

Coach-Like Questions for Teams + Individuals

These questions access the whole-brain rather than fast and automatic thinking.

They get yourself and others to really think about their thinking. I like to use the term 'think again' (a term coined by Adam Grant).

The questions below will challenge any agendas, bias, and perceptions. They also help to dull-down your status as a leader by lifting relatedness, fairness and autonomy. They encourage individuals to speak up, rather than agree (simply because you are boss). So therefore, lifting the status of everyone in the group.

They can also be used across peer-group meetings and with clients.

These questions are brain-friendly (SCARF) and incorporate the Choose Your Focus Model.

I've included a 'Getting the Ideas Flowing' set of coach-like questions, and also 'Reviewing Progress'.

Getting the Ideas Flowing

Step 1. Clear thoughts before getting creative.

Get yourself (& team) to relax, get comfortable, and shake off the previous meeting's emotions or to-do's. Like a 'clear-the-space' exercise.

For example; a simple trick is to look up (this changes the brain's clogged-up thoughts and clears the mind).

Or get everyone to grab a drink or simply shake out their bodies to change their physical state (2 minutes).

I often encourage teams to just stare out of the window doing nothing for 2 minutes asking them to find the 'beauty' or 'look for patterns', or 'something they've never seen before' or 'something that interests them'. If they're in the office, they can still do this exercise. The impact of doing this is that it creates some down time in the brain, regulates emotions, and supports the creative neurons to fire up. It's always nice to do a debrief and have them share what they saw. You only need 5 - 10 minutes but it's a great start to creative thinking.

During one session I delivered, I saw blossom pop, a client saw 2 dragon flies outside their office window, another saw a celebrity they had a massive crush on! It's a quick mindful activity that always goes down well and feels like a real treat of gifted time! The brain reacts well to novelty, it makes us feel good.

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Step 2. Set up the meeting.

For certainty, get the group crystal clear with the purpose of the meeting, the timings, what you hope to accomplish, where you want to be by the end of the X minutes. Remind them of the overall vision, goals that this meeting links to.

Step 3. Use the Choose Your Focus Questions.

Go through the content of the session, reviewing the material, or running through the ideas to be shared.

- *What is the outcome we are working towards?*
- *What's the ideal outcome?*

If a dilemma arises, get the group to name it and pop it into a dilemma statement e.g. "we'd really like to do X, but Y".

Step 4. Cross-check questions when looking at possible solutions.

When you feel all the ideas have been shared, it's time to add some additional thinking. These questions can help.

- *"If I/we had to think of some alternatives, what would they be?"*
- *"What assumptions am I/we making here?"*
- *"What are the short-term and long-term benefits of this decision?"*
- *"If you could raise a concern, what would you say?"*
- *"What have we not thought about?"*
- *"Is it always/never/ absolutely the case?"*
- *"What would a really wise person tell me/us to do?"*
- *"If there were no obstacles, what would be different?"*

I sometimes use the break-out rooms or chatbox to ensure every person gets their idea across.

Step 5. Planning it all out.

Now we're into the *how*. Which is a different part of the brain from the vision, the outcomes thinking and the creative problem solving.

Coach-Like Questions for Teams + Individuals

PLANNING Q's

- *What's your/ our plan for achieving these targets?*
- *What planning do you/ we need to implement to ensure success in this area?*
- *What are the milestones for achieving this goal?*
- *What options do you / we have?*

Again, the chat function (or break-out rooms) enables the team to share each other's ideas in real-time. I find it very helpful for everyone to do this at the same time as it allows 'all voices to be heard' and not be persuaded by others. It's great for an inclusive culture.

And a new starter can often add some fresh thinking to the mix. It also adds energy and bounce to a meeting. It's called parallel thinking.

Step 6. Getting into Action.

The final element is the Detail.

