

NON-DIRECTIVE COACHING SKILLS FOR CLERGY: APPLYING THE FAITH-FULL MODEL

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PREFACE

WHAT IS NON-DIRECTIVE COACHING AND HOW DOES IT WORK?

HOW DOES NON-DIRECTIVE COACHING RESONATE WITH CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY AND FAITH?

THE FAITH-FULL SIMPLE NON-DIRECTIVE COACHING MODEL

- 1. THE DISCIPLES' QUESTION**
- 2. THE PERSISTENT FRIEND QUESTION**
- 3. THE MARY MAGDALENE QUESTION**
- 4. THE JESUS QUESTION**
- 5. THE JETHRO QUESTION**
- 6. THE RICH YOUNG RULER QUESTION**
- 7. THE EUNUCH'S QUESTION**
- 8. THE PEARL QUESTION**

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

APPENDIX

PREFACE

Learning to practice non-directive coaching skills and apply the Faith-Full model as described here isn't intended to qualify you as a fully trained coach. Rather, the intent is to add tools to your leadership skill set. Nevertheless, the more you understand the art of non-directive coaching, the better you will understand the Faith-Full model and allow the wisdom behind it to guide you.

WHAT IS (NON-DIRECTIVE) COACHING AND HOW DOES IT WORK?

There are many different notions about what constitutes “coach” and “coaching.” This gap is one of the major barriers to people’s taking advantage of the benefits of coaching. The term *coach* is sometimes used interchangeably with the terms *consultant*, *therapist*, or *mentor*. While there are similarities among these constructs, the differences are significant and important to understand. A bicycle metaphor is often used to distinguish among these differences.¹



2

Consider these examples.

- A consultant imparts expertise, teaching you about where and how to sit, position your feet, and coordinate your balance and pedaling action.
- A therapist helps you delve into your bike-riding history, discusses your related emotions, and explains why riding your bike is important to your self-esteem.
- A mentor shows you how you may improve your bike riding skills, based on their knowledge and experience as an expert bike rider.

¹ M. Stratford. Developmental Roles Distinctions. <https://www.michaelstratford.com/> (2014)

² Shutterstock

- A coach asks questions to help you consider your thoughts and goals pertaining to bike riding, and whether you even want to ride a bike. If you do, they help you empower yourself to ride, and to get where *you* 've decided you want to go.

The role of *coach* itself may be directive or non-directive. *Directive* coaching casts the coach as the expert who brings the answers. When a pastor is in this kind of coach role, parishioners bring their problems to the pastor to solve *for* them. *Non-directive* coaching is different: the coach does not provide the answer, solve the problem, tell the person what to do, or explain the right way to handle the problem. Directive coaching has much in common with consultant, mentor, and athletic-type coaching roles, with the coach as expert, having knowledge to impart. In contrast, with non-directive coaching, the *coachee* is recognized as the context and content expert and as the person who is responsible for the outcome. Ownership begins and ends with the coachee and is never handed off. The coach guides the coachee in setting the boundaries of the conversation that allow a rich discovery process for the coachee. The coachee does most of the work, which makes for high ownership of the process and the results. High ownership is directly linked to high likelihood of follow-through and implementation.

Another bicycle metaphor to help distinguish the roles of coach and coachee in a coaching conversation is the *tandem* bicycle.³



The person in the coachee role is the front-seat rider. As such, they steer, setting the course by making the primary decisions, serving as the content expert of the conversation. The person in the coach role is the back-seat rider. Their main job is to keep the tandem, the coaching conversation, moving forward to where the coachee wants to go. They get things started, and to add speed – perhaps an extra push when needed – without adding drain.

³ C. Pedrick. *Simplifying Coaching: How to Have More Transformational Conversations by Doing Less*. (Open University Press, 2020).

⁴ Shutterstock

I often hear the quip: “People don’t like change.” In my experience, it isn’t that people don’t like change; it’s that they don’t like feeling like they are *being* changed. They will often make a significant sacrifice or engage in extra efforts if they come to that conclusion themselves.

