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POWERFUL COACHING QUESTIONS

"A beautiful question will move us, unsettle us, and ultimately transform us."
David Whyte

Questions open windows and doors to new possibilities and horizons.

Posing beautiful, evocative questions is an art and lies at the heart of good coaching alongside other core skills that we are constantly developing.

In celebration of our 25th anniversary, we offer you 25 Powerful Coaching Questions, curated by Meyler Campbell Faculty, which you might like to add to your coaching toolkit. Depending on your Tutor(s), you may have already adopted, adapted and made some of your own!

A few questions lend themselves beautifully to partnership, so feel free to play with combinations, merging the magic in your practice.

For ease of reference the questions are first listed by Faculty members, then followed by a rationale as to why we find the question valuable.

There is a bonus section, from ChatGPT just for fun, so we can see how AI builds on our 25 powerful questions.

Thank you to our fabulous faculty for sharing their wisdom.

Enjoy!

The 25 Powerful Questions Co-Curation Team
Helen Duguid, Anna Phillips, Penny Moyle and Penny Terndrup

"A paradigm shift occurs when a question is asked inside the current paradigm that can only be answered from outside it."

Marilee Goldberg, *The Art of The Question*

The 25 Powerful Coaching Questions

"A question not asked is a door not opened."
Marilee Goldberg, The Art of The Question

1. What other goals do you have that might take higher priority than this one?
2. What is the problem we are trying to solve?
3. How do you define success?
4. What is your role here/in this situation?
5. What would your closest person (partner, family member, friend, colleague ...) say/observe/challenge/question?
6. How can you be kind to yourself? (in this situation)
7. Which part of you believes/feels/experiences this? Is there another part which is different?
8. What are you assuming here?
9. What do you care about/long for? (follow up question) Therefore who do you need to become or how do you need to be to live and act from that the majority of the time?
10. Take a quiet moment to look inside yourself before you answer my next question: If you knew the answer (to your dilemma/question/problem) what would it be?
11. Who are you pretending not to be?
12. What would you do if you knew no one would judge you for it?
13. What is the unmet need here?
14. If you fully trusted your strengths to guide you, what would you do next? Or, If your top strength had the steering wheel right now, where would it take you?
15. What's emerging here for you? (follow up question) What feels most important about that?
16. What makes [x] important to you?
17. How are you doing, catching up with who you've become?
18. Right, let's play 'Worst Case Scenario'! Imagine if (whatever the situation is) went wrong in the worst way possible: what would that look like?
19. What would you say to a good friend who is in the situation you find yourself now?
20. In 12 months' time, what will you regret not having done now?
21. During our discussion so far, is there a question that you hoped I would ask you that I didn't?
22. If we were to stop here (which we won't), what would you be taking away/what would you have from the session? And what, if anything, would still be missing?
23. What did you say you were going to do?
24. What's the biggest insight you've had from our time together today? Or what was most meaningful for you today?
25. What else?

"The mind is not a vessel to be filled, but a fire to be kindled."

Plutarch

The gift of 25 Powerful Questions invites exploration and experimentation in your coaching practice. We offer our rationale below for why we feel these questions are useful in coaching conversations and hope they may ignite a spark or two for you!

25 Powerful Questions Rationale

1. What other goals do you have that might take higher priority than this one?

This question can be helpful when a coachee is trying to establish the goal but may be struggling with a number of competing priorities. They may also initially identify a goal which is in fact someone else's goal for them and not one that they can truly own, and this question can help them to realise that.

Catherine Devitt

2. What is the problem we are trying to solve?

Helps to focus the client on what really is their priority or objective, and to define that clearly. And the 'we' can instil a sense of partnership in the endeavour.

Daniel Burke

3. How do you define success?

I find this goal-setting question useful at so many levels:

- It can help a client to think about the really big picture life purpose and ambitions
- It can help to define coaching objectives - what do they want to achieve through coaching over a 6-month period
- It is also a way of defining a focused session goal - the G of GROW

Often used with many follow-up questions to get really specific about how you'd know when you are successful - getting as much light, shade and colour into that vision.

Penny Moyle

4. What is your role here/in this situation?

When clients are struggling with complexity, prioritisation or overwhelm, this simple question helps them lift their heads to identify the most important contribution they can make. It helps reduce any circular thinking, procrastination and streamlines effort.

It stimulates the client to reflect upon their goals and decide where they can add most value, their locus of control, their sphere of influence, what is beyond their control, where their strengths lie, what would be best done by them and what would be better done by others, and much more...

Sarah Martin

5. What would your closest person (partner, family member, friend, colleague ...) say/observe/challenge/question?

Building on the concept of Perceptual Positions (T6), this question sometimes reveals a different kind of insight using someone who see the 'whole person' outside a professional work setting. It's been very revealing on a number of occasions, particularly when invoking family members.

Ann Orton

6. How can you be kind to yourself? (in this situation)

I love this question because it opens up the possibility that a different way of being can be effective for navigating challenging times. Our high achieving clients are often their own harshest critic yet self-kindness is linked to greater resilience and success.

Anna Phillips

7. Which part of you believes/feels/experiences this? Is there another part which is different?

Working with parts is powerful. It helps to 'step out of' one particular mindset bringing greater objectivity and awareness and so enabling choice. To deepen the experience, encourage your client to describe each part in more detail, perhaps find a nickname and even how they look or how old they are. Consider what they might think of each other, say to each other and consider using the gestalt empty chair exercise either with just one part, or alternating between the two. By externalising, the hidden becomes visible and internal conflict can be resolved.

