

Other People's Problems

a primer on coaching

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coaching

For 30 years I've tried to figure out how great leaders do their work exceptionally well. I found they were all exceptional at **asking better questions** — questions that are catalytic, that transform something from what is to what in a very amazing way might be.

*Hal Gregerson
Executive Director of the MIT Leadership Center*

– *benefits of coaching* –

- Produces deep learning
- Trains people to think for themselves
- Identifies and clarifies the *source* of the problem
- Helps people organize their thinking
- Gives people ownership over their problems
- *Encourages creative and new solutions*

Source: <http://www.trainingindustry.com>





*you don't have to have
all the answers!*

— mentoring vs coaching —



direction

=

answers

empowerment

=

questions



the right questions fuel innovative thinking

— questions to avoid —

Closed questions

- ≥ yes/no
- ≥ finite

Did you already try x?

Is this project important to you because x or y?

Leading questions

- ≥ suggestive
- ≥ prescriptive

What if you did abc?

I've seen this before and we did xyz. What would it look like to try that?



— the SOON funnel —

Success

Obstacles

Options

Next Steps

— Neuroscience of coaching —

Vision and goals

Viewed coach as trusting, caring, and inspirational

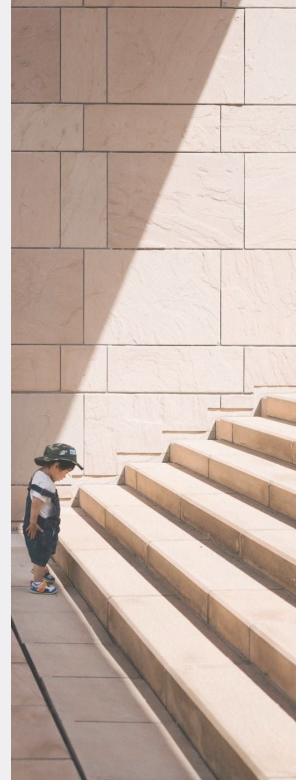
Brain activity related to motivation, social connection, and innovation



Challenges

Viewed coach as abrasive

Brain activity related to stress, defensiveness, and self consciousness



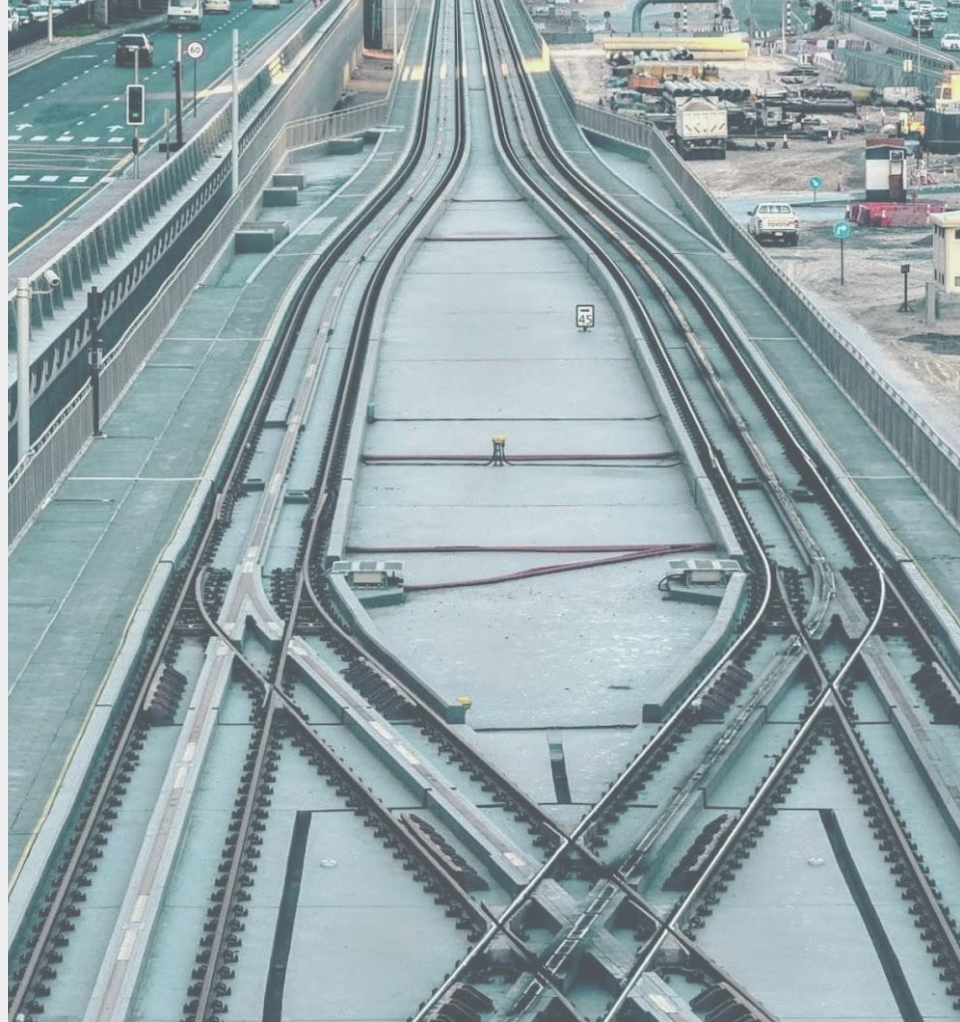
Source: <http://www.meeco-institute.org>



the spiral

— split tracking —

- Listen carefully
- Separate their concerns
- Replay them back for confirmation
- Address one-by-one



