relax, listen to themselves and get clear on their own viewpoint.

Open questions are preferred over check-box ones because closed questions (i.e. questions that are limited to a yes/no response) tend to shut down the conversation and possibly stop the flow of conversation.
Powerful questions underscore the coach’s compassionate curiosity and dedication to helping the client become the person s/he is striving to be, her/his ‘better self’. They are most powerful when used by a coach who doesn’t really know the answer.

a) Questions to open vision

1. If you were guaranteed total success in everything – regardless of what it was – what would you do (and what would you start)?
2. What would you do if you were, here and now, at total liberty to do anything?
3. If you would be released from all commitments, what would you do first?
4. What would you want if you were able to really want anything?
5. What is it you are not thinking of?
6. Who do you have to be in order to….?
7. If you could have it totally your way…?
8. If you would have the power to create anything you choose to…?
9. What do you desire to see written on your tomb stone?
10. What would you love to get up for in the morning?

b) Questions that support self-discovery, attention and possibility

1. What questions are you not asking yourself about that situation?
2. What potentials have you not accessed yet?
3. What is important to you about this situation?
4. What is your profit in this /from …? (i.e. procrastination)
5. Where do you feel a loss of power, freedom?
6. What could be the deeper purpose here?
7. Are you what you are committed to be?
8. What possible underlying assumptions may be there?
9. Do you have your _____ (i.e. anger) or does your ____ (i.e. anger) have you?
10. Is there any message for you in that?
11. Is it so or are you deciding to see it this way?
12. What could someone who has a different set of beliefs think and say about this situation?
13. What’s powering your speaking? (question when someone is caught in story)
14. What would your higher Self want you to do?

c) Questions that support clarity around action and commitment

1. What should/could you let go of in order to…?
2. What could you create/do for yourself to ...?
3. What would have to happen so that ...?
4. What do you feel like saying YES to?
5. What do you need to say NO to?
6. What would make you want to do that?
7. What is it that you could still do today?
8. How much responsibility are you willing to take for causing the difference?
9. How much do you want this? How much is it worth to you?
10. What is the likelihood of you doing this?
11. How much or what would you be willing to put on the line?
12. What challenges might come your way and how might you meet them?
13. What seed could you plant today that could make the most difference tomorrow?

d) Questions that are suggested if your client is stuck

1. Context question: Are you fully committed to get unstuck?
2. What would be your ideal outcome of this situation?
3. What is it that you haven’t thought of yet?
4. What other direction might get you moving forward?
5. Where would you like our conversation to go next?
6. What could emerge from this situation?
7. What do we need more clarity about?
8. Would it be okay if we brainstorm some options?

*Powerful questions can be surprisingly simple, such as: “What’s next?” or “What’s most important about this?” or even “What do you need to do?” They aren’t prompts to get a client to say something obvious. They are used when the answer isn’t obvious, when it needs to be discovered.*

e) Questions that support completion

1. What opened up for you? What’s opening up for you?
2. What can be your greatest learning, insight here so far?
3. What if.............?
   a. Creating a new opening (What if that is not the absolute truth?)
   b. Completing a limitation i.e. “I can’t.” (What if you could?)
   c. Coming from scarcity i.e. lack of money/ not enough love etc. (What if you’d give what you demand to get?)
4. Is it complete? Are you complete?
f) Questions that support appreciation and presence

1. What would it be like if your chances to obtain what you want would increase many-fold?
2. How would that impact your life?
3. What could you think of acknowledging in yourself (or your boss, spouse, life etc.)?
4. What can you choose as your nugget from this experience?

g) Tricky questions 😊

These questions are only recommended if the rapport between coach and client is on a solid and high level!

1. And/what if you would know?
2. Who else should I ask?
3. Is that so, huh?
4. What is it that you are not saying?
5. Is this the truth or the (‘the’ not ‘a’!) lie?
6. What’s the one question you are hoping I won’t ask you?

MY TOP 5 COACHING QUESTIONS

(List in order of priority)

1. ______________________________________________________________
2. ______________________________________________________________
3. ______________________________________________________________
4. ______________________________________________________________
5. ______________________________________________________________
### Possible opposing forces that prevent the client from powerfully engaging in open questions

- Fear of own greatness ("It is our light that we fear, not our darkness." – Marianne Williamson)

- Resignation (consequence of repressing anger)

- Self-sabotage

- Survival / unwillingness to give up being right

- Looking good / avoiding looking bad

- Controlling / Defending Identity

- Being right / Making wrong

"The idea of having students discover answers for themselves has a remarkable effect on their thinking processes. Cognitive scientists have discovered that the more time your brain attempts to figure out a concept the better the student will understand it."