Penny Terndrup

8. What are you assuming here?

I love this question because it helps clients to become more aware of their own beliefs and thought processes and opens up the possibility that those assumptions are not necessarily accurate. What are you assuming about yourself, others, the situation, the market, your business, the changing landscape? - these are all questions that can generate greater awareness and open up a rich seam of dialogue.

Anna Phillips

9. What do you care about/long for? (follow up question) Therefore who do you need to become or how do you need to be to live and act from that the majority of the time?

As coaches, clients and humans, we so often begin with what is wrong. This question turns our presenting complaint inside out into a something we really care about, something worth changing for, taking action towards.

Kirstan Marnane

10. Take a quiet moment to look inside yourself before you answer my next question: If you knew the answer [to your dilemma/question/problem] what would it be?

Most of our clients are brilliant at knowing their own answers, they just need time, space, and the supportive attuned coaching relationship to access them.

Kirstan Marnane

11. Who are you pretending not to be?

Prompts thinking about the identity that clients are projecting to others (through their attitude and behaviour), and whether that is authentic, beneficial, and sustainable for them.

Daniel Burke

12. What would you do if you knew no one would judge you for it?

I find this question can really free up a coachee to think creatively about their options and fully explore the possible.

Catherine Devitt

13. What is the unmet need here?

Gets to the hurt without requiring explicit admission of hurt. Can be answered on a number of levels and so a gentle invitation to a client to go deeper if they would like to, without coming off as overly probing or presumptuous.

Jenni Emery

14. If you fully trusted your strengths to guide you, what would you do next? Or, if your top strength had the steering wheel right now, where would it take you?

Embraces strengths as an inner compass and potential source of wisdom and creativity for the path ahead. Encourages a move to action.

Helen Duguid

15. What's emerging here for you? (follow up question) What feels most important about that?

As a coaching question, it's deceptively simple. It brings the client into the here and now, encouraging them to notice thoughts, feelings, insights, or shifts that arise organically.

To stay non-directive, this question affirms that the thinker is in charge of their own unfolding. It creates a pause, a breath, a space where deeper thoughts/new thoughts can be said aloud.

Helen Duguid

16. What makes [x] important to you?

Close to a why question *without* the why. Gets to values and to the heart to what matters and out of justification and rationalising.

Also, by naming the thing yourself as the coach as part of the question, you accord it a sort of respect and prominence which feels helpful and generous.

Jenni Emery

17. How are you doing, catching up with who you've become?

We frequently carry an image of ourselves which fails to take account of how we have grown and changed.

Des O'Connell

18. Right, let's play 'Worst Case Scenario'! Imagine if (whatever the situation is) went wrong in the worst way possible: what would that look like?

This one comes from my lawyer risk-aversion background, and it sometimes helps unlock things. It's useful to get people to express fears they haven't quite articulated yet and which sometimes sound pretty far-fetched (or manageable) once they are spoken out loud...

Keith Krasny

19. What would you say to a good friend who is in the situation you find yourself now?

For clients who are stuck, this can give a little distance and open new perspectives. For clients who have given their inner critics free rein, it can generate some compassion, as many of us are kinder to others than we are with ourselves.

Liz Gooster

20. In 12 months', time, what will you regret not having done now?

The reason this question works is it seems fight the fear of making a tough choice now with the equally powerful fear of future regret. I have experienced this question unlocking leaders to make tough decisions now which deep down they know to be right and essential but for various reasons they have held off from doing it.

Simon Brown

21. During our discussion so far, is there a question that you hoped I would ask you that I didn't?

Despite our best instincts, questions and listening skills, we must be humble enough to realise that we might not always unearth all the key issues that shape the client's goal. This question, asked probably around 3/4 of the way through a session, can be used to explore if there are unaddressed issues or if, as a coach, our instinct tells us that something else has been left unsaid. It is intended to get them to review the discussion and test internally to see if they are satisfied that all the ground has been covered.

Sheldon Daniel

22. If we were to stop here (which we won't), what would you be taking away/what would you have from the session? And what, if anything, would still be missing?

It's a way to take stock during the coaching session and calibrate accordingly. It can also serve to encourage urgency/agency if the client is not quite zeroed in.

Saverio Grazioli-Venier

23. What did you say you were going to do?

Tests resolve and integrity. If you didn't mean it, you shouldn't have said it. If you said you'd do it, you need to act on it.

Dick Tyler

24. What's the biggest insight you've had from our time together today? Or what was most meaningful for you today?

It ends the session on a positive time, enables the client to articulate their experience, and helps the coach receive some feedback about what the client discovered from their (the clients) perspective... and all of this is done immediately before the session ends.

Saiyyidah Zaidi

25. What Else?

Followed by respectful silence - amazing how often it yields gold.

Anne Scoular

For Fun, ChatGPT Top 10

"Think of AI not as a tool to replace your thinking, but as a mirror to deepen it – a partner in the dance of curiosity ¹"

The co-curation team gave ChatGPT their 25 powerful questions and invited it to offer 10 more. Here's what was shared:

1. What is asking to be born in you right now?
2. If you could whisper one truth to your future self, what would it be?
3. Where in your life are you settling for 'good enough' when you long for 'great'?
4. What are you protecting yourself from – and what is the cost of that protection?
5. What is the conversation you most need to have but are avoiding?
6. If you stripped away everything you "should" do, what remains essential?
7. Who would you be if you trusted your becoming more than your planning?
8. What is your relationship with uncertainty – friend, foe, or something else?
9. If you listened to the part of you that dreams, what would it tell you right now?
10. What is the question you are living, even if you haven't yet put it into words

¹ Inspired by The Institute of Coaching, Research Dose: Coaching Play and Playfulness, Lockwood, R. & O'Connor, S. (2017).