

The Coaching Habit: Questions for Coaching

The Coaching Habit: Say Less, Ask More & Change the Way You Lead Forever by Michael Bungay Stanier

1. **What's on your mind?** (kickstart question)
2. **And what else?** (follow-up / AWE question)
 - a. Stay curious, stay genuine
 - b. Ask it one more time (3-5 times)
 - c. Recognise success – get to *there is nothing else*
 - d. Move on when it's time: *is there anything else?*
3. **What's the real challenge here for you?** (focus question)
 - a. Or: *if you had to pick one of these to focus on...*
4. **What do you want?** (foundation question)
 - a. *Indirect: Suppose that tonight, while you're sleeping, a miracle happens. When you get up in the morning tomorrow, how will you know that things have suddenly got better?*
 - b. Understand human driver behind needs – recognise universal needs in demands
 - i. Affection
 - ii. Creation
 - iii. Recreation
 - iv. Freedom
 - v. Identity
 - vi. Understanding
 - vii. Participation
 - viii. Protection
 - ix. Subsistence
5. **How can I help? / What do you want from me?**
 - a. Avoid taking on victim / persecutor / rescuer role, but put other person in charge, avoids jumping into action
6. **If you're saying yes to this, what are you saying no to?**
 - a. → Use 3P (in this case, project/people/patterns) to determine how to create space, focus, energy, resources to make the Yes a true Yes
 - b. What is our winning aspiration?
 - c. Where will we play?
 - d. How will we win?
 - e. What capabilities must be in place?

- f. What management (and measurement) systems are required?
7. **What was most useful here for you** (about this conversation)? (→ Create a learning moment for the person and you)

Mastering questions

- **“Out of curiosity...”, “Just so I know...”, “To help me understand better...”, “To make sure I’m clear...”** can soften any question
- Ask one question at a time
- Cut the intro and ask the question. (Can start with *“Out of curiosity...”*)
- Don’t use rhetorical questions. Don’t present advice as questions. (But have *answers* where they’re useful)
- You can only coach the person right in front of you
- Avoid “why” and use “what” instead (why is too interrogative)
- Get comfortable with silence. Don’t fill the void.
- When asked “what do you think I should do?”: “Great question. I have some ideas which I’ll share with you. But before I do, what are your first thoughts?” ... “What else could you do/try?”
- Actually listen to the answer
- Acknowledge the answers you get
- Use every channel to ask a question

First 1:1 questions

Ideally, your team summary profiles will have answered some of these questions.

- What makes 1:1s most valuable for you?
- What are your goals for this year? And for the next 3 months? / Do you have any clear career goals that I should know about so I can help you achieve them?
- Feedback
 - How do you like feedback - the medium (IRC, email, in person, etc.)
 - How do you like feedback - routine like in 1:1s, or as-it-happens
 - How do you prefer to receive recognition? (public or private)
- What do you need
 - from your manager?
 - From your team?
 - From your peers?
- What does your team need right now?
- Mood
 - What makes you grumpy?
 - How will I know when you’re grumpy?
 - How can I help you when you’re grumpy?

- Are there things that always put you into a bad mood that I should be aware of?
- Are there any manager behaviours that you know you hate?
- Any surprises since you've joined, good or bad, that I should know about?
- Human learning and growth requires the right amount of four things: new challenges, low ego, space to reflect and brainstorm, and timely and clear feedback. How are these four going for you? Is there one you need more or less of?
- What's your favourite treat?

General 1:1 questions

General thoughts and updates, checking in on engagement and your relationship

- Where are you finding success?
- What's on your mind?
- What are you working on?
- What information or tools do you need to be successful? Where could you benefit from more support? What can I do to better support you as your manager?
- How do you feel you're doing?
- How are you feeling about [X project]?
- What do you enjoy about [your current responsibilities]?
- What motivates you by [the work we are doing]?
- What would help you be even more [happy? successful? productive?]
- What is most useful to you about our working relationship? Our communication?

Blockers

- Is there anything that blocks your progress?
- What are your blockers? What's blocking you from achieving your goals?

Clarification on team goals/ team's work

- Is our team's current work defined clearly enough?
- What are you focusing on this week? What are your biggest priorities?
- How does [your work] connect back to [the team goals]?
- What do you think about [the team goals]?
- What do you think is/will be our biggest challenges to reach [the team goals]? What about our biggest opportunities?