Coaching gives people permission to change. When quality *non-directive* coaching is afoot, people quickly realize whether or not they *want* to change. If they do, then the coaching process will help them strategically to focus on specific problems they care about. They will create plans of action that are realistic, complete with appropriate resources, accountability, and a workable means for measuring progress. It’s an *internally* driven process, so ownership is high, in contrast to an *externally* driven process where an outside expert proposes specific solutions and programs that often don’t quite match with what people really want. As a result, there is often lower ownership for the outcomes and implementation flags.

Imagine the creativity and ministry capacity that could be released if parishioners solved their problems themselves! What if they had a pastor and other church leaders skilled at non-directive coaching? What if they had leaders who, through deep listening and powerful questioning, helped them to discover they have the “answers” already within them and don’t need fixing or directing?

The coaching perspective is that coachees are capable of generating their own solutions. The role of the coach is to provide a discovery-based framework that taps further into the expertise of the person or group being coached.⁵

Accordingly, during each coaching session, a goal for that session is articulated – something the client has discovered he or she really wants. The remainder of the session is spent on helping the client create specific actions to get what is wanted in a manner that is appropriate, together with the resources and necessary accountability.

How Can Listening and Asking Questions Be Powerful?

Listening provides the substance. Questions help to focus and refine the person’s thinking, leading to discovery.

The distinction between listening and hearing is vital.

“The quality of the listening drives the quality of the thinking.”⁶

Listening is not just hearing, and it’s not thinking about what I’ll say when you stop talking. It is completely other-focused. It is simple yet not easy.

⁵ J. Val Hastings, *Accelerated Coach Training* (Coaching4Clergy, 2011), 6.

⁶ Nancy Kline, *Time to Think: Listening to Ignite the Human Mind*, (London: Octopus Publishing Group, 1999)

Many people in churches I've served know how to listen pretty well: they practice it every day in their vocational settings. However, it seems many of them listen less well when they come to church meetings. How many church meetings have you attended that were run in a way that wouldn't be tolerated in the professional world? Examples might be poor agenda planning, unclear desired outcomes, poor facilitation that allows people to talk over each other rather than to listen for complete thoughts, and little accountability for follow up (including who will do what and by when).

Imagine how different meetings would be if participants listened attentively to each other, listening for the intended message before adding their thoughts. Perhaps you have tried the practice, the discipline, of repeating back to the speaker what you heard them say – to their satisfaction – before responding. This ensures high quality listening, not just hearing. It results in better outcomes in a shorter period of time. It is an art. The good news is that you probably already know how to do it and have done it. If not, it's one you can learn if you want to learn it.

What does it mean to ask good questions?

A good question invites greater clarity by helping the speaker to see things differently – creating new awareness and perspectives that empower fresh thinking. It may unleash an “aha” moment that generates action toward what the speaker really wants. Such questions, powerful questions, are directly connected to deep listening. They are brief, free of hidden agendas, and usually open-ended.

In sum, powerful questions fall into four main functional categories, all of which overlap somewhat. They promote or evoke:

1. perspective and understanding;
2. discovery;
3. clarity and learning; and
4. action.

Questions that promote **perspective and understanding** are ones such as: “What’s the truth about this situation?” or “What keeps you up at night?” or “What are you pretending not to know?” or “What is God’s perspective of what it possible?” or “Who is leading your life?” These all invite the person’s thinking or feeling into areas it normally wouldn’t enter.

Questions that promote or evoke **discovery** are ones such as: “What is the gift in this?” or “How much is this costing you?” or “Are you talking about what really matters now?” or “What are some opportunities you are currently not taking advantage of?” These invite the person to think more deeply and often more honestly about something.

Next, questions that promote or evoke **clarity and learning** are ones such as: “Where are you getting in your own way?” or “What’s past this issue?” or “What do you really (really!) want?” or “What do you see happening (or really happening) here?” or “What is the bottom line here?” These questions invite focus and ownership.

