

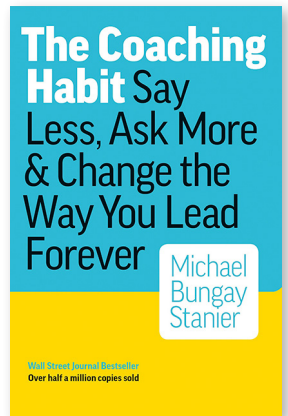


# Executive Book Summaries<sup>®</sup>

## The Coaching Habit

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

by Michael Bungay Stanier



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### THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

Everyone now knows that managers and leaders need to coach their people. You've probably already tried. And failed. Research in 2006 from leadership development firm BlessingWhite suggested that 73 percent of managers had some form of coaching training. However, only 23 percent of people being coached thought that the coaching had a significant impact on their performance or job satisfaction. Ten percent even suggested that the coaching they were getting was having a *negative* effect. The real secret to success here is building new habits, one which ignites curiosity to both the coach and the people it is helping.

In *The Coaching Habit: Say Less, Ask More & Change the Way You Lead Forever*, Michael Bungay Stanier explores various aspects of coaching and ways people can be more effective in their techniques. What is already known about coaching may not be the best way to go about it due to various reasons covered in this book. The author describes how to break coaching down into Seven Essential Questions to properly motivate people to open up and respond in training sessions.

### IN THIS EXECUTIVE BOOK SUMMARY:

- Review why current coaching techniques may not be effective.
- Discover ways to think twice about what is already known about coaching.
- Learn new and more effective ways to coach people through essential questions.
- Explore how to become a better listener and how to respond accordingly.

## You Need a Coaching Habit

You're probably not getting very effective coaching; and you're probably not delivering very effective coaching. There are at least three reasons why your first go at developing a coaching habit didn't stick.

The first reason is that the coaching training you got was probably overly theoretical, too complicated, a little boring, and divorced from the reality of your busy work life. Here's reason number two- you likely didn't spend much time figuring out how to translate the new insights into actions so you do things differently. The third reason is that the seemingly simple behavior change of giving a little less advice and asking a few more questions is surprisingly difficult.

But it's not that hard. Coaching is simple. You can coach someone in ten minutes or less. Coaching should be a daily, informal act. There are three vicious circles that plague our workplaces: creating overdependence, getting overwhelmed, and becoming disconnected. At the heart of this book are seven questions that will break you out of these three vicious circles and elevate the way you work.

## How to Build a Habit

Before we look at what to change, we need to understand how to change. To build a new habit, you need five essential components: a reason, a trigger, a micro-habit, effective practice, and a plan.

### Make a Vow

You need to get clear on the payoff for changing something as familiar and efficient as an old behavior.

### Figure Your Trigger

The more specific you can be when defining your trigger moment, the more useful piece of data it is.

### Double-S It: Be Short and Specific

You should define your new habit as a micro-habit that needs to take less than sixty seconds to complete.

### Practice Deeply

For his book *The Talent Code*, Dan Coyle researched why certain parts of the world were talent "hot spots" for certain skills. Coyle calls it "Deep Practice", and the three components of Deep Practice are:

- Practicing small chunks of the bigger action.
- Repetition, repetition, and repetition.
- Being mindful and noticing when it goes well.

### Plan How to Get Back on Track

Resilient systems build in fail-safes so that when something breaks down, the next step to recover is obvious. Make your habit a resilient system.

## Put it Together: The New Habit Formula

There are three parts to the formula. Identifying the trigger, identifying the old habit, and defining the new behavior.

### Identifying the Trigger: When This Happens...

Define the trigger. Charles Duhigg says that there are just five types of triggers: location, time, emotional state, other people, and the immediately preceding action.

### Identifying the Old Habit: Instead Of...

Articulate the old habit, so you know what you're trying to stop doing.

### Defining the New Behavior: I Will...

Define the new behavior, one that will take sixty seconds or less to do.

## Question Masterclass Part 1

Ask one question at a time. When questions come hurling at you left and right, there's no time to answer any of them and you're left feeling dazed and confused.

### Here's Your New Habit

When this happens: After I've asked a question

Instead of: Adding another question

I will: Ask just one question. (And then be quiet while I wait for the answer.)

### 1: The Kickstart Question

#### Breaking the Ice

One of the reasons managers don't coach more often than they do is that they don't know how to start. One of these three situations might be at play: the Small Talk Tango, the Ossified Agenda, or the Default Diagnosis.

#### The Small Talk Tango

# An almost fail-safe way to start a chat that quickly turns into a real conversation is the question, “What’s on your mind?”

Small talk might be a useful way to warm up to people, but it’s rarely the bridge that leads up to a conversation that matters.

## The Ossified Agenda

The agenda may have been perfect a week, a month or a year ago, but now it’s putting process in front of what really matters.

## The Default Diagnosis

There’s no question or conversation about what the issue is. Digging faster or smarter isn’t going to help.

*The Kickstart Question: “What’s on Your Mind?”*

An almost fail-safe way to start a chat that quickly turns into a real conversation is the question, “What’s on your mind?”. Because it’s open, it invites people to get to the heart of the matter and share what’s most important to them. And yet the question is focused, too.

## *Coaching for Performance vs. Coaching for Development*

Coaching for performance is about addressing and fixing a specific problem or challenge. Coaching for development is about turning the focus from the issue to the person dealing with the issue.

## *Deepen the Focus with the 3Ps*

The 3P model is a framework for choosing what to focus on in a coaching conversation. A challenge might typically be centered on a project, a person or a pattern of behavior.

## Projects

A project is the content of the situation, the stuff that’s being worked on.

## People

When you’re talking about people, though, you’re not really talking about them. You’re talking about a relationship and, specifically, about what your role is in this relationship that might be currently less than ideal.

## Patterns

Here you’re looking at patterns of behavior and ways of working that you’d like to change.

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## Question Masterclass Part 2

Cut the intro and ask the question. If you know what question to ask, get to the point and ask it.

### Here’s Your New Habit

When this happens: When I’ve got a question to ask...

Instead of: Generally taking forever to get to the point...

I Will: Ask the question. (And then shut up to listen to the answer.)

### 2: The AWE Question

*The AWE Question: “And What Else?”*

With seemingly no effort, it creates more—more wisdom, more insights, more self-awareness, more possibilities—out of thin air. There are three reasons it has the impact that it does: more options can lead to better decisions; you rein yourself in; and you buy yourself time.

### Channel Your Inner Ron

Remember that the first answer someone gives you is almost never the only answer, and it’s rarely the best answer. When you use the “And what else?” you’ll get more options and often better options. Better options lead to better decisions. Better decisions lead to greater success.

### You Tame the Advice Monster

Even if it’s the wrong advice—and it often is—giving it feels more comfortable than the ambiguity of asking a question. There’s a place for giving advice, of course. But it’s an over-used and often ineffective response. Talk less and ask more. “And what else?” breaks the cycle. It’s a self-management tool to keep your Advice Monster under restraints.

### Buy Yourself Some Time

When you're not entirely sure what's going on, and you need just a moment or two to figure things out, asking "And what else?" buys you a little extra time.

*Four Practical Tips for Asking "And What Else?"*

- Stay Curious, Stay Genuine
- Ask It One More Time
- Recognize Success
- Move on When It's Time

*Going Too Far: The Paradox of Choice*

Options are good. The power of "And what else?" is that it's the quickest and easiest way to uncover and create new possibilities. But having lots and lots of options isn't always best, either. The goal isn't to generate a bazillion options. It's to see what ideas that person already has.

*Finding the RIght Moment*

"And what else?" is such a useful question that you can add it into almost every exchange.

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## Question Masterclass Part 3

Should you ask rhetorical questions? Stop offering up advice with a question mark attached.

### Here's Your New Habit

When this happens: I've got the answer, which I want to suggest...

Instead of: Asking a fake question, which is just advice with a question mark...

I will: Ask one of the Seven Essential Questions

### 3: The Focus Question

*Eureka. Kind Of.*

Stop spending so much time and effort solving the wrong problem. When you start jumping in to fix things, things go off the rails in three ways: you work on the wrong problem; you do the work your team should be doing; and the work doesn't get done.

