



# THE COACHING MANUAL

FIFTH EDITION



**YOUR  
STEP-BY-STEP  
GUIDE TO  
BECOMING  
A GREAT  
COACH**

**JULIE STARR**



**Free downloads  
included**

## **Praise for *The Coaching Manual***

‘No one has brought to life the nuts and bolts as well as the spirit of masterful coaching better than Julie Starr. *The Coaching Manual* is the definitive resource for aspiring as well as seasoned coaches looking to further refine their approach!’

**Marshall Goldsmith, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Triggers*, *Mojo* and *What Got You Here Won’t Get You There***

‘Many authors claim that their books coach the coach about the process for how to coach; Julie Starr’s *The Coaching Manual* actually delivers! It’s practical, comprehensive, and eminently readable. For anyone entering the field – start here.’

**L. Michael Hall, Ph.D., author and developer of *Meta-Coaching***

‘Clear, accurate, well-written, and full of important information that all coaches just need to know! I would absolutely recommend this book to any coach, neophyte or experienced.’

**Chérie Carter-Scott, Ph.D. MCC, author of *If Life is a Game, These are the Rules*, *Transformational Life Coaching* and 15 other titles**

‘*The Coaching Manual* is the most comprehensive, practical, best-illustrated coaching source I have ever seen. It compellingly teaches the mindset of keeping the responsibility on the coach combined with a powerful, realistic skill set.’

**Dr Stephen R. Covey, author of *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People***

‘... the most comprehensive book on the practice of coaching that I have come across. If anyone wishes to become a one-to-one coach and only reads one book about it, this could well be that book.’

**Sir John Whitmore, executive chairman, Performance Consultants International; author of *Coaching for Performance***

## An appreciation of closed and open questions

Part of the flexibility any coach needs to develop is in their use of both closed and open questions. Closed questions can be answered with a yes or no and open questions can't.

Closed questions (Y/N)	Open questions
1 Did you enjoy your weekend?	1 How was your weekend?
2 Would you like that?	2 How would you feel about that?
3 Can you do that?	3 How will you do that?
4 Should he have called you?	4 What should he have done?
5 Did she agree to what you asked her to do?	5 How did she respond to what you asked her to do?

### ***Open questions open up conversation***

Open questions encourage more information than closed. They also encourage someone's participation and involvement, which helps us to explore their thoughts and ideas. For this reason, an effective coach will tend to use many more open questions than closed.

During a typical coaching session, I would expect the coachee to be doing at least 70 per cent of the talking. As a coach, using open questions is one way that you can enable this to happen.

### ***Closed questions confirm or close down***

Because they encourage a 'yes' or 'no' response, closed questions tend to reduce the disclosure and sharing of information. Nevertheless, closed questions may still be used to great effect, especially where we don't want a detailed response, for example:

- Confirming information: 'Have I got that right?'
- Moving the conversation along: 'Can we continue?'
- Closing a conversation down: 'Have we finished?'

The exception is when people don't respond to closed questions with a yes or no – this is especially common with politicians!

## At a Glance



### What if I can't think of my next question?

Sometimes, a coach will go blank, get stuck and not know what to say next! This is normal, human and happens to all of us at some time. Causes and potential options include:

#### ***You have lost concentration and so lost the thread of the conversation***

Be honest, declare what has happened and move on: for example, 'I'm sorry, I need you to repeat what you just said, I lost concentration just then.' Then make sure you refocus on the conversation and what the coachee is saying, to regain involvement.

#### ***You are genuinely distracted by another thought, idea or insight***

Here, it might be that your intuition has made a connection that's worth exploring. Again, be honest and declare what's happening, for example, 'I'm sorry, but I keep thinking about what you said earlier about not liking things too easy. Can we go back to that a little?'

#### ***The conversation seems to be leading nowhere or seems 'stuck' – maybe the energy has gone out of the conversation, or the conversation feels pointless***

Be honest (again!). Say what you're feeling or thinking – after all, they might be thinking it too, for example, 'Okay, I'm kind of stuck now because I don't know where our conversation is heading – is this still a useful discussion?' They might say, 'Yes, I'm actually getting a lot from this.' If so, find out why, for example, 'Okay, I'm interested, what it is that you're getting here?' You will then have a new focus for the conversation.

Alternatively, if they say, 'I know what you mean, I'm stuck with it as well,' you can then decide how best to continue, for example, 'Okay – do we leave that or do we want to know why we've got stuck with it?' or 'Okay – what could we be talking about?'

#### ***The coach's mind has gone blank because they are less confident or new to coaching***

This one is helped by a little advance preparation or practice. You need to develop the ability to relax yourself and refocus, ahead of time. Develop

the tendency to use your body to regain your sense of centredness and confidence. Try it now. Sit back a little, pull your shoulders back and move your breathing down into your stomach (so that your tummy goes in and out as you breathe). When you do this in a coaching session, use an interrupt-type phrase to enable you to refocus your thoughts, for example 'Pause and focus on what they just said,' or 'What do I need to do now?' Remember that pauses are often useful for the coachee as well as the coach – silences can be powerful! Alternatively, do a brief recap, using your notes if you have them, for example, 'Let's just recap a little – you began by saying that you wanted to . . . ' Usually, this is enough to reorientate you to the conversation and help you decide what you want to explore or discuss.

## Powerful questions

Powerful questions are an invaluable tool for you within coaching and you can ask them in a variety of situations. Powerful questions have many potential benefits:

- They refocus thought, for example from problem to solution.
- They can help someone feel more powerful and constructive about a situation.
- They tap into creativity and create options.
- They can make a problem feel more like a challenge or an opportunity.
- They create a positive forward movement, that is towards solution or action.

Powerful questions are phrased in such a way as to encompass the problem and provoke an answer. The answer that they produce addresses the deeper problem, not just the surface issue. Table 4.4 demonstrates the journey between describing a situation as a problem and describing the same situation within a powerful question. The situation here is that the person is overworked and wants more support from their boss. They feel that their boss doesn't know much about their day-to-day situation and doesn't value the workload they are carrying.

When we ask a clear, powerful question in response to a situation, you can almost hear someone's mind crunch into gear. Our minds can't resist the challenge of a stimulating question.

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**Table 4.4** Journey towards more powerful questions

Coachee's statement/question	Comment
'I'm really struggling with this job, and my boss doesn't support me – he doesn't even know what I do!'	This is a statement of complaint or problem; it focuses on what's wrong. It's not a question, and it produces no creative thoughts or ideas.
'Why can't my boss help me?'	This is a question, but it's not a powerful question. It's actually still a complaint. Also, if this question were answered, we'd get responses like 'Because he's not interested/too busy, etc.' Such responses are not going to help progress this issue.
'How can I get my boss to know more about what I'm doing?'	This question covers only the superficial aspect of the problem and so evokes only a partial answer. Remember that the person also wants their boss to support them, not just be aware of what they do. Responses to this question might include 'Spend some time with him so that he understands what you do'. A powerful question will produce answers to the deeper problem.
'How can I make sure my boss understands more about what I'm doing, and encourage him to give me more support?'	This is a good, powerful question. The question digs below the surface, to bring up a complete solution. The likely response would create ideas that address all parts of the problem, making the boss aware, and getting more support from him.

***Powerful questions create possibility***

These types of questions also create a sense of possibility in a problem situation, where previously it seemed lacking. For example, imagine you've been complaining relentlessly about needing a holiday but also needing the money to fix your car. You dislike your car, you would prefer something smaller, but it seems too much hassle to change it. Then someone asks you, 'How can you have *both* the car you want *and* the holiday you need?'

Hmm – gets you thinking, doesn't it?

Table 4.5 shows some further examples of powerful questions.

**Table 4.5** Further examples of powerful questions

Coachee's statement	Powerful question
'I've moved jobs, I've moved home and now I've got no friends and no social life – I'm still feeling really unsettled here.'	'What could you be doing to feel more settled and meet some new friends?'
'I'm always worried about money. I'm worried about it regardless of how much I have. It's just always on my mind.'	'What's it going to take for you to feel more relaxed about money?'
'I want to go to night school but there's no one reliable to look after the kids. The situation's just impossible.'	'How can you get someone reliable to look after the kids while you go to night school?'

# **Ideas into Action**



## **Let powerful questions work for you**

The following will help you experience powerful questions for yourself, which is a good way to learn how to ask them by appreciating the impact they have upon our thinking:

### **Step one – identify three problem statements**

Write down three problems that you think you have. Choose things that are moderately important but not earth-shattering, such as 'I want to exercise but I'm just too busy with everything else.' Leave enough space under each statement to write a few more sentences.

### **Step two – change problem statements into powerful questions**

Under each problem, write down questions that provoke solutions to the issue, such as 'How can I be less busy and create time to exercise?' Remember, for a question to be powerful it must have the following attributes:

- The question assumes that there is an answer to the problem.
- The question provokes thought to begin to create answers or solutions.
- The question digs below the surface, and thereby invites a more encompassing solution.

For further support, look back at the previous examples.



### **Step three – answer your own questions!**

Take a clean piece of paper and write your powerful questions down one side. Then, focusing on each question, produce ideas or solutions, for example, ‘Get up an hour earlier,’ ‘Ask Sidney to pick the kids up from school on Thursdays,’ ‘Cook meals and freeze them on weekends.’

Once you have some positive solutions, simply decide which you’re going to commit to. Write down a list of actions, behaviours, habits or routines you want to make happen. Remember, it’s great to have great ideas and yet only through your own actions can you bring them to life.

## **What if your question doesn’t create progress?**

Sometimes, no matter how many great questions you ask your coachee, they are just stuck and can’t respond to your question productively. For example, you might ask, ‘What else might you have done to help your team collaborate on this?’ and your coachee can’t think of an answer. You’ve asked the question because you want to help them understand their options or learn from a situation. You’d also prefer that those thoughts came from your coachee, if possible. However, they appear not to be able to think of a useful response, for example, ‘I really have no idea’. The following are all potential options for you.

### **Option: pause, use silence to help them think**

In coaching, silence is a powerful and underused tool, simply because of the space you create for the other person to relax into their own mental processes.

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**In coaching, silence  
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Silence for the person experiencing it is often more comfortable than for the coach maintaining it, as our tendency is often to try to help move the conversation forward. It sometimes works to encourage people to be comfortable with going into silence, for example, ‘Okay, so maybe take a

moment to have a think about that?’ Remember, keep your tone softer for it to feel more like encouragement than instruction.

### **Option: ask a vaguer question**

Sometimes, a vague, less specific question helps as it reduces the pressure on someone to think in a specific way. Examples of vague questions include: ‘What other options did you have?’ or ‘What have you been considering doing?’ and ‘What thoughts are you having about that?’