



Episode 50: How to Empower Others in the Moment

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. Picture this. You're talking with someone – a friend, a colleague, a family member – and you sense that they could use some support. You sense that they could use a boost of confidence, or some clarity of thought, or reassurance that they can handle whatever it is they're thinking through.

And let's suppose that you know about coaching, that you know that when someone is asked a powerful question, it helps people get unstuck and moves them more quickly to productive thinking. You want to step into the role of coach, and you're not exactly sure how.

Today's episode will help you practice coaching others. We'll talk through how to use powerful questions in the moment to empower other people.

Because if you truly want to empower someone, the way to do it is not by telling them what to do. It's not sharing your experience or solution, even though we're very used to doing just that and even though it feels so good to tell others what to do.

If we truly want to help someone feel empowered, the way to do that is to give them the opportunity and space to reflect and harness their insights and wisdom. Empowering others is letting them have their "aha" moment.

This can be hard. Many of us know lots of things and have a lot of ideas. We want to be the expert and provide the answer. And, to empower others, it takes coaching.

Coaching other people with powerful questions requires us to use our rarely used muscles that are often overlooked in our daily conversations.

Today, let's talk about what it takes to empower other people in the moment.

I'll share a framework with 4 key ideas and requirements.

First, empowering other people in the moment is a practice of attention. We can only be present with someone in the here and now if we give them our full attention. Our attention is a resource and a gift. And it's often like a puppy, all over the place.

Our attention increases whatever we attend to¹. Where our attention goes, energy flows.

If we want our attention to flow toward empowering other people, we need to bring our attention to the container of the conversation, to the other person, and to paying attention to what bubbles up inside of us.

¹ Thank you to Lynda Caesara

Let's do a quick attention check. Where is your attention now? Here? Miles away? Who is your attention on? If you want to bring your attention to the here and now, try these practices:

Feel your feet on the ground. Feel your body in your chair, if you're sitting. Take a breath, roll your shoulders back, and touch your skin and say, "I live here."²

Our attention in the present is the first requirement for empowering others, because our full attention allows for requirement #2, which is listening.

The listening required to empower others is a deep level of listening that we in the coaching world call level 3 listening. This means listening to what someone says and what they're not saying. It's listening to their energy, taking in their tone and body language. It's listening all the way through what someone says to the very end of their sentence or question.

Deep and complete listening can be hard, because our brains like to predict. Most of us listen to part of what someone says, and then we are already formulating a comeback or response before they've finished speaking.

If you want to empower someone in the moment, it's important to practice listening deeply and fully.

We also want to channel our listening through a certain mindset. Requirement #3 is bringing an intentional mindset. To help someone feel empowered around what they need, it takes a mindset of curiosity and being of service.

A curious mindset will invite your brain to wonder and be curious about what's really going on, what they really want, and what might be getting in their way.

Having a mindset of being of service means being there for the sake of someone else, to increase their clarity, confidence, and capacity. Being in this mindset shifts the focus from you to them, and creates the expectation that the goal of the conversation is for their benefit.

Our mindset is powerful, and our mindset creates our reality. It's also a choice. The mindset we bring allows us to think in certain ways and not others and to do certain things and not others.

The mindset we bring to an interaction matters, because it allows the conversation to flow in a certain way. If you bring a mindset of "I know what's best for my friend" you'll have a very different conversation than if you bring a mindset of "helping them celebrate themselves."

It can be tricky to be in a curious mindset because we're the center of our own world. We make everything about us. Except that when you're helping someone else feel empowered, it's actually not about you. It's about them.

You can be the person who holds space, listens, and asks questions.

Their feeling of confidence and empowerment needs to come from them, from their inner leader, their wisdom, and their knowing.

² Thank you to Lynda Caesara

Let's recap so far. We've talked about 3 requirements that it takes to empower others in the moment. It takes our full attention on the other person; deep and complete listening; and a mindset of service and curiosity.

The last piece that it takes is having a tool to invite the other person to have their insights and clarity.

That tool is powerful questions.

We empower others in the moment by asking powerful coaching questions.

Powerful questions are a gift because they invite people to think expansively, creatively, and in a forward-moving way. Powerful questions invite thinking to open up and shift.

These questions are also known as open-ended questions because they start with the words what, when, where, who, and how. You'll notice that I did not list the word why, and that's because when asking people about themselves, why questions tend to make people feel defensive.

If you want to increase your toolkit of powerful questions, use questions that start with a what, when, where, who, and how.

You might be wondering how you know which questions to ask? Great question.

If you're familiar with powerful questions, you might trust that as you listen to someone with curiosity, questions will bubble up.

If you're newer to the idea and practice of asking powerful questions, you'll likely want to practice.

Start by choosing a few to practice every day with the people you're talking with. Here are 3 easy questions that are a great way to empower others that you can try:

One: What's important about that for you?

Two: What do you want more of?

Three: What's one step you can take?

Our questions help focus all of the thoughts swirling around in our heads. One of the biggest gifts you can give someone else is to bring your attention to them and ask them a powerful question that invites their brain to make new connections and new realizations.

Let's bring this to you.

In the next few weeks, I invite you to focus on empowering others. When you hear someone who could use support, shift your attention. Put your attention on them, listen with curiosity and service, and ask a powerful question. Ask them what matters most, or what they'd do if they were feeling bold, or what they're ready to let go of. And see how their thinking shifts.

And be sure to let go of any specific outcome you're wanting. Trust that they've got the wisdom and capacity to feel more empowered on this journey we call life.

Thank you so much for listening and being part of my community. If you would like to build your toolkit of powerful questions, please reach out. Email me at deb@debelbaum.com or go to my website

debelbaum.com to schedule a consult. I look forward to it. I'm here to help you create your best self at home and at work, so that you're confident you're moving in the right direction for you.

Until next time!