Lastly, questions that promote **action** are ones such as: “What does success look like?” or “When will you start?” or “What are you waiting for?” or “What’s possible right now?” or “What’s the first thing you need to do now?” Like the previous three types categories of questions, these help the coachee to move forward in his or her thinking, and they evoke specific behaviors needed to accomplish the stated goal.

Powerful questions often include words such as:

- What?
- How?
- When?
- Who?
- Where?

“Tell me more” tends to be a vital follow-up.

There are important distinctions in the quality of questions. Marilee Adams, distinguishes between *judger* questions and learner questions.⁷

Some examples of my own include:

Judger Questions	Learner Questions
Why is he causing this problem?	What/how might I be contributing to this problem?
How can I get them to change?	What do we need going forward?
Haven’t they been listening to me?	What have they understood so far?
Why is he late again?	What challenges is he facing today?
Why do I always get the short end of the stick?	How might I be benefiting from this situation?

Judger questions embody a preconceived view of the matter that limits possible outcomes by restricting the scope of the issue. They are also frequently reactive and defensive, and begin with Why? “Why is he causing this problem?” or “Why is he late again?” or “Why do I always get the short end of the stick?” This assigning blame or responsibility keeps the person stuck in the status quo. Since the explicit objective of non-directive coaching is to help the person move forward toward a goal they want – a change they want in their lives – coaches avoid using judger questions and also help the coachee realize when they are stuck in one.

⁷ Marilee Adams, Ph.D., *Change Your Questions, Change Your Life: 7 Powerful Tools for Life and Work*, (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2016). See www.inquiryInstitute.com for more information.

Questions are central to how we conceive reality, and therefore what we think is possible. So, while judger questions limit conception and possibility, learner questions expand conception and possibility, pushing us into new territories. Their mood is often hopeful: “What do we need going forward?” They are free of judgment: “What have they understood so far?” They often reflect mutually and connection: “What / how might *I* be contributing to this problem?” These characteristics encourage the discovery, creativity and often the courage needed to reach one’s goal.

HOW DOES NON-DIRECTIVE COACHING RESONATE WITH CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY AND FAITH?

The non-directive coaching process resonates with much in Christian scripture. The powerful questions that evoke discovery, clarity, and accountability that are characteristic of non-directive coaching appear early in the Bible. When Adam and Eve are trying to hide from God in the Garden, God asks, “Where are you?” (Genesis 3:9)⁸ God asked Cain two questions in Genesis 4:6 and 4:9, “Why are you angry?” (A self-awareness question) and, “Where is your brother Abel?” (An accountability question)

Even a cursory review of the New Testament reveals that Jesus was a master at asking good questions. As Hastings adds:

He used powerful questions with his disciples and with many of those he interacted with and healed. While there is a prescriptive side to Christianity, Jesus is not primarily prescriptive. Instead, his model was to elicit and draw forth.⁹

When his disciples were reporting others’ opinions about his identity he asked them, “Who do *you* say that I am?” (Mark 8:29) (a thought-provoking question). To the paralyzed person lying by the pool of Bethesda, who complained about others getting into the healing waters of the pool before him, Jesus asked, “Do you want to be well?” (John 5:6) (a vision question). In fact, the New Testament includes more than 300 questions asked by Jesus and only a few clear answers that he provided. Jesus realized that the best way to get people to take themselves seriously was by using a non-directive question approach rather than a more directive answer-driven approach.

A core tenet of coaching is that the client doesn’t need fixing, doesn’t need an external agenda or program, but rather is filled with untapped riches and potential to realize their dream

⁸ All quotations from the Bible are from the New Revised Standard Version unless noted otherwise.

⁹ J. Val Hastings, *Change Your Questions Change Your Church: How to Lead with Powerful Questions* (J. Val Hastings: 2012), 21.

or vision. In the words of Ben Zander, they already have an “A.”¹⁰ The story of David and Goliath illustrates this well. David has a vision to slay Goliath, the giant Philistine warrior threatening King Saul’s army, and offers to go fight him. Saul accepts his offer, yet sees David as deficient. Saul says to David, “You are not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him; for you are just a boy, and he has been a warrior from his youth” (1 Samuel 17:33). He then clothes David with his own armor, which only hinders David. In response, David claims his innate ability, throws off Saul’s armor, picks up five smooth stones for his sling, and successfully slays Goliath.