- *What are you/we prepared to do to make this goal happen?*
- *What's the first step you/we can take?*
- *What will you/ we complete by the end of next week?*
- *Where do you/we want to be, by when?*
- *What support may you/we need?*

(+ you can also use these questions when delegating a competent and confident task).

Below are a set of coach-like leadership questions that can be used for reviewing progress.

Reviewing Progress

These coach-like leadership questions can be used as part of ongoing review meetings or delegated tasks, or more formal performance reviews. These questions support wider thinking, help the team to think for themselves, they tap energy, and spark insights. They also encourage a growth mindset within the team.

They can be used with individuals and a whole group.

They only take about 5 - 10 minutes to run through and remove the detail and drama and keep the brain 'up'.

Coach-Like Questions for Teams + Individuals

Start off with...

- *How did you/we go with....?*
- *Did you/we complete that 100%?*
- *Was there any part of the action that you didn't get to?*

Explore emotion.

- *How do you/we feel about completing / not completing this? (in one word, can be used in chat box)*

Validate effort.

- *What are you/we most proud of?*
- *What have you/we learned from achieving this task?*
- *Good on you/us for tackling such a challenging action*

Questions for insight.

- *What did you/we learn from this?*
- *What have you/we found yourself/ourselves doing differently?*
- *What's clearer now?*

Expand learning.

- *What are the implications of this?*
- *Does this learning impact other things you're/we're working on?*

What's next?

- *What would you/we like to do now that you/we've had this new learning or insight?*
- *What support may you need from me?*
- *What action would you/we like to set?*
- *What do you/we need to remember to do next time?*

Conflict Resolution Worksheet

What do you see as the most important value or principle in this situation?

.....

What might be the most important value or principle for the other person?

.....

As a thought experiment, create a scenario in which the other person's position is the correct one. Write a paragraph about the situation imagining their thoughts and feelings. Use "I" statements, as if you are speaking from their point of view.

.....
.....
.....

Describe what a completely objective third person outside the situation might see.

.....
.....

What advice would you give to a friend or colleague in this situation?

.....
.....

Think about the wisest person you know. What advice might they give in this situation? (Feel free to actually contact them and ask!)

.....
.....

List three possible benefits of resolving this situation

1

.....

2

.....

3

.....

What is your vision of the resolution to this conflict?

.....
.....

What part did you play in causing this conflict? What are you willing to apologize for?

.....
.....



GT Leadership Session

3 - Tools

Coaching for Performance,
Why You Should Ask, Not Tell



Kate Southerby

NeuroLeadership Coach & Founder



Clear the Space

1. Tell them what you are going to do.

"Now I'd like to introduce you to a focusing exercise called 'clearing the space.'"

2. Use a real life example that they can relate to

"The best way to explain the exercise is with an analogy. On a computer, if you have too many programs open at once you are unable to operate efficiently. We can think of our mind in the same way—if we have multiple thoughts going on in the background our thinking is not at its best."

3. Explain the benefits of clearing the space

"This exercise helps you to be focused and at ease in the moment which will allow you to get the most value out of our time together. Research shows that as you label emotional states, you dampen down the activation of the limbic system. In other words, you can get more calm and focused."

4. Explain the steps for them to clear the space

So the format is to say the thought or event that is in the background in just a few words:

"What's in the background for me is..."

Then pinpoint the emotion and say what it is:

"So the emotion is..." Then say: *I'll put that aside to focus on this session."*

And really put it aside as an act of will right at that moment. You may wish to take a deep breath or make a gesture to put the emotion aside. Then ask them: "Are you ready to clear the space?"



Building An Emotional Vocabulary

You can help support yourself and your teams, to label emotional states accurately by using lists like the one on the right.

