

Add Structure To Your Coaching Style

Your natural coaching style usually works best for you. It ensures you don't have to pretend to do something that's not natural to you, and reflects in body language that your client will read easily. When you are natural in your style, it pays dividends in the form of higher trust from your client. So keep your style.

Do be mindful, though, that coaching is a science. That's why, think about a framework, and how to be natural within that framework. No, we're not suggesting you tie yourself down. We're suggesting you work within a framework so your conversation keeps its shape. You don't want to crisscross between fishing in the Amazon, dealing with the client's dilemma, and ending the conversation with an invitation to their kid's school concert.

Part I – The Opening

Build Rapport: No matter how well you know somebody, the initial moments of a conversation are never easy. We end up with “so, what's up?”, or “mmmm, what's going on”?, or something equally absurd. And then we wait for concrete topics to come up before the conversation really begins. Take the opportunity to break ice with a question that leads to a positive response, like, “what's your most memorable achievement this month?”, or “what's the most exciting thing you're working on this week?”. It gets the client talking about something of their interest immediately, and opens up the conversation very quickly. So, think. And prepare. Before you go into the meeting.



What's are you MOST looking forward to this week?

Create a safe environment: After building rapport, you need to ensure you build a safe environment for the client to engage with you honestly. You do need to reiterate that the client is in a safe environment, and that there is mutual respect for each other's space. The adjoining table gives you some suggested ways of doing so.

You know this is a safe place to share

This is a safe place, so please feel free to be yourself...

Our conversation is completely confidential

My goal is to empower you to move forward in whatever you want to focus on today

Part II: Set the Context

Desired Outcome: Your conversations should have a defined outcome. For the client to leave the meeting satisfied, they need to be able to state their expectation from the meeting. The more specific, the better. Needless to say, you should encourage the client to state their expectation. Here are some ways to do that

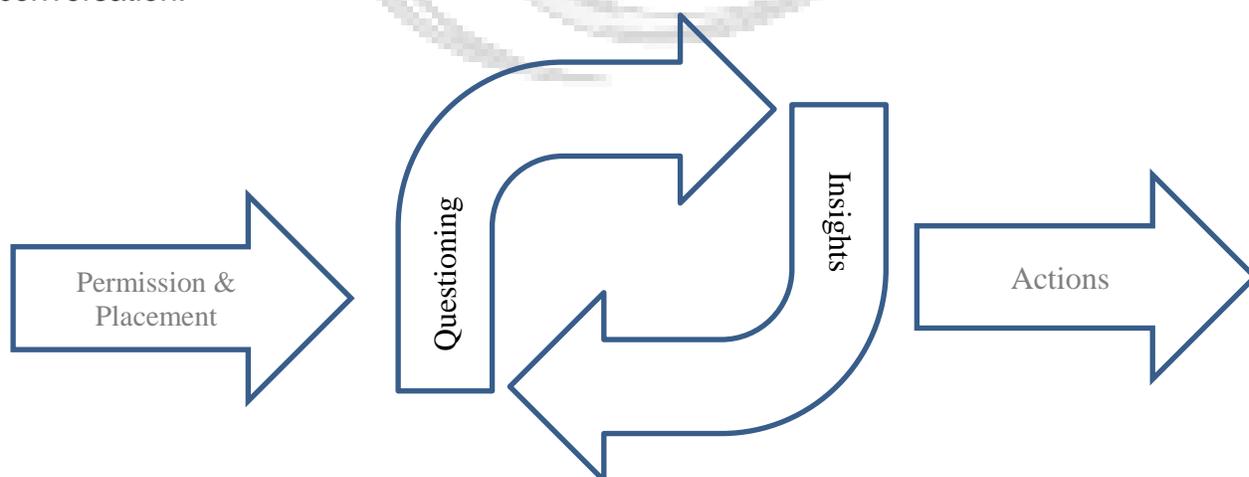
What would you like to focus on today?	You've talked about x issues; which of these would you like to focus on today?
At what level would you like us to focus our conversation today?	We have x minutes today, so lets spend y to explore the issue, and wrap it up in the last z minutes

Current State: The desired state will give you where the client wants to go. It is equally important to understand where they currently are. This is a great way to establish the gap between the desired state and the current state, and how far you can help the client advance through the conversation. Here's how you could explore

What happens that tells you this is a problem?	What will successfully dealing with this look like?
Why is this important to you?	When would you know you have succeeded?

