

Why does coaching work so well in growing the capacity of others?

Coaching is clearly developmental for the coachee: the provision of the space, structured conversation and coach attitudes all assist in the coachee accessing thinking and solutions for themselves.

Less clear on first glance is the value for the coach. As it turns out, the coach needs to observe rather than analyse, to listen rather than speak (e.g. giving answers) and to hold non-judgemental beliefs and attitudes. To take this stance, the coach learns to disengage from default hard-wired habits of communication and thinking that tend to get in the way of growing another. Hence, self management and self awareness capability of the coach grow significantly in the moment of coaching.

Why, as a manager or leader, can't I just tell someone what to do?

The answer here lies in whether the direct report needs to grow to meet a challenge or not. When all that is needed is information ("what time is the meeting?"), the simplest and quickest path is to give the answer.

However, when the lack of information or knowledge is connected to a need to grow ("what do I need to do differently to delegate effectively?") simply giving advice or telling someone what you did works out to be not very effective. The person with the dilemma needs to have the conditions in the brain for new connections to be made, and the provision of advice by a leader/mentor/teacher/manager simply does not facilitate this.

The most efficient brain state to be in to create clarity and insight is provided by another person refraining from judgement, asking questions that stimulate thinking and listening to observe back. This allows the growth of new connections within the brain - for the 'mapping' and integration of information in a way that adds to the ongoing development of the person.

What are the best questions to ask?

Somehow, we have ended up having socially hardwired questions that tend to focus on problem and detail. For instance, if I say "I'm so sick of having staff that don't pull their weight..." then you may well engage with me by saying:

- "I know what you mean..."
- "Have you tried delegating?"
- "What is it that they should be doing?"
- "Do they have an understanding of their job?"
- "What have you been doing to keep them on task?"

You'll notice that the first two are not even questions - they are empathising or advising. The remaining questions help me to stay focussed on the problem, and 'corral' my thinking to consider few options. Sometimes we ask questions that contain opinion or advice - "what do you expect with the way you speak to them?" for example. Opinion or advice, subtle or direct, in a question will often trigger a red zone response of some sort, further reducing access to answers.

The best questions have no opinion or advice, and get me thinking deeply about the issue:

- "If things were perfect, how would you see your staff working?"
- "How important is this issue to you?"
- "If you had the chance, what might you do differently that might lead to how you want staff to be working?"
- "How would you rate, say out of ten, the influence you think you have on how well staff pull

A good question should get someone thinking deeply, objectively and observationally.

When the coachee is really stuck, is it ok to give advice to get them going?

Getting 'stuck' is often the worst nightmare of a coach. "What will I do if the next question does not come to me???"

Fortunately, there are a few things you can do if the thinking of the coachee comes to a halt.

1. Call it as you see it: "we seem a bit stuck here - what do you need to be able to move on with this?"
2. The get out of jail free card: "so where to from here then?". This can be useful if used sparingly.
3. Recap or summarise the last few answers: "so what you have said so far is...". This will give your brain the space to reconnect with the content and to come up with the next answer.
4. If the coachee is really stuck, you can use advice as a think

How is the Coach in a Box module organised and implemented?

How do I 'merge' mentoring (or skills coaching, or accountability) with coaching?

What is the difference between coaching, mentoring and counselling?

What should I be thinking when I coach?

What is permission in coaching and how is it used?