	Toward	Away
Strong	Delighted Elated Exhilarated Inspired Optimistic Passionate Thrilled	Angry Panicked Devastated Stressed Overwhelmed Abandoned Powerless
Medium	Cheerful Confident Curious Determined Energetic Upbeat Positive	Annoyed Discouraged Excluded Guilty Nervous Resentful Scattered
Light	Appreciative Contented Grateful Hopeful Interested Satisfied Relieved	Bored Confused Disengaged Distracted Embarrassed Frustrated Skeptical

A SCARF-friendly, brain-based REVIEW:



Whether they did or didn't do an action completely, there is a great opportunity for learning either way.

EXAMPLE QUESTIONS TO CHECK REALITY

Get the stats from them, get numbers. If they did not complete an action keep them in a toward state by talking about what they did do. We can help by reframing a situation and explaining that sometimes the best learning and insights come from actions that weren't completed.

1. How did you go with...?
2. Did you complete that 100% (a poll)
3. Was there any part of the action that you didn't get to?
4. Can you describe all the efforts you did put into getting this done, including thinking or planning time?

EXAMPLE QUESTIONS TO EXPLORE THE EMOTION

1. How do you feel about completing / not completing this?
2. You seem to have some charge around this action, can you describe your emotions in a word or two?
3. Would you be willing to put aside your emotions around the action and focus on what you have learnt?

EXAMPLES TO VALIDATE THE EFFORT

1. What are you most proud of?
2. Good on you for tackling such a challenging action.
3. It's great that you started on this action.

EXAMPLES TO DIG FOR INSIGHT

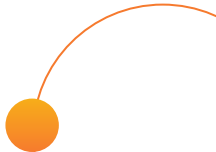
1. What did you learn from this?
2. What did you find yourself doing differently?
3. What has become clearer now that you've done the action?

EXAMPLE QUESTIONS TO EXPAND LEARNING

1. What are the implications of learning this?
2. How does your learning impact other things you are working on?
3. What did you find yourself thinking about or doing differently as a result of this insight?

EXAMPLE QUESTIONS TO FIND OUT WHAT'S NEXT

1. What would you like to do now that you have had this new learning or insight?
2. What action would you like to set?
3. What intention would be helpful to set here? IF/THEN. "If I'm in situation X, then I'll do Y in order to achieve Z"



Do I coach or do I tell?

"It's not what they want, it's not what you want, it's what they *need*".

Before meeting with your team, consider their 'readiness' for coaching:

Are they **competent**?

- do they demonstrate the necessary knowledge? (Y/N)
- do they have relevant experience in this task? (Y/N)
- do they consistently demonstrate high levels of skill? (Y/N)

Overall **Ability** (for this task):

Able v's Unable

Are they **confident**?

- do they have high levels of confidence doing this task? (Y/N)
- do they have a high degree of commitment? (Y/N)
- are they highly motivated to accomplish this task - are they 'up for it'? (Y/N)

Overall **Willingness** (for this task):

Confident and/ or Willing v's Insecure or Unwilling

Think of someone that you might have a meeting with this week - are you going to coach them or tell them?

How to coach your team to change

a step-by-step guide



SCARF +
"I'd really like to
do x, but y?"

Create a **TOWARD**
state



Choose Your
Focus/Grow
model

Facilitate
INSIGHT



Check-ins,

Commit to
ACTION



REVIEW model/
Feedback tools
+ IF/ Then Plans

Follow up to
build **HABIT**



Choose Your Focus



1. Vision

2. Planning

3. Detail

4. Problem

5. Drama

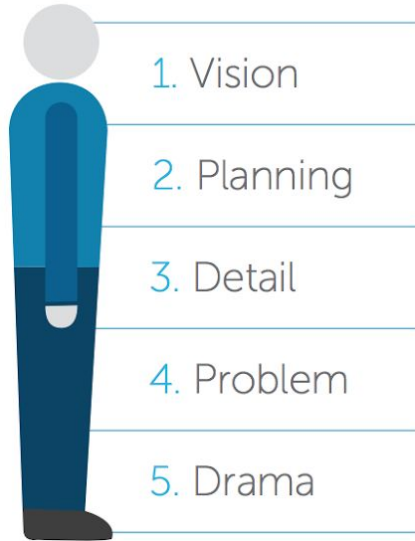


Thinking Questions more likely to generate insight:

Insert Awareness Question.. I'd really like to do X, but Y

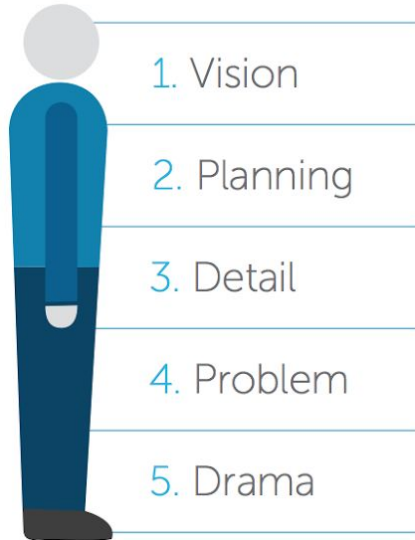
- How long have you been thinking about this? (days, weeks, months, years?)
- How frequently are you thinking about it? (How many times each hour, day, week)
- How important is finding a solution, on a scale of 1-10?
- How up for it are you?
- How high is this in your priorities now? What priority would you like it to be?

Vision Questions more likely to generate insight:



- What would you like to achieve in this conversation?
- What is your vision for this area of your work?
- What do you see as the ideal outcome?
- If there were no obstacles, what would be different?
- What does success look like?
- What will those around you be seeing that is different?

Planning Questions more likely to generate insight:



- What are your options based on your insights?
- What planning do we need to implement to ensure your success in this area?
- What are the next major steps for achieving this goal?
- How can I help you move forward in this area?

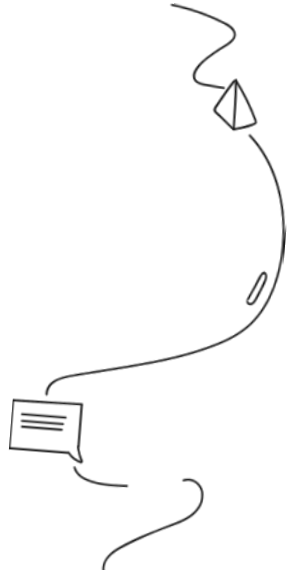
Detail Questions more likely to generate insight:



- What are you prepared to do to make this happen?
- What is one step you could take towards that this week?
- What will you complete before next week?

GROW- Model it

Using GROW as the backbone to your conversations.



Reality. What's the current situation – the good and the bad?

What are the barriers for us getting there?

How clear is your thinking about this?

Goal.

What does the ideal outcome /situation look like?

What is going to make us feel like this is a success? (using 'us' makes sure everyone is agreeing on the right end point)

Options. What are the options for moving forward?

(always start with the other person's ideas/ Tell them you're happy to add yours, but you want to start with theirs, and ask their permission to share yours.)

How can I help you think this through?

What's one route you can take? What else?

If that doesn't work, what else can you try? (once a few ideas are on the table, make an observation if something big is missing – saying, “You've done some great thinking, Is it okay if I share some other observations to help you further? (await their permission) I notice you haven't mentioned X”.

Which route do you want to go down?

Way forward. What is their first step going to be?

When will they take it? What help will they need?

Is there anything specific I can do to help?

Brain-Friendly Feedback

here are 4 ways

Technique 1: "What I Like About This Is....."

- Tell the other person: "What I like about this is..." (give meaningful, specific examples - more than one if possible. Aim for as many specific examples as you can before you give suggestions for changes.
- Then say: "What would make me like it even more is....."

(The specific details make this far more effective than the usual 'praise sandwich'.)

Technique 2: "Yes, And...."

- Avoid the joy-killing phrase "Yes, but...." when you spot a problem with someone's suggestion.
- Instead, try "Yes, and....." to signal that you're adding your perspective *alongside* that suggestion rather than in conflict with it.

