

Practicing the Art of Asking Powerful Questions

By Maureen Breeze



In my last blog, I discussed why questions are a coach's greatest tool and what makes questions powerful. Today I'd like to share four tips for how you can practice question asking.

Remind yourself to resist giving solutions. Think of it like this: a student comes to you with a math problem. If you simply tell him the answer is 34, what learning has taken place? However, if you ask him, "What do you know about this problem?" "How is this problem similar to the one you solved last week?" "What information is given in the problem?" "What information is missing?" etc., the student will trouble shoot, problem-solve, and come to a solution with real learning occurring.

Remember to listen. Slow down and take time to listen. If you truly hear what is being said, notice what is not being said, and observe the student's tone and body language, opportunities for powerful questions will be revealed. In coaching we refer to the acronym WAIT (why am I talking?). If we are talking, we can't listen for opportunities and insights that can guide our question asking.

Challenge yourself to embrace different perspectives. When we coach students, we often strive to help them examine their challenges from multiple points of view. As coaches, we can facilitate this process by stepping into different perspectives ourselves and asking the student questions from these perspectives.

Be curious. In the end, your best strategy for asking powerful questions is to simply remain curious. So if you are stuck and don't know which questions to ask, remind yourself simply to be curious. What makes this student tick? What inspires him or her? How will this student come to a solution? If you approach your coaching exchange with a curious mindset, rather than a "responsibility to solve the problem" mindset, you'll find poignant and pointed questions will flow with greater ease.

Some of the best practice you can get is to approach the other relationships in your life with the goal of asking and listening, rather than telling. Whether it's the students in your classroom, your colleagues at a meeting, your spouse, or your children, explore the art of asking questions using the tips above and see how it influences your interpersonal exchanges!

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