- SuperConsciousness Magazine
Addendum - more questions

If you need a new question for your repertoire, or are simply interested in what other professional coaches are asking their clients, you will find (below) an extensive list of their favorite questions:

- If you could have the perfect life you’ve always desired, what activity would you begin tomorrow to help you achieve it? (Andrea Teague)
- Looking ahead, what will happen if you don’t change? What will happen if you do change? (Sercan Savran)
- What can you do immediately, right now? (Sean Finnegan)
- What will you do today so tomorrow will be different? (Susan Carlson)
- What’s stopping you? (Willa Edgerton-Chisler)
- I understand that you don’t know, but if you knew, what would it be then? (Chris Bysell Hamrin)
- What would ‘80’ year-old ‘you’ want the present day ‘you’ to know? (Marlene Davis McCallum)
- I can hear that you can’t see beyond, but if you are on the other side of the obstacle, how do you want to see it? (Jeffrey Carado)
- What is the question I should ask you next time to move you forward? (Emma-Louise Elsey)
- What do you want your legacy to be? (Richard Pett)
- Except status quo, what is the next worse thing that could happen? (Marcel Gemme)
- If you knew without a doubt you would succeed, what would you take on today? (Eno Nsima-Obot Hill)
- What is the consequence and sequence to this action or thought? (Daniel Tolson)
- What are you learning from this? (Tara Cox-Raj)
- How true is that? (Katy Flatau)
- About what are you willing to be wrong? (Lynne Adrine)
- What do you mean specifically? (Mónica Gb)
- How do you know? (Axel Ritterhaus)
- What did you want to be when you were little? (Charles Popoff)
- How do you define ‘happiness’ and success’? (Laura L. Brown)
- How is what you’re currently doing working for you? (Tish Times)
- So, now what? (Sudania Chou)
- How do you show empathy to yourself? (Sue McDonnell)
- What does SUCCESS look like to you? (Two Page Mini Business Plan)
- If you could have it go any way you wanted, which way would it go? (Lara Klein)
- Would you like to explore that option and see if it is a real possibility? (Cibelis Alonzo)
- So? (Benjamin Loh)
• If you could wave a magic wand, what would change? (John Reed)
• What would you say to a friend if he/she told you this? (Rachel Brozenske)
• You don’t know? But if you did, what would it be? (Susan Carlson)
• What is the root of this situation? (Nancy Rousseau)
• What advice would you give to your daughter/son if they were in the same situation? (Carol Pressnall Leek)
• Tell me more, please. (Mario German Infante)
• What do you think people say about you when you leave the room? (Maureen Jenks Wishart)
• What are you getting from choosing to remain stuck, unfulfilled and unsatisfied? (Andrew Carter)
• So [since this way is not working], what could you do different that might work? (Äŋđŗė Méiŗa)
• So what is most interesting to look at right now? (Catharina Wŏhlecke-Haglund)
• What would you allow yourself to be and to do today? (Fil Maharlika)
• What insight do you get from that? (Sara Örsing)
• How much time are you willing to spend to reach this goal? (Maria Klein)
• Let’s imagine your old job, how do you feel? (Future Coaching Academy)
• What does your future self say about this? Five years from now, how will you feel when you look back on this? (Anu Bhatnagar)
• Imagine a world where anything is possible. Where are you? What are you doing? How are you feeling? (Vicky Ampoulos)
• What will be different? (Tiziana Capuozzo)
• This…for what? (João Catalão)
• What changes would you like to happen in the next 45 minutes? (Johnathan Brooks)
• Who are you “being” in this situation? (Eduardo Vier)
• Would you like to sit here or in this transformational chair? (Johnathan Brooks)
• What do you want instead of this? (Jurgita Kuliešienė)
• What’s really going on here? (Sally Vanson)
• What are you willing to do? (O. Lucía Serna)
• How would God manage if you took the day off? (Magdalena Giec)
• What would it be like if you were certain you would succeed? (Allison Linney)
• What does that tell about yourself? (Minna Sutõ)
• What would you do differently if you had to achieve double your goal in half the time? (Magdalena Giec)
• If your life was a movie, what is currently happening in the movie of your life? How much would like to change this script? (Johnathan Brooks)