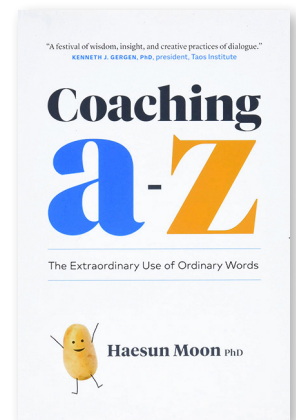


Coaching A to Z

The Extraordinary Use of Ordinary Words

by **Haesun Moon**



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THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

Do you remember having a really good conversation? What made it so good? Some people just seem so naturally gifted in conversations; they make you feel understood, appreciated, or perhaps encouraged and valued. What stories do you live with? What stories frequently make your mind their abode? What occupies your heart-space? Habits of our heart give ears to the stories that enter our lives, and habits of our mind give voice to the stories we echo. Sometimes these stories hurt, sometimes they heal. These questions launched Haesun Moon's decade-long quest as a communication scientist to research how coaching conversations work.

Based on the thousands of hours of research that earned Moon a doctorate degree, she describes in her book, *Coaching A to Z*, how storying together may begin with simply using our ordinary words in extraordinary ways. It could be as easy as ABC! is the exuberant hope behind this book—that you will begin conversing with yourself and others differently as a result.

IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- Good questions invite stories.
- Getting to “why” can motivate “how.”
- Care undergirds cure.
- Coaching conversations reveal hope.

A to E

Already

At the heart of every coaching conversation resides an inquiry about what people want. The role of a good coach, guide, and listener in any dialogue is not to cheerlead the conversation partners with you're-almost-there messages, but to invite them to remember what they're already doing to move in that direction.

Becoming

As you sit with others in conversation, how do you respond to their hopes and dreams? As they share their preferred ways of doing their life, do your assumptions get in the way of believing that they are already well on their way? As they dream themselves into existence, in what ways do you witness and acknowledge their becoming? This "radical acceptance" of believing in the other's becoming is not just for professional coaches; it's the very glue that mends and bonds relations.

Care

Coaching involves curating stories of purpose, possibilities, and progress. "Curate" comes from the Latin noun *cura*, meaning care. What you are curious about will orient your conversation partner's attention accordingly. With coaching, you are inviting them on a quest to discover what they care about and what makes their heart sing.

Difference

When you listen to people daydream, what if you believe their daydreams? Based on what your conversation partner says they want to be different, you can follow the trail by asking more about the very difference those small differences might make. For example: "Suppose your family somehow changed. What difference would that make for you?" "Suppose you made a different choice. What might that do for you?" You might be surprised to see how quickly people get to what they truly care about, just by your listening differently.

Else

Many people search for the one right answer: parents second-guessing their parenting choices, leaders doubting their decisions, people searching for meaningful work. What do you say to someone looking for an answer to be either right or wrong? These curiosities invite various perspectives. "What else tells you that you're moving in the right direction?" "Who else knows and appreciates your heart for people?" "When else have you felt it?"

F to J

First

A manager might ask an employee, "What are the first few things that will signal your relationship with your team member is getting better?" A teacher might ask a student, "What could be the first sign that you're getting better at this subject?" A health-care professional might ask a patient, "What was, or what will be, the first sign of your healing?" When you ask about first things, it's like pulling the initial thread to unravel a tapestry.

Good

People often want to do more and be better. Parents want to do more for their children. Managers want their teams to produce results. Ask: "On a scale of ten to one, where ten is I feel that I am at my best in that area and one is the opposite, where would you say you are today?" "Where would be a good enough point on that scale for you within the next four to six weeks?" "What is different when you are at that "good enough" point?"

Hope

The pursuit of happiness is a popular topic. People say they'd be happier if they became richer, smarter, healthier, taller, thinner, older, or younger. Coaching provides a "language of hope." This implies an intentional and attentional choice to craft hope where happiness may or may not fit. Words carry certain impressions of the past and create new impressions as we use them.

Instead

There's always more to a story. Do you know someone who complains a lot? They find endless topics to grumble about. When this person is a family member or friend, we often tune out. If you listen closely to people telling you what's the matter, you'll find what matters to them standing right in the middle of their stories. Then ask, "So, what do you want instead of that?"

Just

People who come for coaching want to see something improve. A manager wants to build a positive culture. A parent wants to raise a happy family. A couple wants to set healthy boundaries. "How does that show up?" "Where does that begin?" The manager says it shows up when people say good morning to each other at the start of their workday. The parent says it shows up when the family is

present for dinner together. The couple says it shows up when they spend their together-time not talking about work stress. Just like that. When we follow the trail of people's hopes and dreams, we arrive at tiny signposts.

K to O

Know

Learn another's way of knowing. My mechanic's way of knowing my car might not be the same as my mother's way of knowing my heart. Unless you ask, you don't know the other person's logic for life. Listening more intentionally for what people care about makes it easier to discover their preferences and resources.

