

Powerful Questions Workshop for Agile Coaches

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Workbook



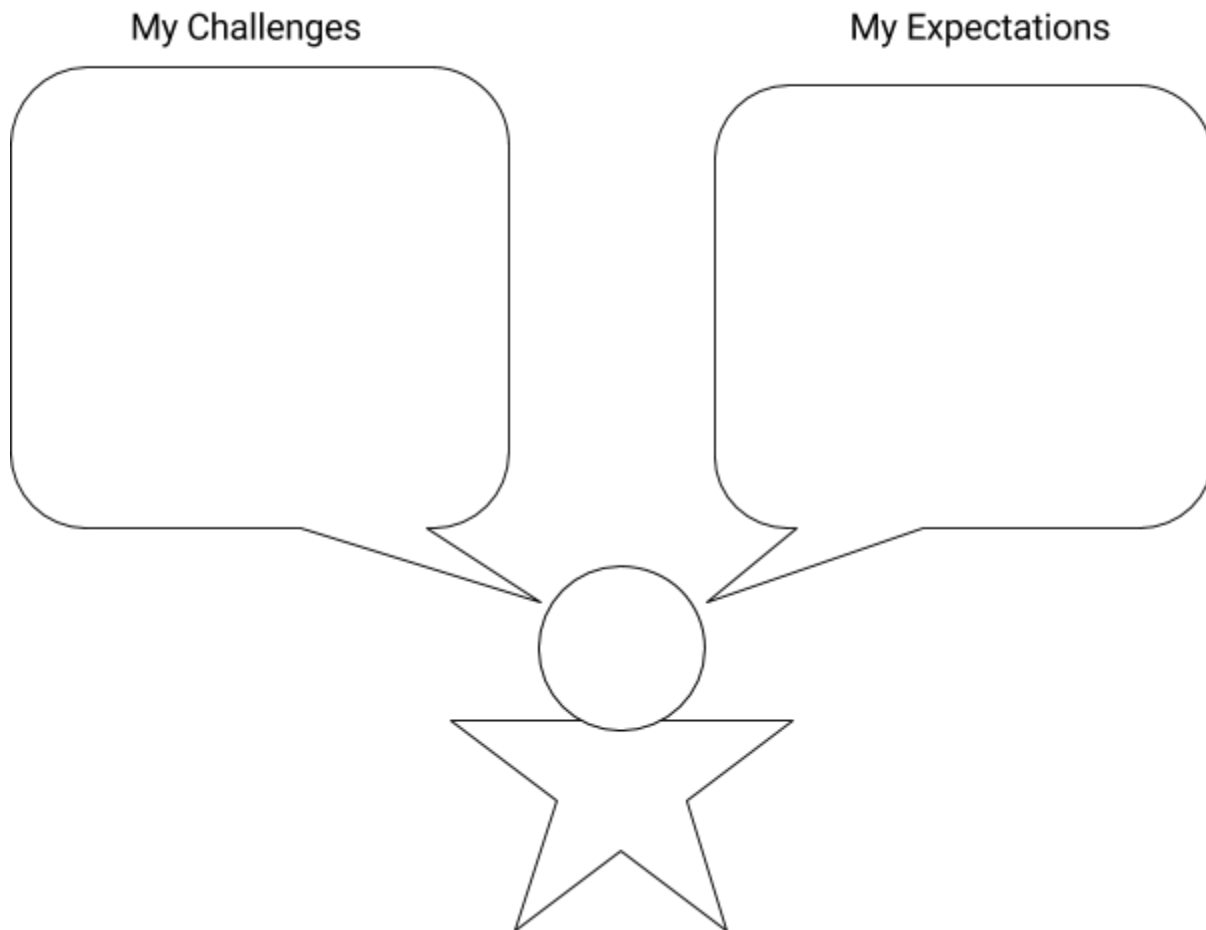
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Share challenges and expectations with your learning buddy

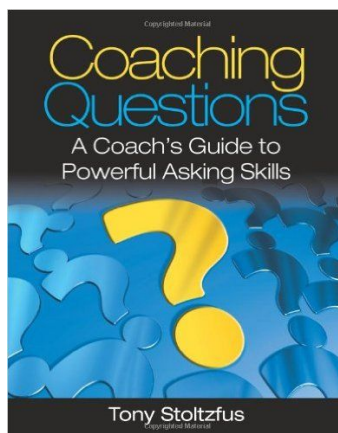
My Challenges

My Expectations



Reference:

This workshop is based on the book *Coaching Questions: A Coach's Guide to Powerful Asking Skills* by Tony Stoltzfus.



Closed Questions

A closed question is:

The benefit of open questions are:

A practical technique to turn closed questions into open questions is:

Practice: turn the following closed questions into open questions.

Closed: Could there be any other ways to improve the quality of your code?

Open: _____

Closed: Do you incorporate testing as part of the Sprint?

Open: _____

Closed: Can you realistically start doing continuous delivery?

Open: _____

Solution-oriented Questions

A solution-oriented question is:

We should avoid solution-oriented questions because:

To avoid solution-oriented questions:

Practice: try avoiding the following solution-oriented questions.

Solution-oriented: Shouldn't you check with the Product Owner before altering the backlog?

Open: _____

Solution-oriented: Don't you think that having a vision would benefit the team in making decisions?

Open: _____

Solution-oriented: Could you use the review meeting to raise awareness about the slow turnaround?

Open: _____

One True Question

The one true question is:

We should avoid one true questions because:

To avoid one true questions:

Practice: other ways to avoid looking for the one true question.

1. Tell me more.

2. You mentioned that Expand on that.

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

6. _____

Rambling Questions

Rambling questions are:

The reasons why coaches get into rambling questions are:

Practical techniques to avoid rambling questions are:

Practice: avoid rambling questions.

You're coaching a team that consistently falls short of its Sprint goal and carries work forward. The team questions the benefits of the Agile process. The team has not had any formal training or coaching. You attend a daily standup meeting to start understanding the situation.

The meeting takes around 30 minutes and includes 20 people sitting in various locations, some near and some distant. They converse via a telephone conference line. It appears that all eyes are focused on a time tracking tool that includes burnup and burndown charts. Two voices dominate the call: the project manager and the Agile founder. Each team member answers the question: "What did you work on since the last meeting?" This information may or may not have been entered into the tracking tool. If not, the leaders remind the team members that they must do this. The leaders also quiz each member on how their time was spent, if the work is fitting into the estimate and if not, why not. There is little talking between team members on the call.

Look at your learning buddy, he's the manager that hired you as a coach. Make him a single, concrete question:

Interpretative Questions

Interpretative questions are questions we make based on our own interpretations of what our client says. For instance, a client says, "I'm finding it tough lately to want to work with Peter. I'm disappointed with his work, he's not showing the commitment i need, and I keep finding myself working late at home." A response like, "How long have you hated Peter?" is likely to get a reaction from the client (" Wait a minute— I never said I hated Peter!") The reason? Our coaching question reveals our interpretation of what the client said.

We should avoid interpretative questions because interpretive questions erode trust (because they put something on the client) and block the conversational flow as the person responds to our analysis.

A practical and direct techniques to avoid interpretative questions is simply make a habit of incorporating the client's own words in your questions. For the example above, we might ask, "How long have you been disappointed with Peter's work?" or "What kind of commitment are you looking for that you aren't getting?" or "What triggers you working late at home?" The underlined words in these questions are taken directly from the client's own statements.

Practice: avoid the interpretative question

Your client says "I'm finding it tough lately to want to go to the Sprint review meetings. I'm frustrated with my current project, I'm not getting the support I need from the stakeholders, and I keep finding myself looking at the clock and wishing the meeting was over."

Your question: "For how long was Scrum not working for you?" (interpretative question)

Your client answer: "Wait a minute. I never said Scrum was not working"

Restate your question so it's no more an interpretative question:

Rhetorical Questions

Rhetorical questions are statements, in question form, of your own opinion of the situation.

