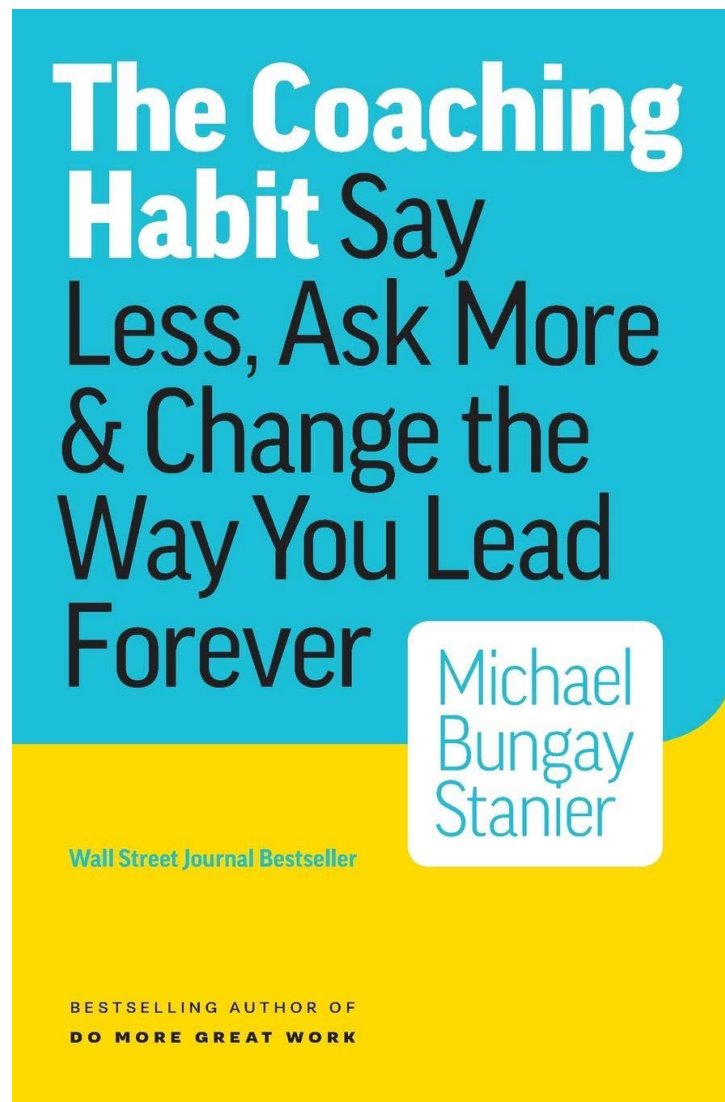# The Coaching Habit: Say Less, Ask More & Change the Way You Lead Forever

By Michael Bungay Stanier

[CLICK HERE FOR THE Written Summary](#)
[CLICK HERE FOR THE YouTube Summary](#)
[CLICK HERE FOR THE Audio Podcast Summary](#)
[CLICK HERE TO BUY THE BOOK](#)
[CLICK HERE TO Follow us on Instagram](#)
[CLICK HERE TO Subscribe to our Weekly Book Summary Newsletter](#)

You Need a Coaching Habit

- Coaching is a leadership style that has positive impact on performance, culture, and the bottom line, but is the least used.
- Coaching lets you break out of three vicious cycles: Creating overdependence, getting overwhelmed, and becoming disconnected.
- By creating overdependence, you disempower others, create frustration for yourself, and make yourself a bottleneck.
- Proliferating priorities makes you lose focus. The more you lose focus, the more overwhelmed you feel. And vice versa.
- Find work that has impact and meaning. Work without real purpose makes us less engaged and motivated, and then we don't find and create Great Work.