You're Solving the Wrong Problem

You might have come up with a brilliant way to fix the challenge your team is talking about. However, the challenge they're talking about is most likely not the real challenge

that needs to be sorted out.

You're Solving the Problem Yourself

Your team has trained you well to do their work for them. Any time there's a problem, rather than trying to figure it out themselves, they now come to you for the answer.

You're Not Solving the Problem

It's not like you don't have your own work to do. And now you've found yourself responsible for solving everyone else's problems, too. You need a way to manage the temptation to jump into fixing that opening challenge. Slow down just a little and you'll get to the heart of the issue.

*The Focus Question: What's the Real Challenge Here for You?*

Here's how it builds to become such a useful question:

*What's the challenge?* Curiosity is taking you in the right direction, but phrased like this the question is too vague.

*What's the real challenge here?* Implied here is that there are a number of challenges to choose from, and you have to find the one that matters most.

*What's the real challenge here for you?* The "for you" is what pins the person you're talking to. It keeps the question personal.

*How the Focus Question Cuts Through the Fog*

We call them the Foggy-fiers, and we call the three most common ones the Proliferation of Challenges, Coaching the Ghost, and Abstractions & Generalizations.

Proliferation of Challenges

With every problem listed, you feel a little uptick of anxiety. The only question is where to start: with the first challenge mentioned, or with the one you're most confident about providing the answer. Or you ask the Focus Question: "What's the real challenge here for you?"

Coaching the Ghost

The key thing to know here is that you can coach only the person in front of you. As tempting as it is to talk about a "third point", you need to uncover the challenge for the person to whom you are talking to.

Abstractions & Generalizations

This conversation can feel more like a slightly academic discussion or an executive summary of what's going on. This

# Stick to questions starting with “what” and avoid questions starting with “why.”

is the time you need to ask the Focus Question: “What’s the real challenge here for you?”.

## *Moving from Performance to Development*

The simple act of adding “for you” to the end of as many questions as possible is an everyday technique for making conversations more development than performance-oriented.

## *Three Strategies to Make This Question Work for You*

- Trust that you’re being useful.
- Remember that there is a place for your advice.
- Remember the Second Question: “What else?”.

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## Question Masterclass Part 4

Stick to questions starting with “what” and avoid questions starting with “why.”

### Here’s Your New Habit

When this happens: When I’m tempted to ask them why...

Instead of: Beginning the question with “Why”...

I will: Reframe the question so it starts with “What”.

### An Irresistible 1-2-3 Combination

The first three questions can combine to become a robust script for your coaching conversation.

#### 4: The Foundation Question

*The Foundation Question: “What Do You Want?”*

Here’s why the question is so difficult to answer:

- We often don’t know what we actually want.
- It’s often hard to ask for it.
- It’s often hard to say it in a way that’s clearly heard and understood.
- It’s often hard to hear the answer to your request.

*Ask a Question. Trade Answers.*

There are times when simply asking a question is the thing to do. And there are other times when sharing your answer to that same question can increase impact.

## *Wait, Come Back!*

So how do you influence others’ brains and your own so that situations are read as rewarding, not risky? There are four primary drivers that influence how the brain reads any situation.

**T is for tribe:** The brain is asking, “Are you with me, or are you against me?”

**E is for expectation:** The brain is figuring out, “Do I know the future or don’t I?”

**R is for rank:** “Are you more important or less important than I am?”

**A is for autonomy:** “Do I get a say or don’t I?”

Your job is to increase the **TERA quotient** whenever you can.

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## Question Masterclass Part 5

Get comfortable with silence. Silence is often a measure of success.

### Here’s Your New Habit

When this happens: When I’ve asked a question and she doesn’t have an answer ready within the first two seconds...

Instead of: Filling up the space with another question...

I will: Take a breath, stay open and keep quiet for another three seconds.

#### 5: The Lazy Question

*The Lazy Question: How Can I Help?*

The power of “How can I help?” is twofold. First, you’re forcing your colleague to make a direct and clear request. Second, it stops you from thinking that you know how best to help and leaping into action.

*Be Blunt...*

The more direct version of “How can I help?” is “What do you want from me?”

...*But Be Careful*

You can likely guess that how “What do you want from me?” lands will depend in no small part on the tone of voice in which it’s asked. A way to soften this question is to use the phrase “Out of curiosity”.