— success questions —

- *What do you wish you were spending the majority of your time on?*
- *What are you optimizing for?*
- *What's the best case scenario?*



— obstacles questions —



- *What's preventing us from accomplishing this?*
- *What failure modes do we need to prepare for?*
- *If you could wave a magic wand, what is one thing you would change?*

options questions

- *What have you already tried?*
- *Forget about who would do the work for a second. What would you do if you had the resources?*
- *Who have you talked to so far and what did you learn?*



— next steps questions —



- *What's the first step we need to take?
What's an even smaller step?*
- *What will make things different the next time this problem comes up?*
- *What support do you need from me to make you successful?*



*don't coach other people
through your problems*

— the SOON funnel —

Success

Obstacles

Options

Next Steps

— homework —

1. Split track

Grab a partner.

Person A talks about their issues for 60 seconds, meandering from one topic to the next.

Person B listens, then “split tracks” the issues they heard into a few different themes.

Ask coaching questions to get to a success mindset.

Swap roles and repeat.

2. Coach roleplay

Grab 2 partners. Roles are presenter, coach, and observer.

Presenter outlines their problem for 2 minutes. Coach asks SOON questions for 3 minutes. Observer notes any closed or leading questions.

Group debriefs. The presenter should share their feelings being coached!

Swap roles and repeat.

3. Real world practice

Read “20 Great Open Questions” from wherewithall.com.

Choose your favorites that you’ll return to often.

In your next 1/1s, ask 3 coaching questions before sharing your opinion or idea.

See if anything feels different!

— thank you! —

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appendix

The SOON funnel: Examples

SUCCESS

- *What do you wish you were spending the majority of your time on?*
- *What are you optimizing for?*
- *What's the best case scenario?*

OBSTACLES

- *What's preventing us from accomplishing this?*
- *What failure modes do we need to prepare for?*
- *If you could wave a magic wand, what is one thing you would change?*

OPTIONS

- *What have you already tried?*
- *Forget about **who** would do the work for a second. What would you do if you had the resources?*
- *Who have you talked to so far and what did you learn?*

NEXT STEPS

- *What's the first step we need to take? What's an even smaller step?*
- *What will make things different the next time this problem comes up?*
- *What support do you need from me to make you successful?*

Coaching Homework #1: Split Tracking

Grab a partner. Choose one person to be the Coach and one person to be the Speaker.

Set a timer for 60 seconds. The Speaker should talk about the problems they are facing at work or in life for the full minute, without stopping. They should meander from one problem or annoyance to the next. They can even circle back on a topic, or go out of chronological order.

The Coach should use the split tracking technique to mentally bucket what they hear into a few different themes. When the 60 seconds are up, the Coach should replay back the major themes they heard and confirm with the Speaker. For each theme, the Coach should try asking Success questions (see the SOON funnel) to understand success outcomes for each theme.

Debrief with each other on how that felt. Swap roles and do it again!

Coaching Homework #2: Coaching Roleplay

For this roleplay, you'll need three roles: Presenter, Coach, and Observer/Timekeeper. If you only have two people, the Presenter can play the role of the Observer too.

2 min: The presenter outlines an issue they are facing that they want coaching on

3 min: The coach has 3 minutes to try to ask *only* open-ended coaching questions that align with the SOON funnel and listen to the Presenter's response. No other types of questions or statements are allowed. The observer should note down any closed or leading questions, and any other observations from the conversation.

3 min: The group debriefs. The observer shares their notes and observations, and the presenter shares how they felt while being coached, noting questions that were particularly empowering or demotivating.

Swap roles and repeat until everyone has had the chance to play each role.

Coaching Homework #3: Real World Practice

Read Lara Hogan's "20 Great Open Questions" doc at <http://bit.ly/20-great-questions>.

Choose your favorite open question from that list, or write down your own that you think you'll use often.

Commit to asking 3 open ended questions in every 1/1 this week as you help people navigate their issues, before sharing your own thoughts or suggestions. Try to work in your favorite question!

Check in with yourself, and maybe even your teammate, to determine how that felt!

Coaching resources to check out

- **The Neuroscience of Coaching:**
https://meeco-institute.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/The_Neuroscience_of_Coaching1.pdf
- **Direction vs Empowerment:** <https://larahogan.me/blog/direction-versus-empowerment/>
- **Active Listening:** <https://larahogan.me/blog/actively-listening/>
- **Reflections:** <https://larahogan.me/blog/coaching-reflections/>
- **LifeLabs Learning Workshops:** <https://lifelabslearning.com/companies/workshops/>
(The Coaching Skills workshop is excellent, as are all of their other workshops!)