



## Episode 28: The Secret to Being a Great Coach

Welcome to In the Right Direction podcast, where we believe you get to choose what's on your plate, you can manage the overwhelm, and that change is possible. I'm your host, Deb Elbaum, and I'm here to share insights and strategies to increase your happiness, one baby step at a time. Let's dive in.

Hi everyone, it's Deb. Today, let's talk about coaching and how you can be a better coach for the people around you. Coaching is an essential tool for all leaders -- whether you're a leader at work, in your community, or at home. That's because coaching leads to coaching conversations, and coaching conversations open doors. They allow for self-reflection, personal growth, and clarity about what's important to you and how to make your goals happen.

Even though most of the leaders I talk to agree that coaching skills are need-to-have skills, they too often fall into the pattern of being problem-solvers and advice givers instead of coaches.

Today, let's get clear on what coaching is and isn't. Let's teach you to become a better coach, not only for your benefit, but also so that the people you're coaching can have the opportunity to build their clarity, confidence, and personal vision.

Let me start with a story from a client. I was talking with one of my clients and she was telling me about coaching a colleague of hers after a tricky exchange with their partner. My client thought she was being a great coach, so I asked her to share with me specifically what she said and did. She said, here was the situation. My colleague received some feedback after a project and didn't know how to interpret the feedback or what to do with it. So I told him how awesome he is. I told him how he should be proud of how he handled that partner. I told him exactly how to interpret the feedback and who to share it with.

As she described the situation, I could hear a few things. I could hear how much my client cared about her colleague. I could hear that she had lots of ideas. I could hear lots of cheerleading. What I did not hear, though, was coaching. I heard advice giving and problem solving.

Take a moment and ask yourself if this sounds familiar. Are you a leader who's quick to give advice? While that's a wonderful superpower to have, problem solving is not coaching. Giving advice is being directive. And of course there are times we need to be directive at work. AND you need to make sure that's not all you do. You need to make space for true coaching conversations.

The International Coach Federation defines coaching as partnering with someone in a thought-provoking and creative process to inspire them to maximize their personal and professional potential. Coaching, they say, can unlock previously untapped sources of imagination, productivity, and leadership.

Let's talk about what coaching is and isn't. Here's what it's not: it is not problem solving; it is not demanding; it is not being judgmental. It's not having an answer in your mind that you want the other person to guess. It's not hoping your direct report will see that your approach is the right way to go.

Here's what coaching is: It is intentionally creating space to give the other person the opportunity to reflect on who they are, what they're good at, what they want, and how they can achieve their goals. Coaching conversations build awareness, insight, confidence, and resilience.

Luckily, anyone can become a better coach, as long as they remember these 2 key pieces. A coaching conversation requires a specific mindset and coaching tools.

Let's start with the mindset needed to be a successful coach. Our mindset is all about our thinking, and how we approach something. When we start a conversation with someone, we can be in any number of mindsets. For example, we might be in an "I'm right; you're wrong" mindset, or we might be in a "Let's brainstorm together" mindset.

The mindset needed for coaching is one of curiosity, openness, and seeing the other person from a place of positive potential. It's a mindset of wondering what the other person's thought process is, how they're approaching what's in front of them, and what motivates them.

True coaching requires a 100% curious mindset. The second you think you know what the other person should say or how they should see something, you have slipped out of coaching mindset into another one.

Here's an example of a well-meaning supervisor who thought they were coaching, but were really in an "I know everything" mindset instead of a curious mindset. I was in a meeting with a client and the supervisor to discuss my client's growth opportunities. The supervisor said they love to coach, and then they proceeded to talk for 20 minutes straight about their professional career, the lessons they've learned, and how they believe my client needs to communicate. While it is lovely to have a supervisor who's very invested, this was not coaching. Not once did the supervisor stop and ask my client a question. Not once did they start a sentence with the phrase, I'm curious...

If you have a point of view that you want the other person to understand, that's not coaching, that's directing.

Coaching requires curiosity. Think Curious George, think channeling your inner anthropologist. I like to use the phrase "I'm curious" as a way to get into a curious mindset.

When I ask a question at the end of a coaching session like, "What are you taking from today?" I am completely curious. I have no idea what the other person will answer. I'm asking the question to help them increase their insight and consolidate their learning.

And that's the point of coaching.

Your mindset is secret #1 to being a great coach; secret #2 is having a robust set of coaching questions.

The tools a coach uses are questions. Unlocking imagination and productivity happens as a direct result of the questions we ask. Coaching questions create space for reflection and clarity. In order to do this, they need to be expansive, open-ended, and invite the brain to think bigger.

If you want to be a great coach, you need to have a set of powerful, open-ended questions at your fingertips.

Here's what you need to remember about coaching questions. They start with a what, where, who, how, and when. They are expansive. They invite the brain to create new neural pathways by thinking about something in a new way or making a connection in the brain that wasn't previously there.

There are tons of coaching questions you can use, depending on how you'd like to guide the other person's thinking. If you want to help them build their confidence, you might use a question like, "What strengths of yours are you proud of leaning into lately?"

If you want to help them see a path forward, you might ask a question like, "How do you define success for this project?"

If you want to help them dream big, you might pose a question like, "Imagine it's 5 years from now, and you're on your favorite talk show sharing your new book with the world. What's the book called?"

Some of my other favorite coaching questions are:

What's not in your control? What is in your control? How do you want to show up? What if this situation were just easy? And here's a fun one: What's your theme song?

My clients are always asking me for a list of coaching questions they can use, so I created one. If you want resources to expand your toolkit of coaching questions, go to my website [debelbaum.com](http://debelbaum.com). On the Resources page, you'll see a freebie handout of coaching questions as well as a card deck of coaching questions that you can purchase.

So let's bring this to you. Now that you know the secrets of being a great coach – which are a curious mindset and open-ended questions -- I invite you to put these into practice.

The great thing about coaching is that you can weave coaching questions into every conversation, even the directive ones. Let's suppose you and your team completed a project and you're debriefing it.

First, you might put on your strategic leader hat and tell others what you appreciated and what you learned. Then, you could put on your coaching hat, step into a curious mindset and ask a question like: What are each of you proud of? What superpower did you bring? What do you want to remember for next time?

The more you practice coaching, the more adept you'll get, and the more you'll help empower those around you.

Thank you so much for listening and being part of my community. I'd love to hear from you as to your most often used coaching questions. Please email me at [deb@debelbaum.com](mailto:deb@debelbaum.com) and share them with me. And remember to check out the coaching resources on my website. I'm here to help you show up as your best self to keep moving in the right direction.

Until next time!