



Eight Minutes, Not Eight Hours



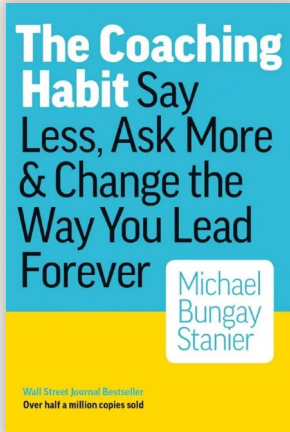
April 2023

The Coaching Habit

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

BOOK AUTHOR: MICHAEL BUNGAY STANIER

Published 2016



Michael Stanier’s definition of coaching someone is “calling them forward to learn, improve, and grow, rather than to just get something sorted out.” While many managers want to be effective coaches, they often fall into the habit of taking on their team’s work and becoming overwhelmed, frustrated, and a bottleneck in the system. Stanier believes the best coaches focus on empowering others to find answers within themselves. In his book **The Coaching Habit**, Stanier builds on Charles Duhigg’s **The Power of Habit** by providing a series of basic questions to steer coaching sessions, along with prompts throughout the book to help leaders identify their negative habits.

Key Quote

“When you build a coaching habit, you can more easily break out of three vicious circles that plague our workplaces: creating overdependence, getting overwhelmed and becoming disconnected.”

— Michael Bungay Stanier

KEY POINTS

The foundation of Stanier’s coaching approach is found in “**Seven Essential Questions**” leaders should ask people they are coaching. The best coaches use these questions – each given a particular name by Stanier – in daily conversations, not simply during formal coaching sessions.

1. **The Kickstarter Question** is “What’s on your mind?”
2. **The AWE Question** is “And what else?”
3. **The Focus Question** is “What’s the real challenge here for you?”

4. **The Foundation Question** is “What do you want?”
5. **The Lazy Question** is “How can I help?”
6. **The Strategic Question** is “If you’re saying yes to this, what are you saying no to?”
7. **The Learning Question** is “What was most useful to you?” (pp. 39, 57, 86, 111, 142, 163, 188)

Key Concepts:

The Kickstarter Question: “What’s on your mind?”

Ask this question to quickly focus the conversation on what is important for the other person. Listen to their answer with attention to the “3Ps.” These are the project (“the content of the situation”), the people (who is involved), and the patterns (“patterns of behavior and ways of working” that the person you are coaching would like to change) (pp. 39, 43-44).

The AWE Question: “And what else?”

Asking “And what else?” creates new insight. It pushes the person you are coaching to dig deeper, it “buys you time” to think, and it pushes the person to consider all options, scenarios, or parts of a project. Practice asking this question after any other question and ask it a few times within the same discussion if you think it is needed to help a person go deeper. For instance: “And what else is on your mind” or “And what else is your real challenge?” (pp. 57, 62).

The Focus Question: “What’s the real challenge here for you?”

When you jump into helping or giving advice, you often run into three main issues: “You work on the wrong problem; you do the work your team should be doing; and the work doesn’t get done.” Asking this question helps you to “focus on the real problem, not the first problem” (p. 85). This question also helps avoid discussing unlimited challenges, venting unproductively, or focusing on abstractions and generalizations (pp. 82, 85, 86).

The Foundation Question: “What do you want?”

When listening to the response to this question, look for the need underneath the want to better understand and respond to requests. Economist Manfred Max-Neef identifies nine self-explanatory universal needs: “affection, creation, recreation, freedom, identity, understanding, participation, protection, and subsistence” (pp. 111, 116, 125).

The Lazy Question: “How can I help?”

This question can lead to a valuable exchange. “First, you’re forcing your colleague to make a direct and clear request,” helping him clarify for himself what exactly would be useful to him. “Second (and possibly even more valuably), it stops you from thinking that you know how best to help and leaping into action” (pp. 142-143).



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However, when answering requests as a coach, remember that you can answer “yes,” “no,” or “I’m not sure.” One good response is “I can’t do that, but I can do this.”

In these interactions, coaches should be mindful of the “Karpman Drama Triangle,” a model of how people can tend to move among three roles: “victim,” “persecutor,” and “rescuer.” These roles can affect cycles of dependence, especially if managers default to act as rescuers (pp. 138, 142-143).

The Strategic Question: “If you’re saying yes to this, what are you saying no to?”

“A Yes is nothing without a No that gives it boundaries and form” (p. 165). Ask questions to better understand the commitment involved. Also, consider the planning fallacy: it is our human tendency to underestimate how long tasks take and how much we underestimated our original estimate (pp. 163, 171).

The Learning Question:

“What was most useful to you?”

Asking this question promotes learning by prompting the people you are coaching to reflect, generating their own connections to the ideas discussed. Generating connections is one of the four neurological drivers of long-term memory.

As a coach, “your job is to create space for those learning moments” (p. 189). Asking this question also “assumes the conversation was useful,” “makes it personal,” “gives you feedback,” and “reminds people how useful you are to them.” To build a stronger relationship, as the coach, you should also tell people what you found to be most useful about the exchange (pp. 192-195).

A Few Lessons from the “Question Masterclass”

“Stop offering up advice with a question mark attached” (p. 76). Asking, “Have you tried X?” confines the person you are coaching to your own ideas. But asking more open-ended questions empowers the person to take the lead.

Apply the Seven Essential Questions in electronic communication too. “Questions work just as well typed as they do spoken” (p. 204).

Try to ask questions starting with “what” instead of “why.” “If you’re not trying to fix things, you don’t need the backstory” (p. 102).

Really listen to the answer. Acknowledge the answers you get, instead of rushing on to the next question.

Get comfortable with silence.

Stanier’s “Top Shelf” Management Books”

Stanier offers readers book recommendations according to distinct categories and topics, some are listed below.



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Self-management

On motivation: **Drive**, Dan Pink

On forming new habits: **The Power of Habit**, Charles Duhigg

On personal change: **Mindsight**, Dan Siegel and **Immunity to Change**, Lisa Lahey and Bob Kegan

On resilience: **The Dip**, Seth Godin

Organizational Change

On how organizational change really works: **Switch**, Chip and Dan Heath

On changing behaviors: **The Checklist Manifesto**, Atul Gawande

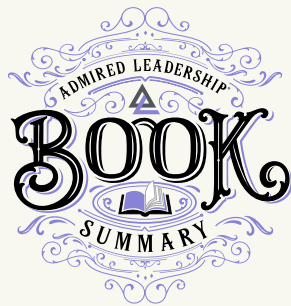
On being strategic: **Playing to Win**, Roger Martin and A.G. Lafley

On improving your impact: **Scaling Up Excellence**, Bob Sutton and Huggy Rao

On being more helpful: **Helping**, Edgar Schein

Stanier, M. B. (2016). **The Coaching Habit: Say Less, Ask More & Change the Way You Lead Forever.**

Box of Crayons Press: Toronto, ON.



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The Latest and Greatest Books for Leaders

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