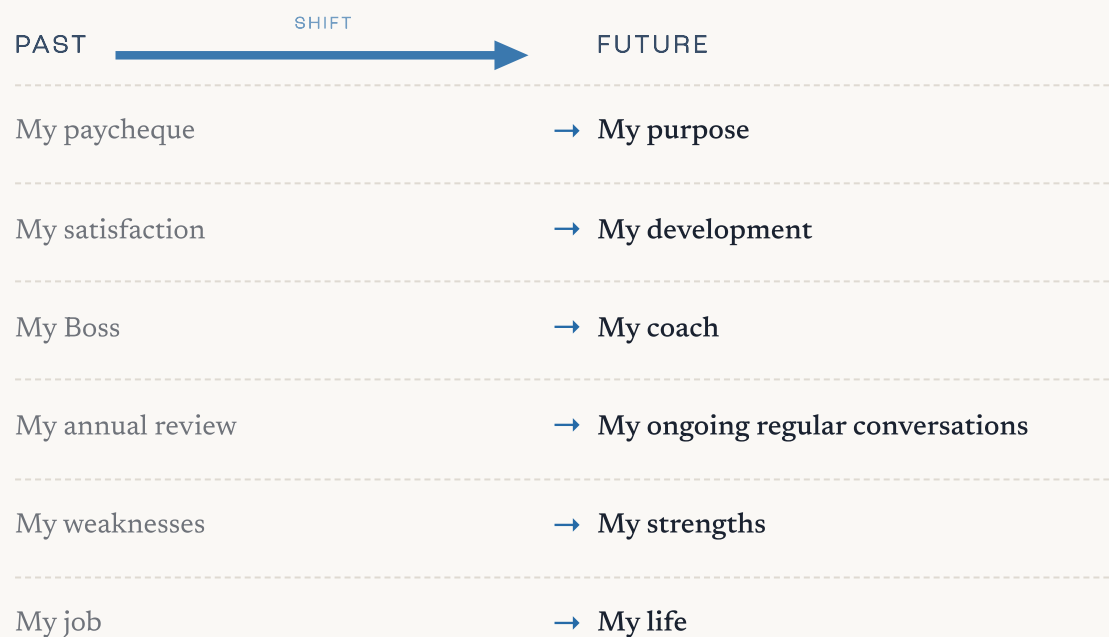


Effective Language

Effective communication, questioning and language style.

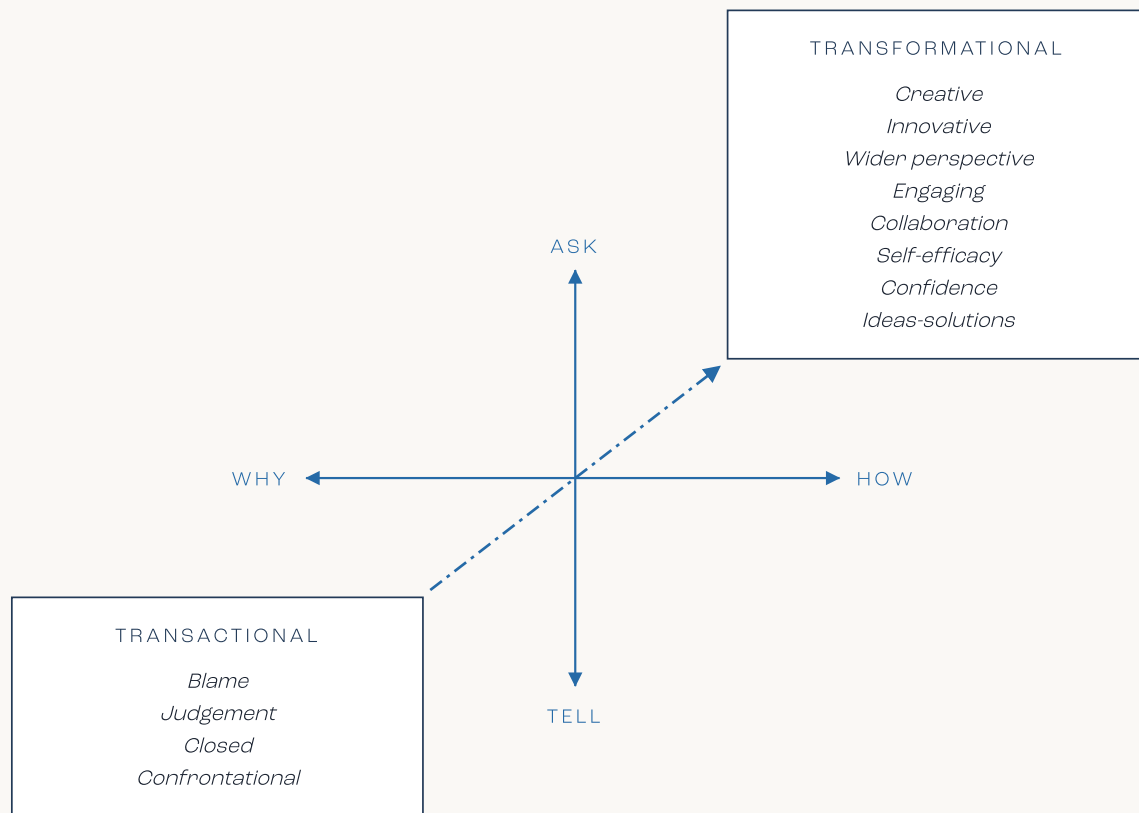
In the last few years, leadership styles have migrated from the traditional 'Command and Control' or "Transactional" style to a more collaborative style of 'Leader as Coach' known as the "Transformational" leadership style. This type of leader includes their team members more directly in the decision-making process and provides support and coaching to individuals within the organisation.

Jim Clifton, Chairman and CEO of Gallup, in his book, "It's the Manager", notes the significantly changing workplace, with now sometimes five generations in the workplace, a more diversified workforce and more flexible hybrid work styles, the demands of the workforce have changed, we move from.



One of the core skills in this 'Leader as Coach' style is the use of effective language. A coaching-style conversation is dynamic and personal, allowing individuals to find fulfilment, balance, and purpose. It requires people to adopt a more curious, open approach mixing their conventional wisdom with their intuition while exploring options. This process is more collaborative and engaging for participants, allows for creativity and creates innovation. This starts with a more open, curious, 'Socratic' style of questioning that generates iterative conversations.

This illustration below shows the Traditional style of (Manager)questioning (why/tell) and A (Leader) coaching style of questioning (ask/how)



01 Effective Questions

Effective questions are provocative queries that halt evasion and confusion. By asking powerful questions, we invite people to have interactive and iterative conversations that create solutions, engagement, and innovation and empower people to collaborate. These are generally open questions creating a greater possibility for expanded learning and fresh perspectives. The questions create iterative conversations where the solutions will be found.

Impacts of effective questioning

 Creates an iterative conversation	 Challenges misconceptions	 Ignites thinking
 Inspires learning	 Deepens understanding and awareness	 Creates reflection
 Encourages analysis	 Develops curiosity	 Encourages growth mindset
 Improves critical thinking	 Increases a wider perspective	 Creates teamwork. Relatedness & Motivation

02 Five Key Principles to effective questions

Use coaching questions that are 'open', questions that promote further conversation and avoid a yes or no answer.

- Use simple, open and exploring questions (who, what, when and how)
- Avoid questions with multiple parts; keep it simple.
- Consider the purpose of the question – how will this help the coachee/mentee?
- Allow time for the coachee/mentee to answer – don't be afraid of pauses and silence.
- Follow the coachee/mentee's curiosity, not yours

Structured questions

- **What** Understanding the goal and objective
- **How** Do We Understand the means of achieving the objective?
- **When** Clarify timescales
- **Who** Explore the support network?
- **What next** Determine actions?

03 Guidelines – used in coaching and mentoring.

- **Gain a clear understanding** of what the individuals want to discuss. Are they asking for advice (requiring a more conventional, wisdom-based approach) or exploring a topic to gain a greater understanding (requiring a more intuitive, open conversational approach)?
- **Remember, it is the coachee/mentee who owns the issue.** Explore a solution that works for them and their situation, not you and your situation, i.e., don't fix the problem; help the person.
- **Avoid leading questions.** Sometimes the coachee/mentee may need to be guided, but beware of asking closed questions (i.e. those with yes or no answers) or questions leading them to the solution you think is appropriate (e.g. don't you think this might work?).
- Questions can be used to **clarify**; what would you like me to help you with, tell me more, or **explore**; how did that make you react, and what did you learn from that experience?
- They should be **supportive** (exploring, getting more detail) and **challenging** (probing to establish the facts). A good coach/mentor can move between the two and gauge the right level of support and challenge. Ask the coachee/mentee if they are prepared to be challenged in the session.
- **Use follow-up questions** (what else, tell me more, go on) to gain more detail, reveal facts, clarify emotions, and understand the circumstances. This is especially useful when exploring the topic for discussion. Get to the true heart of the matter.
- **Silence is golden.** Don't always rush to fill the space. Asking a question but allowing time for the coachee/mentee to reflect on the answer, consider their response or even embellish their initial response is **powerful**.
- **Avoid leading questions** where the solution is hidden in the answer (don't you think this was the reason for your response?)
- **Avoid 'why' questions; these** suggest challenges and encourage the coachee/mentee to be defensive. They tend to suggest error rather than exploration, so try to rephrase the question using a mixture of how, what and when.
- **Make an effort to summarise and reframe.** Listen carefully to the coachee/mentee's explanation, then repeat back to them the key elements of what you have just heard. This shows you have been listening attentively, and summarising the key points provides focus and helps to understand. It may also help the relationship between mentor and mentee, coachee and coachee. Reframing is a crucial skill of authentic active listening.

04 Effective Questions – examples

(Note no question starts with “WHY”, this is not to say we should not use “WHY”, it is overused in our business language and personal lives, and we encourage people to use it less)

1. What would you like to discuss and explore?
2. What would you really like to do?
3. What would a successful outcome look like to you?
4. What makes it an issue now?
5. How important is it on a scale of 1 -10?
6. How much energy do you have for a solution on a scale of 1-10?
7. What would moving it from a 5 to an 8 (for example) take? (These anchor a thought to a number and an action step to change something.
8. What are the implications of doing nothing?
9. What have you tried already?
10. Imagine this problem has been solved. How does that make you feel?
11. What's standing in the way of that ideal outcome?
12. Who are the stakeholders we need to work with? What can I do to help you?
13. How can you tell if things are improving?
14. Imagine you're at your most resourceful. What do you say to yourself about the issue?
15. What are the options for action here?
16. What criteria will you use to judge the options?
17. So, what's the next step?
18. When will you take it?
19. Has anything changed for you?
20. How will other people be able to tell if our coaching has been successful?
21. What personal strengths do you bring to this?
22. What are you committed to doing?
23. How confident can you do this on a scale of 1 to 10?
24. How can you keep track of your success?
25. Are there any blockers?
26. How are we prioritising other issues with this one?
27. Tell me more about that.

Always ask a question authentically with an honest, deep desire to learn and understand more.

05 Pitfalls and “Don’ts” of questioning

- Status questions – sometimes, people ask questions to show their knowledge or status.
- Power Questions- sometimes, people ask questions to show seniority.
- Don’t ask more than one question at a time.
- Don’t ask questions pitched at the wrong level; this is very disempowering and disengaging, highly complex questions to someone not qualified, for example.
- Always give people time to answer.
- Remember, people may not understand your question.
- Don’t ask leading questions,
- Make sure the question is relevant.
- A poorly worded, delivered question will prevent collaboration and engagement and obscure and alienate.
- Don’t ignore the response.

06 One last “Tip”!

(To create the energy- and the how)

In leadership conversations, we often observe the energy of people. In “real-time”, we can observe the people we coach, mentor or lead and manage in a conversation – their energy drops, shoulders down, they are overwhelmed, maybe confused, and not supported etc.

One very simple question, sometimes, is what we call the “[future Question.](#)” For example:

- When this is successful, – what will happen – and what difference have you made? Or
- This idea is inspirational – what do you think happens now when this works? Or
- When this works, what other ideas do you have next? ETC

When we think positively with imagination, innovation and creativity and get to “imagine completed strategies”- we feel good! - don’t underestimate this.

The point of this is to take people to an end state – where success has happened, either from an idea, process, or engagement. When individuals talk about their successful outcomes – their energy lifts, and they are physically and mentally better prepared to think of solutions. This creates SELF-EFFICACY” (belief in oneself)

Importantly – Next – back to focus.

Followed by – “What did we need to do to make this happen?” now we are back with actions- and options- and potentially increased motivation to make the “Goal”- happen.