



Human Change: Motivational Questions for trust-building conversations

The “5 Stages” model is based on [motivational interviewing](#) and coaching frameworks that balance empathy and advanced listening skills to support positive change in others. **How to use these questions:**

Step 1: Be attentive, which stage might they be at? Then ask open questions aligned with their stage.

Step 2: Reflect their answers back throughout the conversation, show them you’re really taking in what they say.



Stage 1: Totally disagree with you

Stage 2: Maybe I agree?

Stage 3: I agree, but how would we make this work?

Stage 4: Successful agreement and collaboration!

If they’re at stage 1: “I don’t agree at all” or “Not right now”

Clarity how it impacts something they care about:

- I know this seems like a small thing, but hear me out: My concern is how it impacts _____, it makes things seem like we don’t care about _____. I don’t want us to be *that* kind of company.
- It sounds like your concern is _____. What if we try _____, how would that work?

Clarify exactly where they’re stuck: “This is a weird question --if you had to rate where you’re at with this, 1 being “TOTALLY STUPID”, and 10 being “TOTALLY AGREE”, where are you at with this? What would bump it up a number?”

Course-correct: “Let’s pause -- I don’t think I said that right. How could I have asked for that better?”

If you or they are too triggered (prefrontal cortex is offline):

- Thanks for listening, maybe we could come back to this once we’ve both gotten more time?
- Maybe this is just something we’re going to disagree on. Thank you though for listening [don’t push to resolve everything in one sitting, their amygdala might need time + privacy]
- Give them time, and read more on [MI](#) or [change psychology](#) to strengthen your skills.

Stage 2: “Maybe...”

Discuss a few options + ask for their ideas:

- What if we _____, instead of my original idea, how would that work?
- What are other ways we could do this that would work for you/your team?
- What if we just focused on making this, say 20% better. What would that look like?
- What if we tried what [another team, another situation] does? What do you think?

Explore pros and cons openly, don't push for only one:
What are the pros and cons of option A vs option B?

Offer help:

- What's one thing I could do to help?
- I want to meet you half-way, what if I _____?

Stage 3: “I agree. How do we/ I do this?”

Brainstorm and decide on specific small steps:

- Thank you for being so open to this. I think the next time this might come up is at _____, how does it sound to ____ [new thing you're asking for]?
- Great, so what can we do to prep for that?
- Can we check-in in ____ weeks/ days?

Clarify commitment:

On a scale of 1 to 5, totally candidly, how are you feeling about this now? (5 is super awesome)

Offer help / to meet them half-way

- How can I help? I want to help :)
- Hmm...it's not what I was originally thinking, but ok, let's try it, what can I do?
- Who is someone else that would be helpful here, that could help us brainstorm alternate solutions?

Stage 4 Doing it!

- Before and after: Before we spoke, I felt/ it felt _____. And now, it feels _____. That's been rad. How's it been for you?
- Check in on hard stuff: What's been hard and what's been smooth about this so far? When it got hard, what did you find helpful?
- Build confidence: Here are two things I've noticed are amazing: _____. How's it been feeling to you?
- Give balanced feedback: Ok, _____ has been awesome. Really! [insert specific example of positive change you've noticed]. And I wanted to check in about _____, would you be open to feedback? [confirm they are] Ok, you can totally take this or leave it, but one thing might be __[specific example]____. I think that would build on what's working good so far. What do you think?
- Real-time feedback is awesome: Hey, can we debrief on that real fast - I think that was an example of the thing we talked about [then if it didn't go well, ask for what else could've worked better, or thank them if they nailed it!]
- Thank them, acknowledge their effort: “You didn't have to take what I said to heart, but you did. Thank you!”
- Reciprocity: I'm open to feedback, what 1 or 2 things could I do next time?

Tip: Give them time when you can to think on the convo, and strengthen your skills: read up on [MI](#) & [change psych](#).