We should avoid rhetorical questions because they evoke either no response or a defensive one. Rhetorical questions are generally a sign that you've made a judgment or developed an attitude about the person you are coaching.

A technique to avoid rhetorical questions is to reset your attitude. Eliminating rhetorical questions requires a change in attitude toward the client. One way is to get in touch with what is going on inside you, and how this situation is pushing your emotional buttons. A second approach is to renew your internal picture of the coachee's potential and ability.

Practice: avoid rhetorical question

You're coaching an Agile team that started using Kanban a few weeks ago. While talking with the manager in front of the Kanban Board, he interrupts you and tells you he was not satisfied with the way the team tested a new bug fix. So he walks towards the board and moves the card back to the "Ready to Test" column, to have it re-tested. And he tells you: "Don't tell the team I moved this card back. Tomorrow, I'll join the tester, so I make sure it's fully done".

At that moment, you felt shocked by the loss of openness, respect and trust in the team. So you ask your client: "**What do you think you're doing!?**".

Spend a few minutes on these reflection questions to reorient yourself around believing in the client:

- Why am I forming judgments here? How is focusing on the negative in this person meeting my own needs? What can I do about that?
- Could I be wrong about the situation? What am I missing? See if you can construct two possible scenarios where the coachee's point of view is more valid than your own.
- What potential, ability and wisdom do I see in this person? What can s/he become? Why am I drawn to coach him/her?

Rethink your question so it's not a rhetorical question any more:

Leading Questions

A leading question is a question that points the coachee to a certain answer: the one the coach (knowingly or unknowingly) wants. While rhetorical questions are blatantly biased, with leading questions you may not even realize you are propelling the conversation in a certain direction. Leading questions should be avoided because they put you in control of the conversation rather than letting your client guide it.

Two practical techniques to avoid leading questions are:

1. **Multiple Options:** add several other options at the end of your question. For example, if you catch yourself asking “What do you feel when the PO suddenly change the acceptance criteria of a PBI, frustration?”... add... “anger, disappointment, excitement, something else?”
2. **Or the Opposite:** add an “or” and then the opposite of what you just asked. Same example as above would be: “What do you feel when the PO suddenly change the acceptance criteria of a PBI, frustration?”... add... “or excitement?”

Practice: redeem the following leading questions.

Leading Question: Why don't you invite the Stakeholders to the Review: you don't trust them?

Redeem: _____

Leading Question: We've been discussing this PBI for a while. Are you ready to estimate it?

Redeem: _____

Leading Question: Since you invested a lot of time on this PBI, do you want to keep it in the backlog?

Redeem: _____

Neglecting to Interrupt

Neglecting to interrupt might turn into an issue if your client tend to speak for ten minutes every time you ask an open question. Too much detail, specially irrelevant details, slows the process and make everyone lost focus.

A technique to avoid this situation is to restore the focus. Bring the client back into to focus.

Interruption examples are:

- It caught my attention when you mentioned earlier that Let's come back to that.
- A few moments ago, you mentioned that Would you please tell me more about it?
- It seems we're diverting from the main topic of the conversation. Are you ok if we get back into it?

Practice: ways to interrupt

Discuss with your learning buddy other ways you can interrupt a conversation to recover it's focus:

Why Questions

A why question is a kind of question that puts your client into a defensive position.

We should avoid why questions because when we use them, we're asking our clients to defend and justify their actions.

To avoid why questions:

- Opt 1) Replace the "why" with a "what":
 - Example: **Why** did you do that? → **What** factors led you to do that?
- Opt 2) Ask for "intentions" rather than "reasons":
 - Example: **Why** did you do that? → **What** did you do that **for**?

Practice: try avoiding the following why questions.

Why: Why did you estimate that PBI that much?

Not Why: _____

Why: Why didn't you attend the daily standup meeting?

Not Why: _____

Why: Why didn't you prioritize the product backlog before coming to the planning meeting?

Not Why: _____

Conclusion

What are the most important concepts I just learned?

What are my feelings about them?

What new actions are possible for me after this workshop?

My learning buddy contact information:

