



Episode 55: The Two Words to Better Understanding Someone's Thinking

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, I'll start with two assumptions. First, I assume that you care about the people you live and work with. Second, I assume that you want to understand them more deeply, to know how they think about things and what's important to them. Because you know that more understanding leads to greater clarity.

At work, especially, clarity is key. It's the foundation for building trust, for having alignment around expectations and outcomes, and for moving forward together to achieve goals.

Today's coaching tool is one that helps increase our understanding of others. It's also simple and easy. It involves two words that harness the power of coaching and curiosity. These two words are ones that you can bring into any situation to immediately more deeply understand someone else's point of view, their values, and their approach to seeing and thinking about a situation.

This communication strategy is subtle and it's extremely powerful. It will help you immediately become a more adept coach in coaching your colleagues, mentees, and team. It will allow you to coach others in the moment to help them. They'll have the opportunity to reflect and clarify what they do mean.

And when they share these things with you, it will give you a further glimpse into how they work and how they see the world.

Today's tool is one of the easiest to put into practice. And, when using it regularly, will reap immense benefits.

You ready? Here's the coaching tool we're talking about today. It involves using these two words: for you.

For – f-o-r -- you -- y-o-u.

The strategy to using these words is to create a question based on what someone just said, and then to add these words on to the end.

Here's an example: I was talking with a client who was feeling exhausted. She wanted strategies to bring more self-care into her life. She was in many meetings all day, and too often felt drained at the end of the day. She wanted to end the day with a bit more energy. Together, we brainstormed ways she could bring micro-moments of self-care into her day, even on the busiest days.

I shared some ideas with her – she could drink more water, she could take vision breaks to look away from her computer, or she could stand up and stretch. After I suggested standing up more, she said, I like that idea.

Here's where I brought in these words and asked a "for you" question. I asked her, what do you like about that idea for you?

She answered that she had a standing desk that she never used, and that when she did use it, it felt great. So she was happy to have a strategy that used something she already had. It would also allow her to do some of the stretches that her physical therapist had recommended while she stood up.

Here's the thing: when she said, I like that suggestion, I could have let her comment be. I could have said to myself, that's great she likes that suggestion. Mission accomplished. I could have even made an assumption about the reason she liked that suggestion. I might have assumed that standing up helped her feel more confident.

If I had done that – just let her comments slide by without getting curious – I would have missed an opportunity to understand her better. I would have also missed an opportunity to give her the chance to build her self-awareness and clarity.

It would have been easy to let the comment go by without pausing and asking a "for you" question.

After all, our brains jump to conclusions all the time. We think we understand what people mean when they say something.

For example, suppose you're working with a team member on a project. It seems to be at a point where something is stuck and progress has slowed.

You ask your team member about the stuckness, and they respond, this part is challenging. If you're in a rush, or if you're in advice-giving mode, you might do what many of us do. You generously offer suggestions or tell them how you would approach it.

What if you asked a "for you" question instead?

What if, after they said, this piece is challenging, you asked, What's challenging for you? And then gave them space and listened.

You would find out a lot. They might tell you about feelings they were having, or they might tell you about things they've tried and where they met resistance. Or they might share that they have things going on outside of work that are getting in the way.

Even if you have worked with people for years, you don't know what's going on inside of them in that moment. Even if they shared their thoughts yesterday, their thoughts may be different in this moment. Please let go of thinking that you can anticipate what others will think or say.

The "for you" question is a reminder to be curious. All of us – as leaders and humans – have more of an opportunity to be curious about others. When someone tells us what's great for them, or what's exciting for them, or what's hard for them, it helps us gather data that we can use to then guide the conversation in a direction that will be more focused, productive, and purposeful.

The great thing about the phrase "for you" is that it works as a follow up to almost anything you want to be curious about.

Say you're wanting to have some team-building activities for your group, and you have a great idea: you say, let's all go to an escape room. One person responds, that's great. You might take the win and keep moving forward with planning. Instead, I invite you to recognize the opportunity for a coaching moment.

Pause and ask back, What's great about that for you?

The key with the words for you is that it brings the focus to the other person. It's an immediate invitation to them to get clear on their thoughts, their values, and their point of view.

And any time we take to let ourselves reflect on those things, it strengthens our confidence and helps us think more clearly. Then, sharing our point of view helps us practice our presence, our clear communication, and leading from our leader within.

Let's bring this to you.

The first thing I suggest is creating a coaching reminder for yourself. Take a sticky note and write the words "for you" on it. Put the sticky note on your wall or on your computer where you can see it.

Then, as you go about your week, set an intention to ask a "for you" question.

When you're talking with someone else, listen for statements they make, like, "That's great. That's challenging. That's a good idea. That's not going to work."

When you hear one of those, pause and turn what they just said into a "for you" question.

What's not going work for you?

What's good about that idea for you?

What's great for you?

Be sure to emphasize the "for you" because that's the invitation for them to be coached and turn their focus inward to think, clarify, and answer.

We are all our own unique person with our own experiences, perspective, and approach. Using the "for you" phrase in a question helps us remember that. It reminds us that the only way we can keep learning other people is by getting curious, asking, and listening.

Speaking of listening...Thank you so much for listening and being part of my community. If you would like help building your toolkit of coaching questions to help you bring them into your life and work more confidently, 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!