Retrospective/Reflection

- What's one thing that could've gone better/frustrates you/surprised you?
- What felt slow or inefficient to you in your last project?
- What's one thing in the last month we could've improved on?

Personal growth

- What parts of your job would you like to deepen your skills in or get additional training in?
- Do you feel we're helping you advance your career at a pace you would like?
- What work are you doing here that you feel is most in line with your long term goals?
- Do you feel challenged at work? Are you learning new things?
- What skills would you like to develop right now?
- Who in the company would you like to learn from? What do you want to learn?
- How do you prefer to receive feedback?
- Do you feel you're getting enough feedback?
- Is there an aspect of your job you would like more help or coaching?

Company improvement

- If you were CEO, what's the first thing you'd change?
- Are there any aspects of our culture you wish you could change?
- What are your favorite parts about our culture?
- Do you feel over-worked, under-worked, or just the right workload?
- What is the #1 Problem at our company? Why?
- How many hours a day do you feel you're productive? How could we help you be more productive?
- How could we be more creative or innovative as a company?

Manager Improvement

- What could I do as a manager to make your work easier?
- What do you like about my management style? What do you dislike?
- Would you like more or less direction from me on your work?
- What could I do to make you enjoy your work more?
- How can I better support you?
- What would you like to know about me?
- Is there a situation you'd like my help with?
- What is something I could do better? What is a criticism you have for me?

Happiness

- Are you happy with your recent work? Why or why not?
- What's on your mind?
- When was the time you enjoyed working here the most?
- What do you feel is your greatest accomplishment here?
- What's something you feel is undervalued that you contribute to the team?
- What part of your job do you wish you didn't have to do?

Personal thoughts

- How do you feel your work/life balance is right now?
- What's one thing we could change about work for you that would improve your personal life?
- What drives you? What motivates you to come to work each day?

Team Relations

- Who on the team do you have the most difficulty working with? Why?
- How could we improve the ways our team works together?
- Who is kicking ass on the team? What have they done?
- Who do you admire on the team? Why?
- Do you feel your ideas are heard by the team and I?
- Who would you like to work more often with? Why?
- Do you help other members on the team? Do others help you when you need it?
- What's one thing we should change about how our team works together?
- What's the biggest thing you'd like to change about our team?
- What do you like most about working on our team?

Work Habits

- What part of the day do you have the most energy and focus? When do you have the least? What changes could we make to your work schedule to accommodate this?
- What are 3 things would you buy to improve your productivity if money was no object?
- What is an ideal, productive day at work for you? Walk me through the day...
- What's an inexpensive thing we could do to improve our office environment?
- What are the biggest time wasters for you each week?
- What makes you excited and motivated to work on a project?
- When you get stuck on something, what is your process for getting unstuck? Who do you turn to for help?
- What part of your work routine do you find is working best? What area do you want to improve?

- Are there any meetings or discussions you feel you should be a part of that you're not?
Are you included in any you don't want to be a part of?
- What do you do when you feel low energy or unmotivated?
- How can I help...? (be more productive/happier at work/enjoy work more/etc)

Concrete ways to ask for feedback

- **Ask for "advice"**, as advice is an invitation, more welcoming, and less negatively connotated than feedback is for some people. *"What advice does anyone have for me?"*
- **Ask specific questions:** *"What's one thing that could've gone better/frustrates you/surprised you?"*
- **Connect your question with an event:** *"What's something we missed in our last meeting?", "What felt slow or inefficient to you in your last project?", "What could we have improved about our last release?"*
- **Time-box it:** *"What's one thing in the last two weeks we could've improved on?", "What's something last week that could've gone better?", "What's motivated you this month?"*

Employee summary

Some folks may find it helpful to keep a similar table at the top of their 1:1 notes with individuals. It is helpful if you have many direct reports or are at a company with underdeveloped HRIS systems where there is a fair amount of movement between teams: it will form the foundation of an employee hand-off document.

If this information is easily available to you elsewhere (i.e. an HRIS system, or your team summary), this may not be necessary. Regardless, this template will help directionally focus your 1:1 conversations as you bounce from one meeting to another.

Start date:	
Time zone & regular work hours:	
Current level:	
Last/next performance review	
Goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For this year • For the next 3 months • Clear career goals that I should know about so I can help you achieve them?
Feedback	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Medium:

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Frequency:● Recognition:
Manager behaviours that you hate:	
Favourite things:	