

The Sequence of Questioning

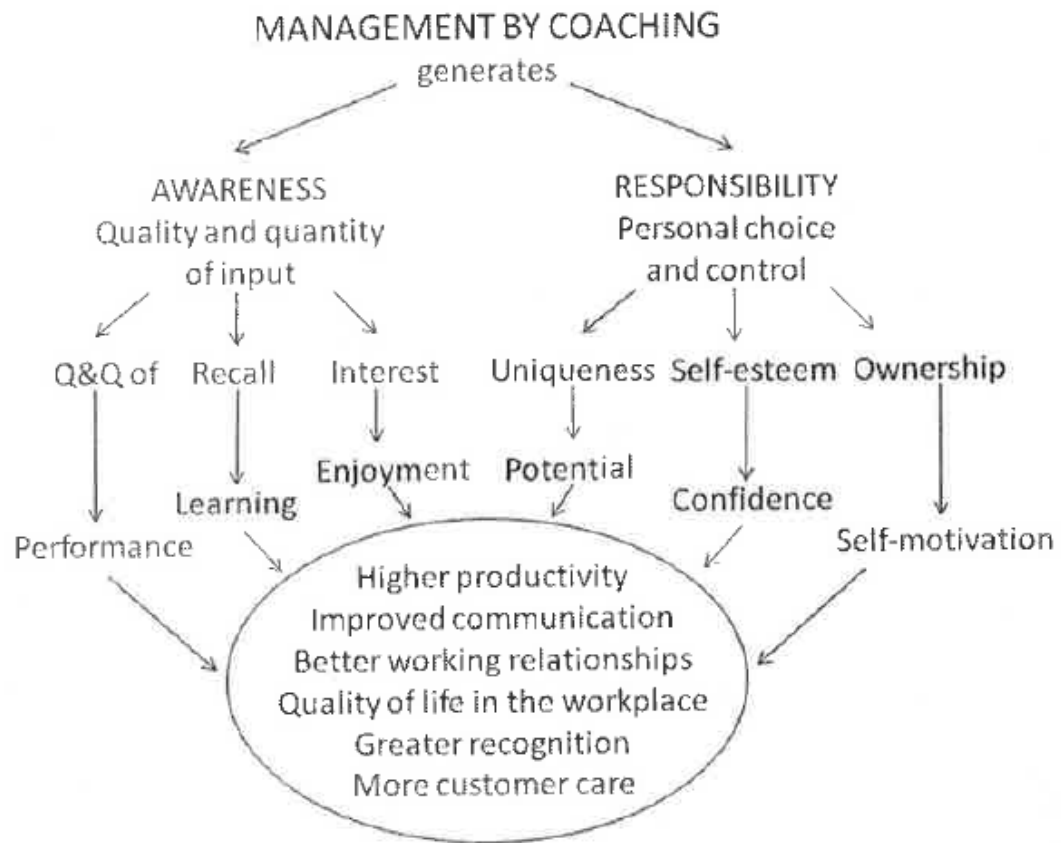
Goals, Reality, Options, and Will

So far we have established the essential nature of **awareness** and **responsibility** for learning and for performance improvement. The figure overleaf illustrates the many-pronged, many faceted nature of the benefits that spread out from these very simple but powerful concepts. Following any line of arrows from top to bottom illustrates the sequence of effects.

We have also looked at the context of coaching, at the parallels between coaching and managing, and at company culture and change. We have explored the role and the attitude of the coach, and we have considered questions as the primary form of communication in coaching. We now have to determine what to ask questions about and in what sequence to ask them.

It is important at this point to stress that it is possible for coaching to be loose and informal, so much so that coachees do not know they are being coached. For the everyday management function of briefing and debriefing staff, nothing is better than coaching, but it should not be identified as such; it would just be managing. In this case coaching ceases to be a

FORMAL OR INFORMAL?



tool of management and simply becomes the way to manage people, in my opinion the most effective way. At the other end of the spectrum, a coaching session can be scheduled and structured in such a way that its purpose and roles are unambiguous. While the majority of coaching is of the former type, we will examine the latter in detail because, while the process is the same, the stages are more sharply defined.

ONE TO ONE

For reasons of simplicity and clarity we will look at one-to-one coaching, although the format of team coaching or even self-coaching remains exactly the same. Both of these will be elaborated in later chapters. One-to-one coaching may take place between peers, between a manager and a subordinate, between an erstwhile teacher and a student, between a coach and a performer, or between a counselor and someone seeking his assistance. One-to-one coaching can even be used in an upward direction, although generally covertly, by an employee on his boss. After all, as no one gets very far by telling his boss what to do, coaching upward has a much higher success rate!

THE G R O W MODEL

So the sequence of questions I suggest would follow four distinct headings:

- ♦ **Goal** setting for the session as well as short and long term.
- ♦ **Reality** checking to explore the current situation.
- ♦ **Options** and alternative strategies or courses of action.
- ♦ **What** is to be done, **When**, by **Whom**, and the **Will** to do it.

This sequence assumes that it is desirable to visit all four stages, which is usually the case when tackling a new issue for the first time. Often, however, coaching will be used to progress a task or process that has been discussed before or is already under way. In such cases coaching may begin and end with any stage.

It may seem strange to set **goals** before examining **reality**. Superficial logic suggests the opposite, as we surely need to know the reality before we can set any goal. Not so – goals based on current reality alone are liable to be negative, a response to a problem, limited by past performance, lacking in creativity due to simple extrapolation, in smaller increments than may be achievable, or even counterproductive. Short-term fixed goals may even lead us away from long-term goals. My experience with goal setting on team-training courses is that teams invariably set goals based on what has been done before rather than on what can be done in the future. In many cases they make no attempt to calculate what might be possible.

Goals formed by ascertaining the ideal long-term solution, and then determining realistic steps toward that ideal, are generally far more inspiring, creative, and motivating. Let me illustrate this very important point with an example. If we set about trying to solve a problem of heavy traffic volume on a strategic route by exploring the reality, we are likely to set goals based solely on relieving existing traffic flow, such as widening a road. This might actually run counter to a more visionary long-term goal, which would be formed by identifying the ideal traffic pattern for the region at some time in the future, and then looking at the stages needed to move in that direction.

So my suggestion is, in most circumstances, to use the sequence suggested above.

MORE THAN GROW

This sequence conveniently forms the mnemonic G R O W, to which I will refer frequently. I must stress, however, that G R O W, without the context of **awareness** and **responsibility** and the skill of questioning to generate them, has little value. Mnemonics abound in the training business. There is S P I N, there are S M A R T goals, there is G R I T and there is G R O W coaching. These are occasionally presented or misperceived as panaceas to all business ills. They are nothing of the sort; they are only as valuable as the context in which they are used, and the context of G R O W is awareness and responsibility.

An autocratic boss might charge his employees in the following way:

My **goal** is to sell one thousand widgets this month. The **reality** is that you did poorly last month with only 400 sold. You are a bunch of lazy so-and-sos. Our principal competitor has a better product, so you have to try harder. I have considered all the **options** and we are not going to increase our advertising or repackage the product. **What you will** do is the following...

He has followed the G R O W model to the letter but he has not asked a single question. He has created no awareness and, although he thinks he has threatened his staff into taking responsibility, this is not so, because they had no choice.

CONTEXT AND FLEXIBILITY

The processes used by a coach, a counselor, a psychotherapist or a guru are similar: they build the awareness and responsibility of the client

If you get anything at all out of this book, let it be awareness and responsibility, which are more important than G R O W. Having said that, the strongest case for following the G R O W sequence with effective coaching questions is that it works.

It is, however, subject to recycling. What I mean by this is that one may only be able to define a vague **goal** until one has examined the **reality** in some detail. It will then be necessary to go back and define the **goal** much more precisely before

moving forward again. Even a sharply defined initial **goal** may be recognized to be wrong or inappropriate once the **reality** is clear.

When listing the **options**, it will be necessary to check back to see if each of them would in fact move you toward the desired **goal**. Finally, before the **what** and **when** are set in concrete, it is crucial to make one last check to see if they meet the goal.

We will now take a deeper look at each one of these steps in turn and at the questions that best raise **awareness** and **responsibility** within each step.