



What Is Coaching, and How You Can Use It?

What is coaching?

Most people have experienced coaching in some form or another in their life. From sports, to music, to art to life. People are coaching and being coached all of the time.

However, most people assume coaching is telling. That the coach is all knowledgeable and the coachee is knowledge less. Again, you go back to your sports, music, and art teachers. They told you what you were doing wrong. They told you what you were doing right. They told you what to change and how to change.

But if that were true, no elite performers – athletes, musicians, leaders or artists – would have coaches. If the coaches were all knowledgeable, then it would be hard to find a coach if you were eluted. If you're at the top of your game, if you are the best in the world, who is better than you? Who has knowledge you don't? Who has experience you don't? No one. Certainly not in the area that you specialise in.

Instead, you should be thinking of coaching as **asking**. The best coaches don't tell they ask. The best coaches foster internal reflection. They foster the coachee to consider what is going on, their role in it, and their role/pathway out of it/to a better solution.

The best coaches can coach well regardless of subject matter expertise. The best coaches can help their clients even if it is outside their area of expertise.

Don't believe me?

Take a look at the story of [The Inner Game of Tennis](#) and it's author [Timothy Gallwey](#). Essentially, Tim wrote the book intending it to help tennis players. What he learnt very quickly was that the inner game was applicable and useful outside tennis. That the same questions and self-reflection could help people improve performance regardless of their sport or field.

If you want more insight into the value of coaching – for all aspects of life – have a listen to the podcast [Against the Rules \(season 2\)](#). The science of coaching is explored for different people in different situations – from life, to sport, to career, to singing.

And, if you're interested in being involved in a coaching session, you can listen to [Coaching Real Leaders](#). Real sessions are presented, along with analysis of the session by the host – Muriel Wilkins.

How you can use coaching now?

If you have not made the leap already, the value of the coach approach is you don't need to be an expert. You only need to know the right questions to ask. And as a leader or manager, asking questions will work much better than giving directives. Not just for correcting mistakes, but for avoiding them in the first place. Asking questions of your staff, students, and colleagues will help them arrive at answers when you're not around too! Making them better at their work and therefore better at helping you.

If so inclined, you can coach yourself. Essentially self-reflection is a form of self-coaching. Asking yourself what you are doing well, or what you're doing poorly is a good place to start with self-

coaching. Providing you can be honest with yourself. And make sure you do the work for real – not just *in your head*.

Some other questions you could ask yourself or the people you manage or work with to shift from *telling* to *asking*.

1. **What are you trying to achieve?** Then, follow that with why? And again, why do that? Etc. Seven times. Yes, it is annoying. But it will help you get to the real thing you are trying to achieve.
2. **What is missing right now?** And if so inclined, you could ask why 7 times to get to the real thing that is missing right now.
3. **What is the one question you don't want to answer?** Ask and answer it. Then ask why 7 times to get some real insights.
4. **If you were to deliberate set this situation up, what would you do to make it happen?** This is particularly useful when considering tough situations.
5. **If the opposite were true, what would that look like?** This is can also be used in tough situations. But also when you are faced with a lot of unknowns and you're jumping to conclusions.
6. **What is the one thing I could do right now (in less than 10 minutes) that would advance/improve/shift my current (negative) situation?** A great question for when you're stunned into in action.

If you want more coaching questions that are a little more specific, check out my blog on [20 Questions for Researchers](#), and the book [20 Questions for Humans](#) by Craig Harper.

“Brilliant work, Richard. Thanks so much for presenting today. I have started the legend file and referred several people to your website to check out your other presentations.”

Dr Katrin Gerber, Research Fellow

Dr Richard Huysmans helped build the first Victorian Allied Health Careers Pathway Blueprint. In addition, Richard has helped more than 200 clinicians, technicians, PhD students, early career researchers and established academics build their careers.. He has provided strategic advice on leaving academia, staying in academia, returning to academia, partnering with industry, growing a career by building new centres and institutes, as well as establishing new programs. As a #pracademic, Richard understands the need to have practical solutions to academic problems. He knows how to identify transferable skills and what makes a good resume.

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