How to Build a Habit

- The change of behavior required is this: A little more asking questions, and a little less telling people what to do.
- To build an effective habit, you need a reason, a trigger, a micro-habit, effective practice, and a plan.
- Make a vow that's connected to serving others. This connects your payoff to the big picture.
- Identify the trigger of the behavior you want to replace; without this you cannot replace the action that follows it.
- Make your new habit short and specific, or possible in less than 60 seconds. This can be the first step to a bigger habit.
- Practice deeply by practicing small parts of the bigger action, repeating the action, and noticing success and celebrating it.
- Make your habit a resilient system, where when something breaks down, the next step to recover is obvious.
- The new habit formula requires identifying the trigger, identifying the old habit, and defining the new behavior.
- There are just five types of triggers: location, time, emotional state, other people, and the immediately preceding action.
- When adopting coaching, pick someone who might be up for it and will cut you slack, and don't incorporate all ideas at once.

1: The Kickstart Question

- Small talk might be a useful way to warm up a conversation, but it's rarely a bridge that leads to a conversation that matters.
- Don't begin your coaching conversation with an agenda that was perfect a week ago, but now puts process in front of what really matters.
- Don't avoid a conversation because that feels comfortable, assuming that there's no conversation or question about what the issue is.
- The question "What's on your mind?" quickly turns into a real conversation about the thing that matters most.
- Coaching for performance focuses on specific problems; coaching for development focuses on the person dealing with those problems.
- The 3P model focuses on a project, a person, or a pattern of behavior that is at the heart of a difficulty that the person is working through.
- Projects is where coaching for performance tends to occur. Start here and see whether conversion would benefit from including another P.
- When you're talking about people, you're not talking about them, but your relationship and your role in that relationship.
- Looking at patterns of behavior that you'd like to change is most likely when coaching for development conversations will emerge.
- We are what we give our attention to. The Kickstart Question helps make explicit something that may be unduly influencing the way you work.

2: The AWE Question

- The question "And What Else?" has impact because more options can lead to better decisions, you ask more questions, and you buy yourself time.
- The first answer is never the only answer, and rarely the best answer. Better options lead to better decisions, which lead to better outcomes.
- Giving wrong advice often feels more comfortable than asking a question, as both we and organizations value clarity and certainty.
- And when you're not entirely sure what's going on, and you need a moment to figure things out, the AWE question buys you extra time.
- Use the principles of practicing deeply to ask "And what else?" with genuine interest and curiosity.
- When someone responds "There is nothing else," view that as a sign of success. Move on to another question.
- When it is time to move on, the variation "Is there anything else?" invites closure while producing the same results.

- Don't fall victim to the Paradox of Choice. When the AWE question generates three to five answers, you've made great progress.
- Studies show that follow-up questions that promote higher-level thinking, like the AWE question, deepen understanding and promote participation.

3: The Focus Question

- If you jump in to tackle a presented problem, typically you're working on the wrong problem, doing work your team do, or the work doesn't get done.
- The challenge most people present is not the real challenge; it is a symptom, secondary issue, or ghost of a previous problem.
- Doing the work of others may feel convenient at times, but it will eventually feel overwhelming, and you'll become the bottleneck.
- "What's the real challenge here for you?" slows down the rush to action, so you solve the real problem and not the first problem.
- The question invites analyzing multiple challenges, and makes it personal instead of appealing to high-level or abstract challenges.
- If asking "What's on your mind?" reveals many problems, don't focus on one or offer advice; instead follow up with the focus question.
- You can only coach the person in front of you. Don't tolerate gossip about someone else; ask the challenge question to focus on the relationship.
- If listening to a high-level conversation about "us" and "we" instead of "me" and "I," the focus question can bring focus to the person at hand.
- Adding "for you" to the end of as many questions as possible can make conversations more development- than performance-oriented.
- Remember that there is a place for your advice, however; one of your roles as a manager or leader is to have answers.
- Research shows that adding "for you" to a question helps people figure out the answers faster and more accurately.

4: The Foundation Question

- There are many reasons why the question "What do you want?" may not be asked or answered clearly, but the illusion of communication has taken place.
- The illusion that each party knows what the other one wants sets the stage for plenty of frustrating exchanges.
- Wants are surface requests or tactical outcomes; needs are affection, freedom, participation, creation, identity, protection, recreation, understanding, and subsistence.

