

By: Megan Donald

The Coaching Habit Say Less, Ask More & Change the Way You Lead Forever

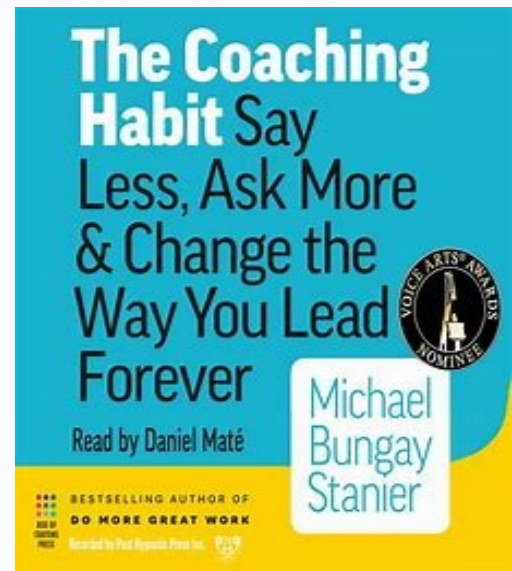
By: Michael Bungay Stanier

Book Summary

The Coaching Habit is about asking the question rather than always being the one to give advice as a manager. Instead asking questions so that you are working smarter not harder. The book goes through seven questions that you should be asking to listen to the people in your organization rather than always being the one to give out the commands. Stanier states at the start of his book:

“It’s about making you a leader, a manager, a human being who’s more coach-like. Which means building this simple but difficult new habit: Stay curious a little longer, rush to action and advice-giving a little more slowly. It’s a fast practical read, and I think you’ll enjoy it”

- Michael Bungay Stanier



The seven essential questions of the book

Question 1—The Kickstart Question (p.2-3)

Question 2—The Awe Question (p.4)

Question 3—The Focus Question (p.5)

Question 4—The Foundation Question (p.6)

Question 5—The Lazy Question (p.7)

Question 6—The Strategic Question (p.8)

Question 7—The Learning Question (p.9)

“Everyone knows that managers and leaders need to coach their people” (p. 2)

About the author



- Lives in Toronto, Canada with Rhodes Scholar his husband of 30 years.
- Michael founded a training and development company called Box of Crayons.
- Michael's book *The Coaching Habit: Say Less, Ask More & Change the Way you Lead Forever* has sold over a million copies.
- Michael has been named the global coaching guru since 2014

Coaching Habit and how to build one

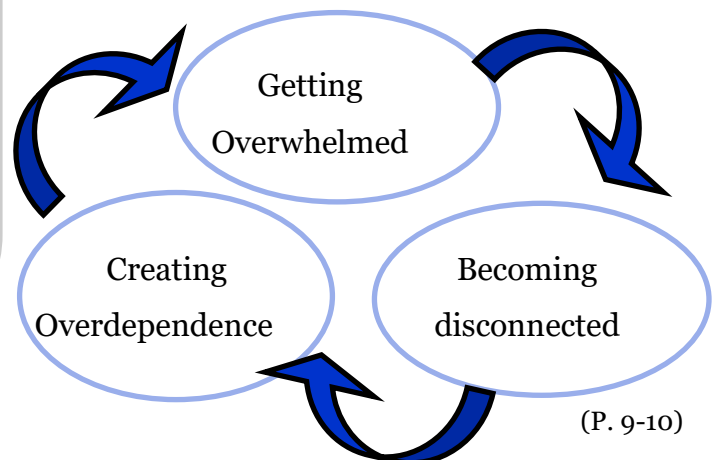
When you are creating a coaching habit you need 5 essential components:

- A reason
- A trigger
- A micro-habit
- An effective practice
- A plan (p. 18)

These essential components will help you become a better coach. There are three reasons as to why a coaching habit might not work. First, its too theoretical, the person didn't spend much time figuring out the habit, and lastly being open to change (p. 6).

“ ONE OF THE LAWS OF CHANGE: AS SOON AS YOU TRY SOMETHING NEW, YOU 'LL GET RESISTANCE.” (P. 26)

There are 3 vicious circles that plague a workplace:



Question 1—The Kickstart Question

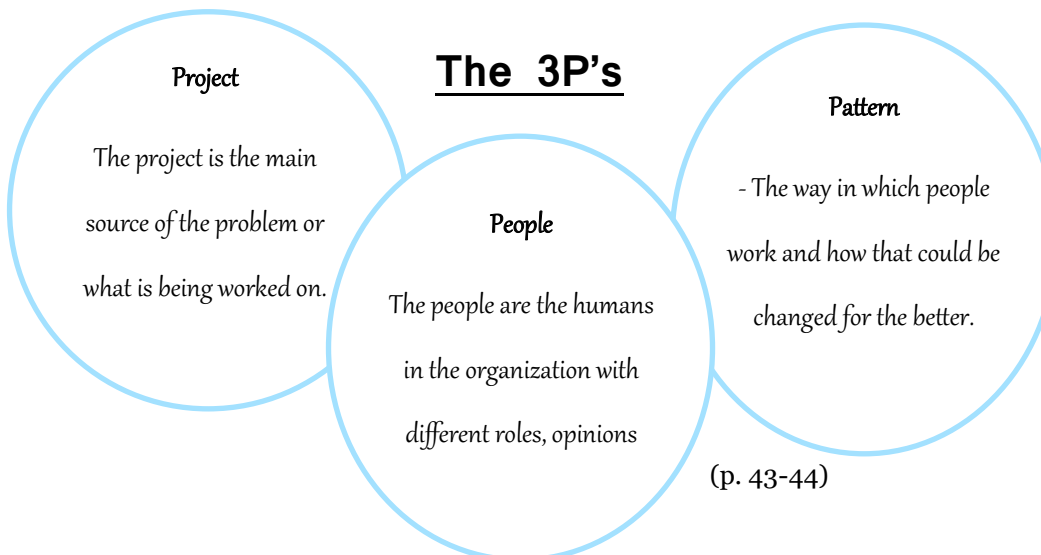
Book Summary—Page 3

One of the main reasons that managers don't coach is they do not know where to start or how to coach. The kickstart question starts with, "What's on your mind?" This is a simple question that lets the person know that you are open to listen to their conversation rather than just being demanding. It also is not too broad of a question, but also not too narrow that you might only get a one word answer. It will also allow the manager know how the person is feeling or what work related task are on the person mind (p. 39).

In the Question 1 chapter, Stanier addresses the three reasons as to why managers or leaders might not be coaching their staff.

- 1) Small talk tango—great for warm-up conversation, but not meaningful conversation.
- 2) The ossified agenda—having to have the meeting always at the same time, place and with the same agenda gets redundant.
- 3) Default diagnosis—Having a plan and going for it before figuring out the logistics. (p. 37-38)

Stanier also discusses deepening the focus with the 3P's for coaching development.



Some ideas for putting the 3P's to use are asking, "What is on your mind?" This allows the person to explain what they are working on and you as the manager can ask if there are any challenges that they may need help with using the 3P's to guide the conversation. (p. 45)

"In which you discover the power of an opening question that gets the conversation happening faster" (p. 36)

"Call them forward to learn, improve and grow, rather than to just get something sorted out" (p. 41)

"One of the main reasons that managers do not coach that often is they do not know how to start" (p. 37)

"A 2010 study started by making the point that anytime we have something on our mind it takes up energy, even though it only accounts for 2% of your weight it takes up 20% of your energy." (p. 48)

Question 2—The AWE question

Book summary—Page 4

What is the AWE question?

The AWE question is asking “and what else?” When you start asking this question, you refrain from always giving advice.

There are four helpful tips that can help a person use the AWE question.

- 1) Stay curious and genuine
- 2) Ask it one more time
- 3) Recognize Success
- 4) Move on when it is time



“ Even though we don’t really know what the issue is, we’re quite sure we’ve got the answer they need.”

(p. 61)

The goal of “and what else?” isn’t to create a lot of options, but rather to hear someone else’s opinion before giving your own advice. For most people it is hard to not give your own advice first in a conversation. When getting into the habit of saying “and what else?” it has the impact of having more options that could lead to better decisions, allowing yourself to think before you speak as the leader, as well as giving yourself time to process (p. 58).

Haiku on advice

“Tell less and ask more
Your advice is not as good
As you think it is”
(p.59)

Stanier states in Chapter 2, “ Having at least one more option lowered the failure rate by almost half, down to about 30 percent” (p.59). This is easier said than done, but with time and practice it will become more of a habit.

“Ask the right questions if you’re going to find the right answers” -
Vanessa Redgrave

“And what else? ‘ is the quickest and easiest way to uncover and create new possibilities” (p. 64)

The AWE questions tame your advice monster and allows you to listen more.

Question 3— The Focus Question

Book summary—Page 5

“Without a good question, a good answer has no place to go”

- Clayton Christenson

“Every fiber in your body is twitching with a desire to fix it, solve it, offer a solution to it” (p. 83)

“Focus on the real problem, not the first problem” (p. 85)

All organizations want to succeed and check items off their to-do lists. But, when an organization has problems and you jump into help, sometimes things can go sideways in three ways; you go to the wrong problem, you do the work your team should be doing, or the work doesn't get done (p. 82).

THE FOCUS QUESTION—WHAT'S THE REAL CHALLENGE FOR YOU HERE?

This question will help you solve the real problem, rather than the first problem. Some questions that will help build a success focus question are:

“What is the challenge?”

“What's the real challenge here?”

“What's the real challenge here for you?” (p. 86)

Three strategies to make the focus question work for you are:

1. **Trust that you are being useful**—learn to recognize the question and understand when people are taking time to think the question through.
2. **Remember there is always a place for your advice**—One of the roles of a leader is to have answers for certain questions
3. **Remember the second question**—The second question is “and what else?” that follows the focus question. This second question help get extra information from the person.



Question 4—The Foundation Question

Book summary—Page 6

In adult and work relationships we do not always get what we want. But, sometimes we struggle to ask for what we want for fear or the word “no”. As a leader you need to be able to ask your employees within the organization, “What do you want?” Stanier discusses the importance of asking, “What do you want?” as a foundational question in chapter 4.

The foundation question—What do you want?

A lot of times people are not brave enough to ask for what they want directly. They will tip toe around the wants, so they don't have to be bothered with the word no. As a leader, Stanier discusses the differences between wants and needs for employees. Wants are what people would like to have and needs are the drivers to that want. (p. 115).

There are 9 essential needs, that Stanier discusses in his book from Manfred Max—Neef, Rosenberg. These needs are the driver to the wants within an organization. As the leader you need to determine what the need is from the wants. For example, if someone wants to go home early. The need may be understanding. (p. 116)

Affection	Creation	Recreation
Understanding	Identity	Freedom
Participation	Protection	Subsistence

When people feel like they can be trusted within an organization there brain does not go to flight or flight response. TERA quotient is to help the leader create a sense of trust with the employee. The T stands for tribe, and allows everyone to feel like a group. The E stands for expectation and has people knowing what is expected of them as the employee. R is for rank, this allows people to know their place within the organization. Finally, A stands for autonomy for everyone to work together. (p. 122)

“If you're not trying to fix things, you don't need a backstory” (p. 102)

“The single best problem with communication is the illustration that it has taken place.”
- Bernard Shaw

“Stick with questions starting with WHAT.” (p. 100)

T– Tribe
E– Expectation
R– Rank
A– Autonomy

Question 5— The lazy question

Book summary—Page 7

“Silence is often a measure of success” (p. 130)

“What do you think this is about...?’ is the cheddar on the mouse-trap” (p. 146)

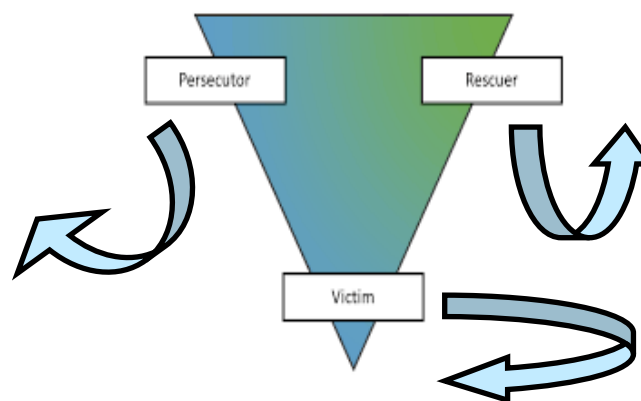
“The minute we think we have all the answers, we forget the questions” - Madeleine L’Engle

Stanier discusses how there is being helpful and “helpful” in this chapter. Helpful is asking the right questions to have the person on going on the right track without doing all the work, whereas “helpful” is you doing all the work and getting burnout in the organization.

THE LAZY QUESTION— HOW CAN I HELP?

The lazy question helps break leaders or managers out of the drama circle. There is a diagram of the drama circle below. Stainer outlines in his book that when you ask, “How can I help?” You are not allowing the employee to discuss their entire feelings, rather get to the root of the issue they are having.

The Drama Circle



The persecutor is the person who thinks they are better than everyone and is known to micro-manage everything. This person often feels alone in the organization. (p. 137)

The victim is the often the person who feels that everyone is out to get them in the organization. (p. 137)

The rescuer is the person who thinks they need to help everyone and does not always think about everyone else. Often the rescuer has people avoiding their help because they take over.

(p. 138)

Question 6— The Strategic Question

Book summary—Page 8

THE STRATEGIC QUESTION— IF YOU SAY YES TO THIS NOW, WHAT MUST YOU SAY NO TO?

In this chapter, Stanier discusses that the strategic question is about not always having to say *yes*, sometimes you are able to say *no*. This does not make you a bad leader, rather it allows you to focus on what is important.

There are many reasons why a person may say *yes*, but there are bad and good reasons for saying *yes*. Stainer outlines this in the chart on page 167.

	Bad reasons to say....	Good reasons to say....
Yes	Ill do anything to have you get off the phone or leave the office. I know that I'm not actually going to do it. I think this will make people really like me Habit.	I was curious about the request and asked questions, and the person gave me a good reason. I'm clear on what I'm going to stop doing so I can start doing this. It's Great Work for me— work that will have an impact and that means something. My boss has made it clear that it's not negotiable.
No	I don't like the person. (Unless I really don't like the person.) I'm comfortable and I don't want to things to change. Attack is the best form of defense. Habit.	I was curious about the request and asked questions, and the person gave me good answers, so now I know it's not a fit. I've thought about what my core priorities are, and I'm willing to hold the line. I'm trying to build a reputation as someone who's strategic and thoughtful. (pg.167)

“The wheel is spinning, but the hamster is dead” (p. 156)

“Saying YES more slowly means being willing to stay curious before committing.” (p. 169)

“In which you get to the heart of overwhelm and discover the question at the heart of every good strategy” (p. 160)

“A YES is nothing without the NO that gives it boundaries and form.” (p. 165)

Some questions you can ask before saying “Yes” are:

- ◆ Why are you asking me?
- ◆ Whom else have you asked?
- ◆ When you say this is urgent, what do you mean?
- ◆ If I couldn't do all of this, but could do just a part, what would you have me do?
- ◆ According to what standard does this need to be completed? By when?

The chart above, Stanier examines the good and bad reasons for saying *yes* and *no*. Sometimes, as a leader you need to realize that you cannot say *yes* to everything that comes across your desk. If you do, you are going to burn out and not do great work, you will just be doing good work. No business enjoys someone doing something mediocre when they could be doing something extraordinary. In order to do extraordinary things, you need to be able to say *no* to specific details.