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## Question Masterclass Part 6

Actually listen to the answer.

### Here’s Your New Habit

When this happens: After I ask a question...

Instead of: Going through the motions of looking like I’m actively listening...

I Will: Actually listen. And when I get distracted (which I will), I’ll come back and start listening again.

### 6: The Strategic Question

*More Impact. More Meaning*

You know there’s some work that you do that you absolutely love? It’s not just that the work is making a difference and having an impact; it’s that the work means something to you.

*The Strategic Question: If You’re Saying Yes to This, What Are You Saying No To?*

This question is more complex than it sounds, which accounts for its potential. To begin with, you’re asking people to be clear and committed to their Yes. But a Yes is nothing without a No that gives it boundaries and form.

What gets us into trouble is how quickly we commit, without fully understanding what we’re getting ourselves into or even what we’re being asked. The secret to saying No is to shift the focus and learn how to say Yes more slowly.

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## Question Masterclass Part 7

Acknowledge the answer you get. This isn’t about judging people; it’s about encouraging them.

### Here’s Your New Habit

When this happens: The person gives an answer to the question I’ve asked...

Instead of: Rushing on to the next question...

I will: Acknowledge the reply by saying “Yes, that’s good.”

## 7: The Learning Question

*How People Learn*

As a manager and a leader, you want people to get stuff done. But you want more than that. You want them to learn so that they become more competent, more self-sufficient and more successful.

*The Learning Question: “What Was Most Useful for You?”*

Your job as a manager and a leader is to help create the space for people to have those learning moments. And to do that, you need a question that drives this double-loop learning. That question is, “What was most useful for you?”.

*Why “What Was Most Useful for You?” Tops the List*

“What was most useful?” helps hit the spot in at least six ways:

- It assumes the conversation was useful.
- It asks people to identify the big thing that was most useful.
- It makes it personal.
- It gives you feedback.
- It’s learning, not judgement.
- It reminds people how useful you are to them.

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## Question Masterclass Part 8

Now that we’ve covered the Seven Essential Questions, you understand that you’re going to have to change the way you have conversations with the people you manage, influence, and engage with.

And yet—a hefty and ever-increasing amount of our lives is spent staring at the screen, tapping away as we exchange emails and IMS and texts and Slack messages. And these Seven Essential Questions work just as well for those communication channels as they do face-to-face.

Use every channel to ask a question. Questions work just as well typed as they do spoken.

### Here’s Your New Habit

When this happens: When I get an email that triggers the Advice Monster...

Instead of: Writing out a long, thorough answer full of possible solutions...

I will: Decide which one of the seven questions would be most appropriate, and ask that question by email.

Anyone who has been a manager or been managed, coached managers or trained managers to be more coach-like may find that too many conversations between managers and those they're managing feel too much like an ill-fated expedition through a roughly-terrained nature park.

There may be:

- Too much baggage.
- Too much certainty, thinking you know the destination and the path to get there.
- Wandering off the path too quickly.
- Working way too hard to get back on the path.
- And being exhausting at the end, having got a lot less far down the track than you hoped you would.

If that description feels true to you, then you'll be well served to build a coaching habit of your own. The questions presented in this book are the ones that have been found to have the most impact.

If you can make just these Seven Essential Questions part of your management repertoire and everyday conversations, you'll work less hard and have more impact, and your people, your boss, your career, and your life outside work will thank you for it.

The change in behavior that's going to serve you most powerfully is simply this: a little less advice, a little more curiosity. Find your own questions, find your own voice, and above all, build your own coaching habit.



Michael Bungay Stanier has a gift for distilling big, complex ideas into practical, accessible knowledge. His books have sold over a million copies, with *The Coaching Habit* topping *The Wall Street Journal* bestseller list. MBS has been featured on the blogs and social media platforms of thought leaders including Seth Godin, Tim Ferriss, and Brené Brown, and has appeared on ABC, BBC, CBC, Ted.com, and innumerable podcasts—as well as the *Harvard Business Review*, *Forbes*, Inc., and *Fast Company*. MBS is the founder of Box of Crayons, a learning and development company, that helps organizations move from advice-driven action to curiosity-led transformation.

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