

Module 8 – Asking Questions

Western culture is dominated by great thinkers, teachers, speakers, writers, but when was the last time you heard of someone being called a great question asker? Probably never.

And because our culture hasn't placed a high value on asking questions, it's likely that we don't have a value for it either. We would think that a motivational speaker might bring more change to a person's life by speaking for 30 minutes than a person who asks questions for 30 minutes straight. We might assume that one person has more wisdom than the other; after all, if you have to ask questions, then what are you bringing to the table.

QUESTIONS ARE MORE POWERFUL THAN ANSWERS

Let's use a quick exercise to show you the power of asking questions:

What color are your shoes?

Did you come up with the answer? Of course you did. Your mind went right there. You may have even looked down to remind yourself of what kind of shoes you were wearing (if any at all).

That's what questions do – they force a response. Your mind didn't debate answering the question. As a matter of fact, your body even came under submission to the power of the question.

Let's try it again, however this time, try not to answer the question. Ready?

What color is your hair?

How did that go? The answer still squeezed through didn't it?

Let's try one more:

What city do you live in?

Even if you were able to block the name of the city, you may have even seen images of it in your mind.

Module 8 – Asking Questions

This example demonstrates the power of questions. Furthermore, it demonstrates that the power of question asking is greater than sitting and listening to a teacher or speaker. How do we know?

How many times have you sat in a classroom and disregarded what the teacher said?

How many times have you willfully not responded to something a motivational speaker said?

How many times have you not reasoned, not engaged, or even rejected thoughts, perspectives, and information from another person?

Questions force engagement. It can be argued that they are more powerful than a person's own will.

In a coaching relationship, we're not asking questions to control people. We just simply understand that questions are more powerful than giving answers. We can give an answer and it not be engaged or even remembered, but when we ask a question, the individual is engaged in a very personal way.

POWERFUL QUESTIONS

When we say "powerful questions," we're implying that these questions are different from everyday questions. In coaching, we want to ask questions that are not closed meaning they cannot be answered with a simple "yes/no" response, but questions that require thought and insights.

Like a salt shaker...

Think of questions like the two different openings of a salt shaker. There is one side that if you open it will give you just a few sprinkles each time you tilt the container. That's great if you don't want much. But if you're trying to get a lot out, it's going to be time consuming. You're going to be shaking it for a while. You'll likely get tired or frustrated.

The other side has a big opening. The bigger the opening that's created, the more will be drawn in a single tilt.

Module 8 – Asking Questions

In coaching, one powerful question can create an opening for an abundance of helpful thoughts and ideas.

Like a pump...

Other powerful questions are more like a pump.

Pumps function differently than a salt shaker. In a salt shaker, you just need an opening. Pumps don't have water at the surface ready to come out. They typically need to be primed.

The questions we ask, we don't know the answer to. And, the questions we ask, the client doesn't know the answer to either – they are questions they've never thought about or questions they've never been asked. Therefore the questions prime the pump of their heart. They require thinking. They require something to be drawn.

A question isn't powerful because it can be answered on the fly. Some really powerful questions that are asked require time to ponder, visualize, and dream.

ASKING WITH THE END IN MIND

We will be sharing some examples of questions. It's really important that we don't go in front of clients with a generic list of questions though. Questions are asked out of the context of the conversation. We don't just ask a question. We ask a question that we want an answer to. There's a purpose. There is a perspective that we're trying to gain. Furthermore, we want to ask the kinds of questions that stir and move the conversation, not just ask questions because they're on a script.

OPENING CLOSED QUESTIONS

Often the end happens before its time. So it's really important to ask questions that by their very nature are open.

Here's an example of a closed-ended question:

How are you doing?

Module 8 – Asking Questions

There's a door attached to the question that closes behind the client as soon as they answer it. It's simply a "good," "bad," "fine," etc.

Here's how to change it to an open question:

What things in your life are going well for you?

What things are you really thankful for today?

These questions are better. It's holding the door open for the individual to express emotions and share insight.

Here are some more examples:

Closed	Open
Did your presentation go well?	How did your presentation go?
Do you need more time to complete this?	What is a reasonable timeline?
Have you discussed this with him?	How should you approach this with him?

WITHHOLDING JUDGMENT, DIAGNOSIS, & STAYING NEUTRAL

If you notice, the kinds of questions we ask are always:

What?

How?

When?

Where?

But we never ask Why? questions. Why questions are always about diagnosis and judgment.

We carefully ask questions that are neutral and non-judgmental. We're allowing the client to have safety and freedom to explore the reasons why. As coaches, we use the client's insight and not our own.

Module 8 – Asking Questions

Here's an example:

“Did that make you angry?”

Not only is it a closed ended question, but it is a question that carries a judgment call that could mean “I think you're angry” or “They should be angry about this.”

KEEPING QUESTIONS SHORT AND SUCCINCT

Sometimes in the quest for a powerful question, we can be a little too wordy and too eloquent to the point that the client loses the question in all the words.

The best questions are simple, short, and to the point.

SAMPLE QUESTIONS FOR COACHING

To start the session:

What do you feel we need to focus on?

What is it you want to achieve?

Where shall we start?

So, how can I help?

What are the key issues you wish to address?

To challenge:

How else could you achieve it?

How else could you view the situation?

What makes you think that?

What are your thoughts about?

What do you mean by...?

What are you going to do?

How else could it work out?

To gain more information and clarity:

Module 8 – Asking Questions

What are more examples of this?

What specifically do you mean by...?

For what purpose?

You may not know right now but, if you did know ..., what would it be?

How might someone else solve this?

What else do you need to consider?

To get commitment to achieve/ change:

So what are you going to do?

How will you know when you have it?

When you get it, what will you see, hear and feel?

What will happen if you do...?

If you don't..., what will that do for you?

What effect will this change have on others?

How willing are you to...?

FINAL THOUGHTS

- Do not ask multiple questions. Ask one question at a time.
- Do not ask leading questions which are questions that contain a hint at the answer that you want.