I was running through the church parking lot on a cold November morning, hurrying to prepare for our children’s program, when one of the men in our church stopped me. He told me he needed to talk. Thinking about all the things I still had to do before Sunday School, while at the same time wanting to give this man the attention and focus he deserved, I paused and asked, “What’s up?” His response was that he wanted me to be one of his accountability partners. Immediately, I felt a small twinge of “uh-oh” in my gut. I have been asked this question countless times in the past, and it’s a responsibility I have rarely been able to uphold to the complete satisfaction of the person asking. How would I respond to his request? I replied, “Let’s talk later today!”, and I scurried into the Sunday school classroom.

As a pastor, I have a heart for people. One of my greatest desires is to see the people in my church experiencing and living out their fullest potential. However, when this man asked me to step into an area of greater influence in his life, I had a moment of self-doubt. Would I have what it takes to help this man reach the next level in his life? I have come to realize that for years, I have been missing a key — a powerful tool/strategy/process to effectively bring people from Point A, who they are now, to Point B, who God has designed for them to become. I now believe strongly that coaching is that key.

Coaching is “an ongoing partnership between a coach and a client that is focused on the client taking action toward the realization of their visions, goals and desires”¹. Coaches have been described as “change experts who help leaders take responsibility and act to maximize their own potential”². For most of my ministry life, I was stuck in the mentoring/discipling/counseling paradigm — as the leader, I was responsible to be the “expert” — the one with the answer to the problem. The beauty of coaching is that it puts responsibility in the coachee’s hands³. When coachees take responsibility for their own development, two very powerful things happen: (1) their internal motivation to change and improve naturally increases⁴, and (2) their long-term dependence on their leader as the “expert” disappears⁵.

Once you catch the vision of the power of coaching, the natural next question is, how do I establish a coaching process that teaches people how to learn, holds them accountable for their own personal growth and development, and aids in their transformation? If you’re asking that question, then this is the article for you!
Steps To a Successful Coaching Process

**Step One: Build Relationships**

So, you’ve realized you need a tool to help develop self-reproducing, self-motivating leaders, and you’ve decided that coaching is it. Now what? The most essential factor in coaching is relationship. Without the ability for a coach and coachee to relate to one another in a spirit of trust, belief, and support, there is little good that can come from coaching. However, when there is a solid, flourishing relationship, there is no limit to the potential impact. We see throughout Scripture that God is a God of relationship. He has created us to have strong, productive connections — relationships — with each other. A critical first step is to foster these relationships between the leaders and members of your church. In coaching, we see the amazing fruit these relationships can produce. They have been shown to increase people’s sense of satisfaction, the quality of their work, and the amount of work they are able to accomplish. They help people reach their fullest potential, which opens the door for greater leadership roles in the future.

**Step Two: Listen**

As a pastor, I have greatly struggled with holding my tongue. There are times I hear certain key words and think, “I’ve seen this before.” Other times, my discernment kicks in and I believe I have the answer to my coachee’s problem. In either case, I have a great tendency to immediately share my insight and advice. A second transformational aspect of coaching, one that must be included in your church’s coaching process, is a commitment by those in leadership to listen first and most. Scripture exhorts us to be quick to listen and slow to speak. Living out this Biblical advice, though challenging for many leaders, is crucial to effective coaching.

**Step Three: Ask Powerful Questions**

A great complement to your church’s new habit of listening is the next coaching essential — asking powerful questions. What defines such a question? A powerful question is one which expands the thought process of the coachee,
draws them into a deeper understanding of their situation, and ultimately moves them toward the solution to their
problem\(^4\). (For some examples of these types of questions, see Chart 1 below.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Question</th>
<th>Examples</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Open/Probing Questions</strong></td>
<td>“What was most significant to you in this experience?”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Questions that let your coachee lead by allowing them to answer in any way they choose</td>
<td>“What would be most important for us to focus on?”</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Revealing Questions</strong></td>
<td>“If [money, time, resources, energy] wasn’t an issue, what would you do?”</td>
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<td>Questions that change viewpoint or help the person get out of a box and think creatively.</td>
<td>“Put yourself in the other person’s shoes – what can you see from their perspective?”</td>
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<td><strong>Ownership Questions</strong></td>
<td>“Since we can’t change the other person, what could change about you that would make things better?”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Questions that focus on taking responsibility and being proactive in order to make things better.</td>
<td>“Let’s say God is using this situation to get your attention on something. What do you think that something could be?”</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Direct Questions</strong></td>
<td>“What are the implications of that choice for your [marriage, family, job, relationship]?”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Questions that cut to the heart of the issue.</td>
<td>“How does your response line up with Scripture?”</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Asking Permission</strong></td>
<td>“That statement caught my attention – would you mind talking a little more about it?”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Opens the door to entering a new area or broaching a sensitive subject.</td>
<td>“Can I ask you to look at that from another angle?”</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Choosing an Agenda</strong></td>
<td>“What’s the most important step you could take right now to move toward your destiny?”</td>
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<tr>
<td>What to ask when starting a new coaching relationship or a new change goal.</td>
<td>“What are you most motivated to change?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Decision-Making</strong></td>
<td>“If you saw someone else in your situation, what would you tell him/her?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questions to ask in a decision-making process.</td>
<td>“On a scale of one to ten, how sure are you that this is the right decision? What would it take to make that ‘six’ into an ‘eight’?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Life Purpose</strong></td>
<td>“What are you passionate about? What kind of career would make you leap out of bed in the morning?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questions that help people identify and pursue their destiny.</td>
<td>“Think of a situation that really fit you – where you felt like you were doing what you were born to do. Describe it.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Taking Action</strong></td>
<td>“Make an action step out of that – what do you want to do?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questions that turn ideas into committed action steps.</td>
<td>“You said you [might/ought to/could] do that. Nail it down: what will you commit yourself to doing?”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Step Four: Teach People How to Learn and Be Responsible for Their Own Growth and Development

A beautiful aspect of coaching in a church setting is that it teaches the people in the church that their growth is dependent on them and the Lord, not on the other leaders in the church. Here’s how it works: Instead of reinforcing the “advice-giving paradigm” by training yourself and your other leaders to be the expert or the answer-giver, train yourself and your leaders to listen first and most and then ask powerful questions in order to draw out the answer from the coachee. When they realize the answer came from within them and because of their relationship with the Lord, they will be much less inclined to continue looking to you to be their problem-solver.

Transformation

Imagine a future full of growing, self-reproducing, self-motivating leaders in your church who don’t need to look to you to find the solution to their problems. Exciting thought, isn’t it? The amazing thing is that not only is it possible, it is the natural result of coaching. Transformation takes place in people’s lives when they realize God has equipped them to live their lives successfully, to solve the problems they face gracefully, and to actually achieve the goals and dreams they have always thought impossible. Author Joseph Umidi says, “Transformational coaching speaks to the heart more than the head.” When you as a leader empower your people by listening to them, asking powerful questions, and giving them ownership of their growth and development, that’s exactly what you are doing — speaking to their heart. And that’s what brings about true transformation.

The man in my church asked me to keep him accountable. When I reconnected with him later that day, I employed some coaching principles and put him in control of his own growth. “If you want me to help keep you accountable, then I want you to take some time to write down exactly what you’re looking for, exactly what you want me to ask, and exactly how you see this working. I don’t want this to fail simply because of ambiguity at the very beginning!” He responded excitedly that he was very willing to do that. Was this the start of a coaching relationship? I’m not sure yet, but I feel
momentum building, and I am confident that as we leaders develop this coaching process in our church, our people will experience much greater opportunities for transformation.
Footnotes:

1. (Mccluskey, 2008, p. 266)

2. (Stoltzfus, 2005, p. 7)

3. (Whitmore, 2002, p. 38)

4. (McLean, 2008, p. 17; Stoltzfus, 2005, p. 59)

5. (Passmore, 2010, p. 162)

6. (McNally, 2013, p. 14; Stoltzfus, 2005, p. 79)

7. (John 1:10-13, John 15:15, Psalm 68:5-6, etc.)

8. (Genesis 2:18, Ephesians 5:33, Ephesians 6:4, etc.)

9. (Bower, 2012, p. 4)

10. (Stoltzfus, 2005, p. 7)


12. (Stoltzfus, 2005, p. 55)

13. (James 1:19)

14. (Qing, 2013, p. 13)

15. Adapted from (Stoltzfus, 2005, p. 223-227)

16. (1 Corinthians 3:6)

17. (Armstrong, 2012, p. 38)

18. (Stoltzfus, 2005, p. 39)

19. (Umidi, 2005, p. 64)

20. (Stoltzfus, 2005, p. 265-266)
References:


