

The Coach Approach

Coaching Skills for Enhancing Conversations and Relationships

Executives in Transition

What Coaching Is (and Isn't)

The International Coaching Federation (ICF) defines coaching as:

Partnering with clients in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximize their personal and professional potential.

Coaching is not therapy, consulting, or advice-giving. The coach facilitates the client's thinking—helping them clarify, explore, and commit. The insights and actions come from the client.

Core Coaching Skills – Questions and Listening

1. Questions: The Power of Words

Words create worlds.

The words we use matter. There can be a misalignment between intent and impact. Being conscious of word choice can make a big difference in relationships and outcomes. Language can conceal or reveal. Our word choices can create:

- Scarcity or abundance
- Hopeful or fearful environments
- Limiting or powerful thinking
- Inclusive or excluding conversations

Good questions don't gather information. They create insight.

Closed-ended questions

- Efficient and transactional
- Yield limited detail or context

Open-ended (evocative) questions

- Invite longer responses
- Create connection, discovery, and insight

Shift from efficiency → insight

- Why → *What / How*
- Advice → *Curiosity*
- Fixing → *Exploring*

Examples:

- "Why didn't that work?" → *What made this challenging?*
 - "Have you tried...?" → *What have you already considered?*
 - "What should I do?" → *What matters most as I think about next steps?*
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2. Listening: Listening to Understand

Do you usually listen to respond—or listen to understand?

Three levels of listening

- **Level 1: Internal** — focused on your own thoughts and reactions, what you'll say next
- **Level 2: Focused** — giving full attention to the speaker
- **Level 3: Global** — fully engaged, listening for meaning, emotion, and what's not being said

Listening to understand means listening for what is important to the other person, the words they use, their ideas, and what may be left unsaid.

Making Assumptions: Staying Off the Ladder of Inference

We often move quickly from observable data to assumptions, conclusions, beliefs, and actions — without realizing it. Before acting, pause and ask:

What else might be true here?

Assume good intentions. It might not be about you.

Key Takeaways

Consider one small action you can take:

- Notice word use (“have to” vs. “get to”)
- Ask more open-ended questions
- Listen to understand (Levels 2/3)
- Stay off the Ladder of Inference

Small shifts in conversations can lead to clearer thinking and better outcomes.

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