Part III – The Exploration Phase

This part of the conversation takes a cyclical pattern. You may be working with the client on one issue, or more. For each of the issues, we recommend you follow this cycle. Even if you're discussing a single issue, every time a new aspect of the conversation opens up, you need to make sure the client is comfortable with having that conversation.



Permission & Placement:

For every new issue, or a new question within the same issue, seeking the client's permission to ask questions is a great way to make them feel comfortable to open a new area of discussion. It is also a great way for a coach to gauge whether the client is open or closed to discussion at the moment. Both enhance trust, and mutual respect.

Placement means clarifying what you want to discuss before you ask the question. This gives the client an opportunity to decide whether they want to discuss the subject. If they don't, then there's no permission, and a signal to exit from the conversation. If they agree, then it's a green signal to move forward with the question.

Some sample constructs may help you in framing this part of the conversation.

Placement	Permission
I may need more information on this specific challenge.	Would you like to discuss this in more detail?
Your inputs are very useful. To get to specific actions, we may need to discuss more.	May I ask you another question?
I think there's more to your anger issue. I'd like you to share more situations.	Is this a good time for this conversation?
I would like to move the discussion to what may be a related issue.	Are you ok with that?

At times, you may need permission and placement outside of the coaching conversation, for example, to set expectations, manage disclosure etc. Some examples are as follows

- In the due course of our coaching engagement, I will need your permission to ask questions to drive our conversation. May I proceed? (Wait for explicit "Yes" from client)
- Feel free to answer or not answer some or any of them, if you are not comfortable answering
- I seek your permission to continue this recording (Wait for explicit "Yes" from client)
- The recording will be shared with my Master Coach / Mentor. The purpose is solely for my learning and skill building.

Questioning: The art of questioning is more than framing great questions. It begins with the coach listening for potential. It requires listening generously, ie, speak less; let the client speak most of the time, but listen for what they really mean. Clarify extensively. Get to a point where you and the client understand an issue in exactly the same way; no guessing! Paraphrasing is a great way to get there, or else, you could ask

Client	Coach
I have a massive problem with slow people	When you say slow people, what exactly do you mean? How does working with slow people affect you?
I'm don't really care about that	What specifically do you not care about? Is that all there is to it?

When asking your questions

Did you know this about yourself?
Do you better understand the gap between your current and desired states?
Did you ever think about resolving your issue this way?
What would be the impact of dealing with your challenge in this way?

- Be succinct
- Be specific
- Keep your questions short and simple
- Ask one question at a time

Insights: Getting to insights is the reason for asking questions. Insights are the “aha” moments for the client. Insights can be arrived at in creating self-awareness, as well as in breaking through barriers. Its when the client opens up his mind to a problem, or to a way to deal with it. The moment you can get a client to think about himself, his problem, or its solution in a way they haven’t done before, they may have arrived at their “aha” moment.

How do you know? Ask them!

Part IV – Closure

Actions & Commitments: Any action the client is committed to work on will be the result of his “aha” moments. Actions the client is willing to take on himself have the best chance of success, because clients inherently have higher accountability to their own solutions. To get to actions, ask what the client believes are the best solutions

Would you like to summarize what actions you will take?
What is the one area you would like to work on till our next call?
On a scale of 1-10, how committed are you to completing these actions before our next call?
How would you like me to support you?

Please review the actions, and support your client in writing SMART (specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, time-bound) goals.

Closure: End on a warm, positive note. “It was nice talking to you”, or “I’m sure you’re going to succeed” are great closing statements. The closing part of your call is also an opportunity to get some inputs from the client.

- “On a scale of 1-10, how did this session go for you”
 - Acknowledge feedback, "Thanks for sharing your feedback"
- "What can you do differently, so the score can move up"
- "What can I do differently, to help you move up the score"

You may want to secure the schedule for the next call in your closure.