Even though this is an awkward thing to do, it will help your organization. (p. 167-168)



Question 7— The Learning Question

Book summary—Page 9

“In which you discover how to finish any conversation in a way that will make you look like a genius.” (p. 186)

“Your job is to create the space for those learning moments.” (p. 189)

“ We live in the world our questions create.” - David Cooperrider (p. 192)

“ Acknowledge the answers you get” (p. 180)

THE LEARNING QUESTION— WHAT WAS MOST USEFUL FOR YOU?

The final question for *The Coaching Habit* discusses knowing how people gain knowledge effectively. Stainer examines the different types of learning.

Double Loop Learning

First Loop

In this loop the person tries to fix the problem without sitting back and thinking about the issue

Second Loop

In this loop the person tries to create a learning movement where they sit back and find insights into the issue.

The double loop learning helps people to reflect on their learning and actual absorb the learning that is happening. When you just take in advice and do not use it first hand often times it does not get used (p.188).

Stanier discusses in this chapter the importance of reflection. At the start of each meeting ask the question, “What have you learnt since we last met?” to have the person reflect on the last meeting. When we reflect it helps the person to learn. There is also an app called iDoneThis, that works on having people write down and reflect on each meeting after it is completed (p.191).

AGES

A- attention
G- generation
E- emotion
S- spacing

AGES is an acronym. This acronym helps to understand that when we take time to learn and obtain knowledge we remember it better then when advice is just given. This is why asking questions is much more effective for the person to remember the conversation then just giving advice (p. 190).

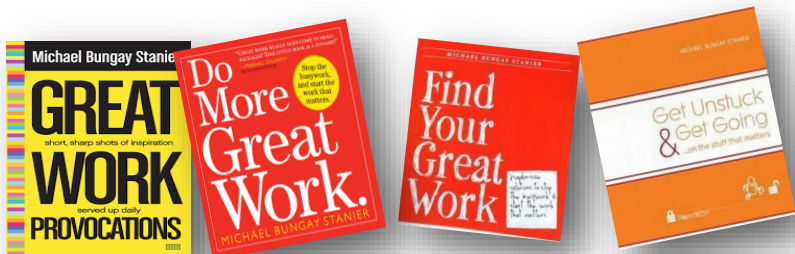


Book critique

The Coaching Habit was an easy read. Stanier made the seven essential questions each into a chapter. Having each essential questions as it's own chapter made the book easy to follow and understand. At the end of each chapter, there was a place to build your new habits and write down ideas. I think that is a great exercise for someone to do if they are going to change their mindset. One things that Stanier could have done was made a summary page at the back of the novel that outlines the seven essential questions. This would have made it easy to refer back to from time to time. There were diagrams throughout the novel and examples, which made the novel easy to relate to. Throughout the book, Stanier gave suggestions to different podcasts or apps that you could use to learn the coaching habit. Overall, I would give the novel an 9/10. The reason I would give it an 9 out of 10 is because I think it is easy for someone to follow and apply to their work environment. One thing the book was missing was a connection to education. There are also many quotes from various professionals that the reader can reflect on and find other sources of information.

Other books from Michael

- * *Do more Great Work: Stop the Busywork. Start the Work That Matters* (2010)
- * *The Advice Trap: Be Humble, Stay Curious & Change the Way you Lead Forever* (2020)
- * *End Malaria* (2001)
- * *Find your Great Work* (2008)
- * *Great Work Provocations* (2013)
- * *Get Unstuck & Get Going... on stuff that matters* (2009)



Discussion Questions:

- 1) In which situations could you see yourself using the seven essential coaching habit questions in a school?
- 2) Have you ever been in the vicious circle as discussed on page 2? How could you use the coaching habit to get yourself out of those vicious circles?
- 3) “The wheel is spinning, but the hamster is dead” (p.156) What does that quote mean to you? How could you use the coaching habit to explain the quote?

Reference :

Stanier, M.(2016). *Coaching Habit: Say Less, Ask More & Change the Way You Lead Forever*. Box of Crayons Press.