

# The Art of Questioning

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Reaching a Goal by Practicing the Art of Questioning via the Following Seven Practices:

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## SEVEN PRACTICES OF GOOD QUESTIONING

1. Create a welcoming environment
2. Build trust
3. Listen
4. Gain clarity
5. Ask for more
6. Learn rather than judge
7. Keep ourselves out of the answers

### *The Art of Questioning #1:*

#### Create a Welcoming Environment

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- » What soothes—or stresses—your collaborating teacher?
- » In what ways can you create an atmosphere that puts your collaborating teacher at ease? Make sure your coaching conversations take place in a comfortable, private space where it is unlikely you'll be interrupted.
- » What are your collaborating teacher's likes and dislikes?

### *The Art of Questioning #2:*

#### Build Trust

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- » It is difficult to respond authentically, if at all, to someone we do not trust.
- » As a coach, it is critical to embody the Five Components of Trust:
  1. Are you trustworthy, truthful, and fair? Do you need to change something to be perceived as more trustworthy?

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2. Are you reliable? Are there responsibilities you can decline so you will have more time to be reliable? What rituals can you add to your day to help you be reliable?

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3. Are you competent? Are you continually developing your professional skills and adding to your knowledge so you can better help people reach their goals? Are you practicing your skills; for example, by working through the Making It Real exercises at the end of each chapter in *The Impact Cycle*? Are you deeply learning the things that will make you an excellent coach?

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4. Do you have a personality that exudes warmth? That is, are you kind? Are you slow to speak and quick to listen and gain understanding? Do you share authentic, positive information? Are you a good listener? Are you seeking to build emotional connections with the teachers you are collaborating with and hope to collaborate with in the future?

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5. Do you convey an attitude of stewardship or benevolence (charity)? Do you have others' best interests at heart? How can you change so that you are less concerned with yourself and more thoughtful toward others?

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### *The Art of Questioning #3:*

## Listen Well

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“If coaches don’t listen carefully, they will struggle to coach effectively.”

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*The Impact Cycle, 2017*

- Do you really want to hear what the other person has to say?
- Are you able to be completely present to others, and, if not, are you working to become more present?
- Is it possible to be a thinking partner with your collaborating teachers if you are not genuinely interested in what they have to say and are not listening carefully to understand where they are coming from?
- Do you believe you can learn from your collaborating teacher?

### **THE FOUR ELEMENTS OF BEING A GOOD LISTENER**

1. Commit to listen. What is your collaborating teacher saying? Award-winning instructional coach Delia Racines has learned to “listen for the request in the complaint.”
2. Make sure your collaborating teacher is at the center of the conversation. Ask: Am I allowing my partner to guide the conversation?
3. Pause to affirm before responding. Ask: Have I heard this correctly?
4. Don’t interrupt too often. There are appropriate times to interrupt and help refocus the conversation.

### **THE THREE LEVELS OF LISTENING**

1. Listen to what is said. Do you understand what your collaborating teacher is saying?
2. Listen for the inner voice—the deeper, real meaning in what people say that is hidden by using guarded language.
3. Be aware of the interview process. Keep in mind how much time is left for a particular coaching conversation. Are you staying focused on the targeted outcome for the conversation? Is the conversation moving too fast or is it too slowly?

***The Art of Questioning #4:*****Gaining Clarity**

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1. Ask one question at a time, and allow time and space for the collaborating teacher to respond. “Let silence do the heavy lifting” (Scott, 2002).
2. Ask for clarity on vague words or concepts or if you need to back track or in any way gain a better understanding of what your collaborating teacher is saying.

**OTHER WAYS TO GAIN CLARITY**

Ask yourself:

- » Are you focused on the conversation, or are you drifting in and out?
- » Do you have a clear understanding of what your partner is thinking and feeling?
- » Are you giving adequate time for your partner to respond?
- » Do you ask one question at a time and allow time for your conversation partner to form a response before you ask another question?
- » Do you and your collaborating teacher have a clear understanding about what you both are speaking?

***The Art of Questioning #5:*****Ask for More**

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- » Instead of asking “probing” questions (these are often perceived as uncomfortable), ask the AWE question: And What Else? (Michael Bungay Stanier, *The Coaching Habit*, 2016)

***The Art of Questioning #6:*****Learn Rather Than Judge**

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- » Do you believe that your collaborating teachers are doing the best they can, given everything else they are dealing with right now?
- » If you don’t believe they’re doing the best they can, how will that affect your relationship with them?
- » Is there a way you can find the ability to work from the assumption that your collaborating teachers are doing their best so that your relating to them and your coaching will be more effective?

- » Will your collaborating teachers recognize that you are on their side if you don't believe the best about them?
- » Do you have a judging mindset or a learning mindset? If you have a judging mindset, should you work to change that to a learning mindset?

#### **JUDGING MINDSET**

- » Judges others' thoughts, feelings, or situations
- » Considers self an expert, regardless of experience
- » Focuses on own role (which may lead to using a self-protective approach) and refuses to take the role of an outside observer, a researcher, or a reporter (unable to detach)
- » Looks at the situation from one perspective: his or her own
- » Fails to look for and find win-win solutions
- » Is intolerant of self and others
- » Fails to ask clarifying questions and just assumes he or she knows what the other person means
- » Fights change aggressively most or all of the time

#### **LEARNING MINDSET**

- » Responds without judging others' thoughts, feelings, or situations
- » Considers self a beginner, regardless of experience
- » Avoids focusing on self (which may lead to using a self-protective approach) and takes the role of an outside observer, researcher, or reporter (is able to healthfully detach)
- » Looks at the situation from multiple perspectives, especially the respondent's
- » Looks for win-win solutions
- » Is tolerant of self and others
- » Accepts change as a constant and embraces it

#### ***The Art of Questioning #7:***

#### **Keeping Ourselves out of the Answers**

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- » Are you refraining from trying to shape your collaborating teacher's answers and decisions (manipulation)?
- » Are you refraining from asking leading questions?
- » Are you refraining from asking questions that are actually advice disguised as a question?

It is important to balance thinking about how you are practicing the art of questioning and keeping the collaborating teacher's words at the front of your mind. To become better at this, practice until you have made the art of questioning a habit from which you operate by default. The easiest and best way to do this is to video record your coaching conversations to see how you are adopting these habits and identifying which ones you still need to work on.

Use the following form to help guide your practice. You can use it by video recording conversations and reviewing the conversation with the checklist in hand.

Consider practicing one habit daily, or weekly, until you feel it is a natural part of the way you communicate. In addition, you might wish to review the Beliefs section in *Better Conversations*, as communicating from those beliefs naturally results in you becoming skilled at the art of questioning.