Technique 3: "What Would Need To Be True to Make That Work?"

- Instead of saying "That won't work because of this, that, and the other"
- This phrasing sets an exploratory tone rather than a critical one, it encourages a feasibility check without making anyone look silly or 'wrong'.
- "Here's what would have to be true to make this work"

(Technique 4) Self Directed Feed-Forward

The approach to take is to ask the person to self-evaluate first, starting with what they are doing well. We then move on to asking what they might do differently next time. This helps manage SCARF threats so the other person can remain in a towards state.

+ Step 1: Placement

“Let’s take a few minutes to reflect on what you are learning after completing X. Let’s start by focusing on what you are already doing well/what looks good/what you like about x, and then move to areas you might like to focus on next/may need my help with. Are you ready to debrief me?/Is now a good time to have that conversation?”

+ Step 2: Ask for their positive feedback

“What are three things you felt you did well?”
“What else did you do that you were happy with?”
“Would it be okay if I shared my observations of what you did well?”

+ Step 3. Ask for their thoughts about development

“What did you learn from completing X?”
“What would you like to do differently next time?”

+ Step 4: Add your own thoughts

If appropriate you can then share your feedback based on your observations.

What you can do before our final meeting (deadline 21st)

- I. Try out one of the coaching methods (GROW or Choose Your Focus models) with your team (either during 1:1's or in a group).
- II. Try out one Feedback technique with a member of your team.
- III. Look at the leadership dilemma you identified in session 1 (on the next slide). What is your current relationship to that dilemma, in one word?

Use the Choose Your Focus Model to coach yourself or each other.

Individual Goals

Nicky

Leadership Dilemmas for her:

- *When to push performance v's to balance the team's psychological safety. They've been through so much due to pandemic.*
- *I don't know what people need?*
- *We are a business that used to have full autonomy, but maybe that's not it now? What's the right thing to do right now?*

Joe

Leadership Dilemmas for him:

- *Culture feels 'tense' - lots unsaid.*
- *Needs to be more excitement and cohesion.*
- *Perception of the leadership team needs to be worked on 'feels like a group of friends, a clique'*
- *Needs to be more ownership*
- *People are burnt out*

Sam

Leadership Dilemmas for him:

- 22 people reporting to me. Feeling responsible for them. Want to set up more leaders to support. Their responses and expectations are currently all different. Some are accepting, some are pushing back (those who have experienced the 'old culture').
- My role is now more 'leader' v's doing the delivering. Not such an output.
- Struggling with leading a 100% remote team. The engagement piece around how to do that. Feel at best as a leader when engaging with a team in-person.

James

Leadership Dilemmas for him:

- Growth is great but we need to establish ways of working. To streamline and harmonize.
- Not demoralizing individuals but motivating them.

Will

Leadership Dilemmas for him:

- How do we steer performance (keen to practically understand when to mentor and when to coach, and the how to do it) - he mentioned GROW model. (I mentioned when to 'mentor', when to 'coach' game - a leaders dilemma)
- People in his team want to progress, want the growth and added responsibilities, "they want to own the number" but when they need the team to help them, they back off. They say "I don't want to do that part of it". They don't want to have that accountability.
- How can we create that mentoring framework?

Some guidelines and extra resources:

[More details on giving feedback in difficult situations here.](#)

[Coach-Like Questions for Teams + Individuals](#)

[Coaching Growth Mindset](#)

["Change your Questions change your life" by Marilee Adams](#)

["Quiet Leadership: Six Steps to Transforming Performance at Work" by David Rock](#)

["Your Brain at Work" by David Rock](#)

["The Coaching Habit: Say Less, Ask More & Change the Way You Lead Forever" by Michael Stanier](#)

["Social: Why our brains are wired to connect" by Matthew D. Lieberman](#)

[Hand Model of the Brain by Dan Siegel](#)

[Name it to Tame it by Dan Siegel](#)