

4. Questioning techniques

As a coach, it is important to listen carefully to the coachee and to ask questions that help you better understand the other person, their issue and what they want for the future. By asking questions you can also gain more insight into what is holding the coachee back from achieving his or her goal, so that you can look together for solutions to overcome these obstacles.

When asking questions and listening, a coach adopts an 'OEN attitude' and asks questions in an Open, Honest and Curious way (in Dutch: Open, Eerlijk, Nieuwsgierig). Open questions begin with WHO, WHERE, WHAT, WHICH, WHEN, HOW and TO WHAT EXTENT and invite the coachee to give more information than closed questions, which generally have a fixed set of possible answers. Asking honest questions means asking about the things you notice or find odd and that the other person probably takes for granted. Asking curious questions has to do with your tone and a genuine interest in understanding the coachee. There are several types of OEN questions; below are a number of examples:

‘When people react like that, I simply don't know what to do any more.’

- React like that, how exactly? (The meaning of the verb is clarified further)
- Who exactly are these people? (The noun is specified further)
- What exactly do you mean by ‘then you no longer know what to do’? (The coachee's reaction is clarified further)
- What exactly in people's reactions leads to you no longer knowing what to do? (Cause and effect are clarified)

‘I just know that he thinks I should be doing better, and that makes me sad.’

- How exactly do you know what he thinks of you? (Probing the conclusions the coachee draws)
- Better than what exactly? (The comparative standard is explored further)
- What exactly is it that makes you sad about that? (Cause and effect are clarified)

Exercise 4.1

Asking questions. Which questions would you ask if the coachee says:

- ‘They communicated that really badly!’
- ‘I would so like to have the confidence to give my opinion during meetings, but I get nervous just thinking about those looks.’
- ‘My team really takes advantage of me! If I let one person leave early, they all want to go home early.’

- 'I have tried several times to motivate our salespeople to do better.'

Video 4.2

Watch the following video to gain a better understanding of why it is so important for a coach to listen carefully and to ask questions that shed more light on the coachee's issue: what he or she considers important and what the possible solutions to the issue or problem might be. Unsolicited advice and telling the other person what to do generally do not work: http://www.ted.com/playlists/92/listen_up.html