

"Questions are a coach's stock in trade. There are two basic types of questions: questions that gather information and questions that deepen learning. The latter category is far more powerful."

How to F.R.A.M.E. the Coaching Conversation: Tips for New Coaches

By Barry K. Zweibel

Coaching happens through conversation. But not all conversations are coaching. So how do professional coaches do what they do? What makes *their* conversations different from conversations with friends, colleagues, relatives, and strangers? What do they *know* that others don't?

Well, the first thing that coaches know is that coaching takes practice - hours and hours of practice. That's one of the reasons why the International Coach Federation requires that coaches log a minimum of 200 hours of 1-on-1 professional coaching time in order to even qualify for their ACC, or Associate Certified Coach, designation. (Their PCC, or Professional Certified Coach, credential requires 750 logged coaching hours, and their Master Certified Coach (MCC) certification requires 2,500 hours of client coaching experience.) You may like to "chat over coffee" but that's a *LOT* of latte!

Yet simply practicing coaching is insufficient. What's also needed is a coaching model to help frame the coaching conversation. One that I created to clarify that gets at this notion of framing the coaching conversation is as follows:

The F.R.A.M.E. Coaching Model®	
F	F.O.C.U.S. each interaction
R	REACT non-judgmentally
A	ASK thought-provoking questions
M	MONITOR progress and learning
E	ENCOURAGE continued growth

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F.O.C.U.S. each interaction

So how *does* a coach help people focus? Taking the use of acronyms one step further, we can look at it from the perspective of the person being coached:

- **F** as in **FACE IT** - Just getting people to talk about where they're stuck, or what they might be avoiding, is often enough to help them stare down their 'scary monsters' and get back on track. So coaches have people talk about what's *really* important.
- **O** as in be more **OPEN MINDED** - Basketball coaching legend John Wooden said it best, "It's what you learn *after* you know it all that counts." Helping people realize that there may be *other* ways of thinking/feeling about things than how they typically do, is often incredibly liberating and helps them think more creatively and expansively.

- **C** as in recognize the **CHOICES** - Once the creative juices start flowing, the next task is to help the client brainstorm a number of concrete alternatives as to how s/he *might* move meaningfully forward. But make sure that you're not the one providing all the answers - that's not coaching, that's consulting. The more you can encourage your client to come up with seemingly absurd ideas, the better.
- **U** as in **UNAMBIGUOUSLY** move forward - Once a variety of choices are identified, coaches help people pick one (or more than one), develop specific assignments and plans to get things going, and establish accountabilities to insure proper follow-through.
- **S** as in **SOLIDIFY** the learning - Results are nice, but for learning to stick, it's essential to talk about the insights, discoveries, and Lessons Learned along the way. As Vernon Law said, "Experience is a hard teacher because she gives the test first, the lesson afterward." A good coach makes sure the lessons are clearly understood.

REACT non-judgmentally

A big problem that many face when non-experienced coaches try to coach them is that they feel like they're being judged. Thus, being able to react in a supportive and respectful way is an essential element in effective coaching. Don't make it about whether you agree or not; make it about the client's clarity and perspective. Your job as coach is to ask questions to facilitate that clarity and perspective.

Friends often have a hard time doing that because friends typically have already decided for a person what's in their own best interest. Spouses/significant others often have a hard time doing that because their world will dramatically change based on whatever conclusion is reached. And colleagues often have a hard time doing that because their judgment is often affected by both sets of conditions. But very few of them are trained in the ways of coaching, and as such, they rarely recognize the biases they bring to a coach-like conversation.

To be truly objective and impartial - yet caring and supportive - can be a fine line to walk. But a coach needs to or the individual will shut down and no longer share what they're really thinking and feeling.

ASK thought-provoking questions

Questions are a coach's stock and trade, and many coaching schools talk about the importance of asking "powerful" questions. There are two basic types of questions: questions that gather information, and questions that deepen the learning of the person being asked. The latter category is far more powerful and thought-provoking. Here's the test: if a client is telling you things s/he has already thought about or felt, then you missed the mark. If, on the other hand, new thoughts, feelings, realizations, ideas, insights, and directions start to 'pop', then you're in the zone. Consider the following examples:

Gather Information Questions	Deepen the Learning Questions
<i>What have you tried so far?</i>	<i>What haven't you tried yet?</i>
<i>Why are you stuck?</i>	<i>What would make that easier for you?</i>
<i>What do you mean?</i>	<i>What aren't you saying?</i>
<i>What are you waiting for?</i>	<i>What are you ready to do?</i>
<i>Why did you do it that way?</i>	<i>What have you learned so far?</i>

See the difference? Now which set of questions do you think would help move

someone forward? And whatever you do, don't ask "Why?" Rarely does a *why* question yield an answer you can do much with.

MONITOR progress and learning

It's one thing to say you're going to do something, but it's entirely another thing to actually do it. So it's not surprising that one of the key roles a coach plays is to hold people accountable for the commitments they make. They do this by asking three key questions:

- WHAT will you do?
- By WHEN will you do it?
- HOW will I know?

Want to become a better coach? Ask everyone you coach these three questions! Executives require something a little different, though. Interestingly, the most significant difference between life coaching and business or executive coaching is this - executives don't typically need the accountability piece as much as their non-executive counterparts. They already know how to follow-through on their commitments - that's what helped get them promoted into the executive ranks to begin with. So when coaching executives, the more you can engage them in the conversation the more likely it is that they'll come up with a very clear set of realizations and Next Steps. They'll then be off and running.

ENCOURAGE continued growth

In addition to helping clients move meaningfully forward, coaches can help people want to *continue* on the path of ongoing growth and development. They do this by helping clients recognize victories otherwise overlooked. They do this by championing their clients to recover more quickly when things *don't* go as hoped. And they do this by acknowledging that the twists and turns along the way are a sure sign of progress. (After all, if the person wasn't going anywhere, there'd be no new twists or turns showing up.)

But even more importantly, encourage your clients to celebrate both their successes AND failings - the successes for what they enable, and the failings for what they teach. And that's the greatest coaching tip of all.

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