

SATISFACTION STRATEGIES • POWERFUL QUESTIONS • DEVELOPMENTAL EVALUATION

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The
ART,
Science & *Impact* of
COACHING

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The ART, Science & *Impact* of COACHING

How, when and why coaching works

How do we coach? Is it art, science, or both and more? What does a coach need to know, do, have, or be to achieve the greatest impact and make the most difference?

How do we prepare to coach in these rapidly changing times? What tips, tools and techniques enhance coaching? How do we measure coaching's effectiveness?

Join us as we explore the art, science and impact of coaching.

3 Powerful Questions

Engaging spiritual wisdom in secular coaching

By Adam Robersmith, MDiv, DMin

KEEP IN MIND
Spiritual language isn't always 'religious.' People may use any number of names for the Divine, but they might also use other words to name profound realities: Spirit, Truth, Love, the Universe, Nature, human potential, and so on.

As a spiritual director, I regularly hear clients say things like, “I need to pray about it” and, “During my meditation, something shifted for me.” The place from which I listen, think, and speak with my directees is grounded in questions like, “How is it with your soul?” and “How goes your relationship with the All-That-Is?” Clients talk with me about work and home, sexuality and spirituality, purpose and suffering; in every conversation, together we seek to bring the client’s

spiritual wisdom to bear on every aspect of their lives. I cannot conceive of a session that lacks the awareness generated by these questions and conversations.

That is not the case for many of the coaches that are my clients and colleagues who work in the secular world. They often tell me they feel ill-equipped to discuss spiritual matters. I hear that they don’t have the training or knowledge to invite spiritual wisdom into the discussion, even when engaging it would be transformative. Referral can be exactly

the right thing to do – and spiritual directors really appreciate the work! – but sometimes all a client needs is to have this perspective included in the moment.

You can engage your clients' own spiritual wisdom without being a spiritual director or ordained clergyperson. Asking people to articulate and examine their own perspectives, understandings, and frameworks doesn't require you to be a professor of theology. The skills you have as a coach (e.g. asking powerful questions, questioning disjuncts and gaps, mirroring integrity and coherence in a client's story) are all you need to help a client engage their own spiritual wisdom and shift their perspective.

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THE QUESTIONS

Each of us makes meaning of the world using a collection of cognitive and emotional frameworks within which our goals are viewed. We may focus on achieving success, avoiding failure, increasing health, finding joy, or pursuing enlightenment. Cultural norms, family systems, and personal histories provide key frameworks for how we address those goals. Religious teachings and spiritual development also impact how we choose and pursue our goals, so including a client's spiritual perspectives can more fully illuminate possibilities and obstacles for the coaching relationship to address.

Three powerful questions can change a client's perspective on themselves and their situations by helping them articulate their cosmology—their conception of how the universe works and their place in it.

1. How do you think the universe works?
(What is your **theology**?)
2. What do you value and how do you determine your course of action? (What are your **ethics**?)
3. How do you best function in the world?
(What is your **personality**?)

1 Theology

This can include specific religious beliefs or more personal understandings. A client might simply say, "I'm Muslim" or "I'm Christian" or "I'm an atheist." Encourage them to go a bit deeper, to describe exactly what that means to them. You might discover that they attend a congregation, but don't really believe in God.

Another might share a profound belief in a Divine reality, but no interest in organized religion. Someone might believe in a universe where karma is powerful, and someone else might understand the world to be a place of material cause

and effect and nothing more. This question can help the client to understand their own unarticulated expectations about what the world will offer them and how the world will respond to them, too.

2 Ethics

This may include both highly aspirational, idealistic ideas as well as practical, transactional ideas. Ethical systems vary widely, addressing personal behavior, group norms, and global issues. Clients may say, "I believe in the Golden Rule" or "I look out for Number One" or "Fair's fair." Again, encourage them to go deeper in their reflection. What do they believe the Golden Rule really says, and how do they use it in practice? What does taking care of oneself before anyone else really mean? If "fair's fair," what exactly is fairness? When something is unfair, how do they address that? This question can break open client understandings about why their circumstances are what they are and how they got there.

3 Personality

Asking personality questions helps people gain clarity about who they truly are, what they should expect of themselves, and the best ways to nurture change in their lives. This is something you've probably already discussed in different ways: they may have already said to you, "I procrastinate" or "I'm a perfectionist" or "I focus best in the morning."

Once again, ask them to reflect more deeply. They may realize that they are afraid of sin or encouraged by the feeling of rebirth that comes with a new day. They may realize that they work best in collaboration or that they avoid keeping commitments. This question can help clients assess their capacity to live out beliefs and values or what circumstances best support their practices of self-care and awareness.

Remember: You, as the coach, don't need to be an expert in spirituality or theology. You are asking your clients to reflect on their own understandings of these ways of making sense of the world. Your job is to notice whether these responses have integrity as well as to help identify inconsistencies and incompatibilities that affect the issue at hand. Most importantly, you are inviting your clients into an awareness of self-coherence that few people consider in the midst of daily life.

THE CONVERSATIONS

These questions can be used in one-on-one coaching, group coaching, or in classes and workshops. I've asked them in all these settings to good effect. I've also asked them of myself, which is what I recommend you do before you ask them of anyone else. Experiencing these questions for yourself will help prepare you to guide others in the process.

First, give yourself a few minutes to set aside all the stuff that is swirling around within you so that you can be present

to this exploration. Next, read the first question, take a breath or a moment to sit with it, and then answer it. Speak aloud, write it down, draw, make a couple of notes: do whatever will let you express and recall your thoughts. Give yourself another moment – breathe, move, close your eyes — and then do the same with the next two questions. Look at your responses. What sort of story do they tell about who and how you are in the world?

You can take this a step further, too. Reflect on a real issue in your own life. Answer the questions. Pause a moment, and then return to your issue, considering it in the context of your responses. What new perspective does your spiritual wisdom bring? What are you most aware of in this moment? Are you frustrated? Defensive? Surprised? Delighted? Curious? Numb?

I highly recommend working with all three questions in one session. Considering responses to all three keeps a person from dwelling too much on any single cause or limitation, helping them examine the situation in a multi-dimensional context. To do that, you'll need to keep careful track of the

3 POWERFUL QUESTIONS ON SPIRITUAL WISDOM

1. THEOLOGY: How do you think the universe works?

2. ETHICS: What do you value and how do you determine your course of action?

3. PERSONALITY: How do you best function in the world?

time. Ask your client to reflect on each question for three minutes, share their thoughts with you for five or so, discuss it together for five, and then take two minutes to make some notes. Giving each question fifteen minutes, you can do all three in a coaching hour. If you are working with two or more people, break the group into pairs (joining in if needed to complete a pair) using the same timing to finish in less than sixty minutes. When possible, I use over an hour to allow for more reflection, sharing in pairs, or group conversation.

Spiritual directors and coaches share at least one goal: supporting people as they create change and growth in their lives. Just as there are times when I send a client to a coach, there are times when your clients will need a spiritual director or a spiritual/religious community for support. Sometimes, though, all a client needs is the opportunity to articulate their own spiritual wisdom. With these three powerful questions and the skills you already have, you can help your clients move forward with greater awareness and new perspectives. •

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Things will never be the same, and
help is needed navigating change.

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or sharpen your skills as a coach.

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