

To help explore the depth and width of their challenge:

- a. "What's going well and what's not feeling right about ____?"
- b. "What are 1 or 2 things would you change first about ____?
What 1 or 2 things would you keep the same?"
- c. "What's been the hardest part about _____?" or
"What's your biggest worry about this?"
- d. "Six months from now, how do you want to be feeling about this? What's the ideal state?"
- e. "If you didn't have to worry about ___, what would you do?"
- f. "What options *haven't* you tried yet?"
- g. "Let's brainstorm for a bit, what are 3+ ways you could achieve _____ AND _____?"

To narrow down options:

- h. "What are 1 or 2 experiments you could test first to see which is the right approach?"
- i. "I hear that there's X, Y, and Z all going on. If you had to pick one of those to address first, what would it be?"
- j. "What's your gut feeling about these options - which would you choose on spidey sense alone?"

To place "guardrails":

- k. "I am concerned about _____. On a scale of 1 to 10 (10 is really bad), how bad do you think it actually is?"
- l. "If you/we choose _____, what 3 things could go wrong (there's always things that can go wrong, so let's just plan for them in case we can prevent them)?"
- m. "I wondered if _____ was what caused ___, how do you see it, is my assessment off?"
- n. "I worry that if we _____, then _____ will happen, how can we avoid/prevent this?"
- o. "Knowing what we know now, what 1 or 2 things do we need to do next to prevent ___?"

If the person seems upset:

- p. Make room for context: "It would help me to understand, what feels *most* upsetting about this?"
- q. Clarify: If they give you a vague phrase, such as "feels wrong" or "seems off-brand", encourage them with "Say more about that - what makes it feel _____"
- r. Look for Bright Spots: "Ok, I hear that it really didn't work well when X, Y, Z happened. When do you feel it worked well?" or "When does this *not* happen?"
- s. In your shoes: "If you were me, what would you do next about this?"
- t. Collaborate: "I would like to find a solution together on this -- but likely need your help -- what could both of our teams do to make it substantially better by Q2?"

To invite them to be honest and give you/the team feedback:

- u. "What 3 goals do you think we should be prioritizing?" [let them answer]
"How well do you think we're doing with each of those?"
- v. "If you could improve this by 10%, what would you do first?"
- w. "You're a person who has a good sense of how folks are taking this -- what do you think people would like/hate about option A vs B?"
- x. "What do you wish you had more direction/clarification from me about?" or
"What 3 things could you/we try this week to create more clarity?"

THE OTHER HALF OF COACHING

- Ask them if you can take notes so you don't miss anything - it shows you're not just passively listening and can help you track the conversation better.
- Only ask a question with *authentic* curiosity. People can tell when someone is not genuinely interested in their answers, so open questions only work if your tone and body language honestly convey that you are curious and non-judgmental about whatever their answer might be.
- Avoid machine-gun questioning: Leave 2 seconds of silence after they're finished talking -- this gives them room to think further, and often they'll start talking again and share a deeper thought (they usually do - this is awesome)
- Look for words, metaphors, and underlying values and passions they repeat, then confirm with them if your inference is correct: "It sounds like you really love _____, is that right?"

- Do not accidentally phrase open questions as *closed* questions, for example: “How are you feeling about this?” is not the same as “Are you happy with how things are going?”. Open questions invite others to “tell their story” in their own words without leading them in a specific direction. It might take a few extra minutes, but the connection they’ll feel to the final solution/conclusion will pay off in the end.
- Affirmations: Open questions require also being skilled with affirmation. These are statements and gestures that recognize their experience, their strengths and acknowledge their values. Affirmations make the person feel *whole* and *seen*. Examples of affirming responses:

I appreciate that you are willing to talk this through

I can tell how much ____ matters to you

I can tell how hard you’re working on _____

I appreciate your ability to consider this in addition to the other priorities I know you’re also managing.

- Reflective Listening: Reflective listening is meant to close the loop in communication and ensure breakdowns don’t occur, and can start with the basic: “So you feel.../ It sounds like you... / You’re wondering if... . “
- Summaries: Summarizing helps to ensure that there is clear communication and can provide a stepping stone towards change. Begin with a statement indicating you are making a summary. For example: “Let’s zoom out for a second...it sounds like X, Y and Z matter most, is that right?” or “Here is what I’ve heard - tell me if I’ve missed anything: _____”