

“Wow, that’s a good question. Hmm. ...”

“Thanks for listening—it’s helpful just to be able to talk about this.”

“I’ve got it! Why didn’t I see that before? Now I know what to do.”

If you’ve been in conversations where people say these things to you, you just might be coaching. Coaching is about helping someone reach awareness and take action on something important to them.

You don’t have to be credentialed to coach your employees. (In this document, employees are called “clients.”) Coaching can be informal, simple, and happen in 10 minutes or less. All it takes are good coaching habits.

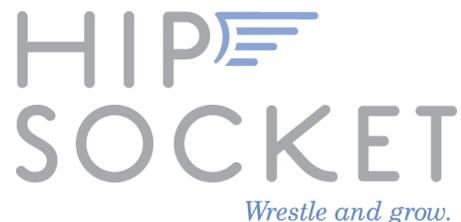
Habits are most easily formed when broken down into small steps that have triggers. For coaching employees, that might look like this: “When an employee asks for advice, instead of giving that advice I’ll ask. ...”

But what do you ask?

How to coach

Sometimes you will not ask; you will make observations. But when you have a question, make it simple and straightforward. “It is with words as with sunbeams,” the poet Robert Southey said. “The more they are condensed, the deeper they burn.”

- Avoid long setups that take your client away from what they want to process.
- Ask one question at a time—no “stacked questions.”
- Shut up. (In sales they say, “The first one to talk loses.” Coaches aren’t selling—but since you are guiding to awareness and action ... if the employee is talking, both of you are winning!)
- Choose open-ended “what” and “how” questions to help the client explore. (And make sure you are asking genuine questions—not advice disguised as a leading question.)
- Avoid “why” questions. (In our culture, it can put somebody on the defensive. “Why aren’t you reaching your goal?” can sound judgmental. Better: “What gets in the way of you reaching your goal?”)
- Reflect back the answers you hear (“It sounds like you feel ...”). It ensures you understand the client ... gives you time to think about your next move ... and gives the client the blessing of feeling heard.



What to ask

The Kickstart Question: **What's on your mind?**

Gives the client permission to get to work on a project, person or pattern of behavior.

The AWE Question: **And what else?**

Allows the client to process more deeply—not just the surface answer. (You can ask it after just about any other question. Followup questions have a magical power.)

The Focus Question: **What's the real challenge here for you?**

Ensures you coach the person, not the problem.

The Foundation Question: **What do you want?**

Provides clarity for the outcome the client seeks.

The Lazy Question: **How can I help?**

Prevents you from giving unwanted advice, instead drawing out what the client wants. (You can always say "no" to the request.)

The Strategic Question: **If you're saying yes to this, what are you saying no to?**

Solidifies the client's commitment and a plan to achieve it.

The Learning Question: **What was most useful to you?**

Enables the client to take insights from the session to other areas of their life—to grow.

One more thing ...

Most of this assumes the employee has approached you. If you want to approach the employee, don't ambush. For instance, coach the employee around your observations or some data—e.g., a performance report. And give them that information in advance.

Adapted from the International Coach Federation's "Core Competencies," "Co-Active Coaching: Changing Business, Transforming Lives" by Henry Kinsey-House and Karen Kimsey-House, and "The Coaching Habit: Say Less, Ask More & Change the Way You Lead Forever" by Michael Bungay Stanier.