Look

How many times have we unknowingly participated in creating and perpetuating biases? When you change another person's words by adding your own, you actively shape their world. When you hear what others say, consider that as an invitation to inquire about what they mean in their world, not as permission to impose meaning from yours. Ask, "When you say that word, what does that mean to you?"

Might

People often mistake that immediate topic as the destination and start problem-solving toward it. Take that topic as another departure point on people's way to their desired direction and start building from it. Try asking questions like, "Suppose you show up at work with that peace?" instead of, "How will you get that peace?" Ask, "Suppose you walk into that interview with confidence?" instead of, "How will you gain that confidence?" Once your conversation partner supposes their preferred future, you can invite them to imagine "What might happen next?"

Notice

When you witness small-but-not-insignificant details that are working well, you become primed to notice differently. You learn to stand by, attending to the progress of others, rather than assessing them constantly. Try this as you go about your day and, after a week, take stock of what changed for the better. What do you notice now that you didn't notice before?

Opposite

To help clients visualize their progress, use a scale from

ten to one. One young student described ten as her friendships deepening with two other students at her new school. At ten, they'd eat lunch together on the bench outside. A teacher described his ten as feeling confident on his first day of teaching high school, smiling and making eye contact with the students. With the scale, asking people to describe their life at ten in vivid detail, you are inviting them to perform their preferred future in their imagination.

P to T

Possible

Imagining what's possible motivates or mortifies us. Our dreams and dreads are often an expression of what we truly care about. A dream of winning a lottery was an expression of Jacob's wish for dignity. Andy, a university student, dreaded an exam because of what failure might mean to their dream. The most useful stance that you can take in your presence with others is tuning in at the frequency that amplifies their dreams.

Question

Our questions are loaded with assumptions. Within each question you ask is an embedded quest of your own curiosity. No wonder some questions feel more like an intrusion than an invitation! Observe what you are asking and what you are asking for in your conversations with others. How does the way you frame the question influence the course of the conversation?

Recent

Ivory wanted to reconcile with her brother. She wanted to be able to joke around like they used to. When invited to remember when she had seen this happening, Ivory recalled a family barbeque when they'd had fun together, playing Jenga with their nieces. In bits and pieces, people remember experiences they'd like to have more of. As you invite them to re-author a new story with those bits and pieces, you witness how they turn them into a preferred new story like turning a kaleidoscope. Their new story becomes a new way of making sense of their life.

Suppose

Behind every regret and fear lies a wish. The work is to hold on to that hint of hope, and to grow it bigger by paying attention to it, making the memory of a preferred future. Wishes show up so subtly, many times as an offshoot of a person's regrets and fears. The work is to attend to that delicate offshoot, so that it remains grafted and growing, as they

weave their resourceful past through their preferred future.

Toward

Coaching conversations, or conversations concerned with people making positive changes should begin with, “Where to?” But the tendency is to start with, “Where from?” Perhaps this happens because of the habit of asking, “What’s wrong?” so that we can help others fix the problem.

All the Way to Z

Useful

When you sit with another in conversation listening into their past, you may hear difficulties, disappointments, or even disasters. Your next curiosity can be focused on how they coped with those experiences, what they learned from them, and how they are making the best use of them. You will witness something transforming right in front of your eyes.

Value

Story-listening is a highly evocative activity for both the narrator and the listener. As you sit with the other, what you listen to evokes values. There are stories about why they want something different to begin with (purpose), how they’d rather have it (preference), what may become available as a result (possibilities), and what’s already working in that direction (progress).

Wonder

In coaching conversations, you are called simply to witness and wonder how another person does their living—their logic for life. Your own logic, the way you understand and

organize your world, may get in the way of inquiring about theirs. If you don’t try to understand their logic, your advice is, at best, a far-fetched suggestion or an irrelevant opinion.

X on a Scale

Remember the ten-to-one scale? Ask, “On a scale of ten to one, where ten is good enough and one is the opposite, where do you think you are at right now?” Draw the scale with a marker or use masking tape on the floor. Ask them to mark X with a marker or walk toward that spot on their scale. The choice is theirs, any number between one and ten. What follows is my choice of curiosity.

Yet

Conversations can position your conversation partner to be their own witnesses. People can watch their own arrival at their preferred destinations. The word “yet” creates room for anticipation. “What are some of your examples of what is yet to come?” “What have you always wanted to learn that you have not learned yet?”

Zero

You may have heard of the term “ground zero.” It can be defined as the center of intense change that reminds us of what happened, what used to be, and what could have been. Often it becomes the origin of our regrets and fears, even anger. But it doesn’t end there. Ground zero also calls for us to remember, remind, and rebuild beyond what was lost into multiple possibilities.



Haesun Moon is widely recognized as a leading expert and educator in evidence-based coaching and the use of language in transforming workplace dialogues. As a researcher and faculty member of The Institute of Coaching at McLean, Harvard Medical School Affiliate, she has developed coaching models and approaches that have been embraced the world over. Haesun lives in Toronto, Ontario, where she teaches at the University of Toronto and serves as Executive Director at the Canadian Centre for Brief Coaching.

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