



Colorado
Charter Chapter

Coaching the Person, Not Just the Problem By Walt Hastings, PCC

Perhaps you have heard the often repeated phrase, "Coach the person, not the problem." What does this mean?

As a coach, my aim is to inspire clients to grow both personally and professionally, as well as to assist them in dealing with their presenting issues in a coaching session. I want them to expand awareness about themselves, as well as gain insight into their situation.

In the coaching world, we have developed certain words with specialized meanings. These include the words "who" and "what". There are "what" questions, as contrasted with "who" questions. What's the difference?

"What" questions focus a client on actions or doing – on one's outer life. "Who" questions focus a client on personhood or being – on one's inner life. Both questions are essential in coaching.

It seems that many presenting issues surfaced by a client during the Coaching Agreement are "what" issues. These have to do with issues such as setting goals, taking necessary steps to achieve a goal, or solving a pressing problem. Successfully dealing with the presenting issue in a coaching conversation is essential in serving the client well. "What" questions typically assist a client in thinking through issues that require action.

At the same time, an even higher priority in serving the client well is stimulating growth in the client as a person. "What" questions are less effective in promoting personal growth. In contrast, "who" questions can invite deeper reflection and are more likely to lead to growth as a person and as a leader.

Stated in another way, our goal in coaching is first to serve clients by focusing on the presenting issue or problem that they want to resolve. However, a second and greater objective is to stimulate growth and transformation in them as persons and as leaders. This is accomplished by asking more "who" questions that focus on personhood and being.

Here is a key to coaching the person, not just the problem: inquire as to how the presenting issue impacts other areas of the client's life. Think of the things that comprise a person's inner life – priorities; core values; emotions; self-image; hopes and dreams; past mistakes and regrets; relationships of various kinds, including marriage, family, extended family, co-workers, neighbors and friends; spirituality; health and physical well-being; world-view; and so forth. Ask powerful "who" questions that invite the client to consider how the presenting issue impacts these various areas. Or do it the opposite way – ask how a certain area regarding their inner life influences the presenting issue. Either way, in using this approach, a coach combines focusing on the presenting issue, plus using "who" questions that invite deeper reflection that stimulates transformation and personal growth.

Coach the whole person, not just the problem!

Walt Hastings, PCC
walthastings@hotmail.com
303-526-9490

