

How To Coach When There Is No Time



In this article you will learn why coaching is so important to effective leadership and how to coach when it feels like there is No Time.

John Whitmore in his book **Coaching for Performance** defines coaching as “unlocking people’s potential to maximize their own performance.”

Fulfilling potential requires that people work because of intrinsic motivation—when they come to a task because they have enthusiasm for it, because it is important to them, and not out of compliance with someone else’s direction. Intrinsic motivation is also facilitated by bringing one’s own ideas to a situation.

The heart of coaching

This is why the heart of coaching is asking questions—an astonishingly simple but very powerful method. After all, only through asking questions can we know what is important to others and what ideas they have for taking action.

This very simple approach is incredibly difficult to pull off regularly and effectively due to the stress and complexity of work. These factors quite often narrow range of thinking and diminish creativity and genuine curiosity in everyone. This leads to a strong tendency to just want to get to the answers or just give direction. Also, our diminished creative powers can make it feel that any benefits from the type of exploration that is part of coaching will require a lot of time.

In fact, any time you can take to ask people questions instead of giving direction—even for five or ten minutes—will raise the chances for increased motivation and engagement.

Tips for when there is No Time

Here are tips to keep in mind when you feel there is No Time and your impulse is to provide answers.

1. Create a habit prior to meetings of checking on your sense of pressure. Remind yourself of your desire to maximize other’s potential.
2. Keep in mind a simple series of steps to guide rather than direct problem solving through asking questions. My sequence of steps are to ask about:
 - a. the current state or problem;
 - b. the desired state or goals;
 - c. options for action—expanding beyond one option to 3 or 4 helps with creativity;
 - d. and what option will be chosen for action.

The emphasis with others is on their goals, their ideas, and their choices of action.

When time is very limited, you can focus on just one part of the problem solving approach. For example, just ask questions about the current state and then ask the person to come back later with thoughts on their goals and a couple of options. I also keep in mind a few questions about intrinsic motivation that can facilitate engagement in problem solving. For example, when exploring the desired state or goals, I might ask “What would you be most enthusiastic about accomplishing here?”

You can obtain a tool to help with this coaching process along with additional questions by following the instructions below. Of course, there are times you have to provide direction instead of coaching but there are different ways to do that which can facilitate or inhibit future efforts at coaching. For more information, see the article on [Active Telling](#).

Enable creativity to emerge

The good news here is that the time pressures and stress of work tend to have such a strong negative impact on creative thinking that just taking time to ask a few questions can be surprisingly effective in helping others to bring forth their best thinking.

Reference

Whitmore, John **Coaching for Performance** Nicholas Brealey Publishing 2009

Questions Tool for Coaching

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About Neil Baker M.D.

Neil Baker M.D. works with organizations to enhance leadership and team impact through *In-the-Moment Leadership Strategies*. This means using any work situation, even the most complex and difficult, as an opportunity to achieve immediate impact on quality of work relationships and on progress toward results.

He has developed these approaches as a leader, speaker, consultant, and executive coach for 30 years. Past positions include serving as Director of Psychiatric Inpatient Services at the University of Colorado Health Sciences Center in Denver, Colorado; Medical Director of Clinical Improvement at Group Health Cooperative in Seattle, Washington; and faculty and improvement advisor for more than twelve years for the Institute for Healthcare Improvement (IHI) in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

You can learn more and see client testimonials on his website at neilbakerconsulting.com.