- Understand and express what you want. When we each understand what the other wants, we're in the middle of an interesting and worthwhile conversation.
- If you're not sure about a situation, you read it as unsafe, and you begin to back away, unable to engage your conscious brain.
- So that others engage rather than retreat from you, focus on TERA, so that you think about how to influence the environment that drives engagement.
- T is for tribe, where the brain evaluates whether someone else is on your side or is your opposition.
- E is for expectation, where the brain evaluates whether what's going to happen next is clear or ambiguous.
- R is for rank, where the brain evaluates whether someone else is more or less important than you are, and its effect on your status.
- A is for autonomy, where the brain evaluates whether you have a choice or not.
- Your goal is to raise the overall TERA quotient, and by asking questions you can do just that.
- The miracle question, "If a miracle happens, how do you know things are better?" focuses on the end in mind, like the foundation question.

5: The Lazy Question

- Offering help is not always helpful: You raise your status and lower the other person's, whether you mean to or not.
- The Drama Triangle says that we bounce around between three archetypal roles: Victim, Persecutor, and Rescuer.
- As a victim, you attract Rescuers and have no responsibility to fix anything, but you're powerless. You're a whiner.
- As a persecutor, you have a sense of power and control, but you end up being responsible for everything and you create victims. You're a bully.
- As a rescuer, you feel indispensable and morally superior, but people reject your help and you create victims. You're a meddler.
- Rescuers create victims, even though we want to believe that it's the other way around.
- The question "How can I help?" forces a colleague to make a direct and clear request, and stops you from thinking that you know how best to help.
- The worst thing you can do is something that is not so right that it's actually useful, but not so wrong that someone tells you to stop.
- If you ask "What do you want from me," preface it with "Out of curiosity" or "Just so I know" to soften the tone.

- Don't be afraid of the question. You can answer yes, no, provide a counter-offer, or think about it to buy yourself time.
- Asking the Lazy Question not only makes you more effective, but gains you respect as well.

6: The Strategic Question

- Being busy is not a measure of success. And the maxim "work smarter, not harder" sounds good but is impossible to act upon.
- The qualifier "strategic" is overused. Michael Porter defined strategy as "The essence of strategy is choosing what not to do."
- A "Yes" is nothing without the "No" that gives it boundaries and form.
- The No of omission applies to the options that are automatically eliminated by you saying Yes.
- The No of commission puts the spotlight on how to create the space and focus, energy and resources needed to create the Yes.
- Follow the 3P model of Projects, People, and Patterns to ensure that you cover all bases for the No of commission.
- It's easiest to say no to those who are closest to us, and to those who are distant from us. In between it's much harder.
- Say no by saying yes more slowly. Stay curious before committing by questions around urgency and resourcing.
- In response, the person will either order you to work, have good answers, go find the answers, or find someone else to do the work.
- It's awkward saying no to something, because you're actually saying no to someone.
- Ask: What is our winning aspiration? Where will we play? How will we win? What capabilities must be in place? And what management systems are required?
- The question behind these questions is the Strategic Question: What will you say No to if you say Yes to this?
- The strategy question helps fight the planning fallacy, where we fail at estimating how much time we take to complete something.
- Prospect theory says we overvalue things that we have because we don't like loss. The strategy question focuses on what we're holding onto.

7: The Learning Question

- People don't learn when you tell them something, or even when they do something, but instead when they recall and reflect on what happened.

- The question "What was most useful to you" creates space for people to have learning moments.
- Retention increases when we take the time and effort to find an answer, or we create and share our own connections to new ideas.
- Interrupt the process of forgetting by asking a question. Find a way to ask the question in places other than the end of a conversation.
- The Learning Question frames what just happened as something that was useful and creates a moment in which to figure out what it was.
- It has the person focus on the one or two key takeaways from the conversation.
- Suffixing the question with "for you" makes it personal; people are telling themselves what was useful, which sounds like better advice.
- The answer to the question not only provides guidance on what to do next time, but reassures you that you're being useful.
- Finally, the question prompts insight instead of eliciting judgment, and it reminds people how useful you are to them.
- Tell others what you found to be the most useful; this equal exchange of information strengthens the social contract.
- The peak-end rule says that how we evaluate an experience is disproportionately influenced by its peak and its ending moments.

https://github.com