Jesus wasn’t into fixing people, but saw, spoke to, and drew out the image of God in which Genesis 1 says that all people are created. Like a good coach, Jesus repeatedly looked for the “A” – the good, the Image of God, the “Divinity in Disguise”¹¹ – in a person. People grumbled when Jesus invited himself to Zacchaeus’s home, as he was a tax collector, a sinner. Yet this evoked Zacchaeus’s most generous self to emerge: “Half my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much.” Jesus powerfully messaged him, “Today salvation has come to this house because he too is a Son of Abraham.” (See Luke 19:1-10)

In fact, an artful coach who is tuned into the client reminds them in times of self-doubt or low self-esteem, that they are, in fact, wonderfully made, and that God approves of and loves them from the very time of their conception, à la Psalm 139:

I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made...
 My frame was not hidden from you,
 when I was being made in secret,
 intricately woven in the depths of the earth.
 Your eyes beheld my unformed substance. (Psalm 139:14-15)

Speech itself is one of the coach’s main tools. In a real sense, words create our reality. The Semitic tradition is full of this notion, beginning with God speaking the creation into being in Genesis 1. Laura Cunningham points out that much of Walter Brueggemann’s work on the Psalms highlights the power of speech itself. The person laments, and by the act of articulating their words of lament they know that the current experience, in this case of the Pit in Psalms¹², is not how things should be.

While coaching does not involve a specific scriptural or liturgical tradition, pastors who are coached out of ruts may discover a dynamic similar to the psalmist’s emergence from the Pit. As they articulate frustrations, recognize they are not alone, and discover new

¹⁰ Ben Zander, “Give Yourself an A,” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M1ANV5BQnJA>, (Accessed, September 7, 2018).

¹¹ Title of a book by Kevin Anderson, Ph.D., (Monclova: CLB Press, 2003).

¹² The Psalms feature many instances of the writer agonizing about being in the Pit, or thanking God for rescuing him from the Pit, such as Psalm 28:31 and Psalm 30:3.

possibilities for action, all with the help of an executive coach, pastors may come to the same kind of “mourning into dancing” energy that the psalmist discovered.¹³

Like an artful coach, through powerful direct messaging that reveals limiting assumptions, Jesus helped people see how they are hindering what they say they really want. Witness the rich young ruler of Luke 18: “‘What must I do to inherit eternal life?’ Jesus answered him, ‘You know the commandments....’ He replied, ‘I have kept all these since my youth.’ Jesus said, ‘There is still one thing lacking. Sell all that you own and distribute the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven.’ But when he heard this he became very sad.”

Jesus made statements that challenged people to develop integrity between their professed values and their judgments of others. To the self-righteous religious authorities ready to stone a woman caught in adultery Jesus proclaimed, “Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her” (John 8:7).

In addition, the Bible parallels non-directive coaching by asking people to see and to value their unique God-given gifts and to put them to use for the good of the greater body. Paul uses the image of the church as a body – needing all its parts (talents) to function well toward an end goal.

Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot would say, ‘Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,’ that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear would say, ‘Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,’ that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? (1 Corinthians 12:14-19)

In another example, I imagine that Jesus is challenging the scribe to expand on the notion of “strength.” Assuming that “strength” doesn’t only refer to muscle strength, it could logically be expanded to include all the gifts, talents, and personality traits that a human possesses – all the characteristics that contribute to making each individual a unique being created in God’s image.¹⁴

One of the scribes came near and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, he asked them, “Which commandment is the first of all?” Jesus answered, “The first is, ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.’” (Mark 12:28-30)

¹³ Laura Auman Cunningham, *From Rut to River: Coaching Pastors in Stuck Situations* (Doctor of Ministry thesis, Columbia Theological Seminary, 2017), 12.

¹⁴ Jane Creswell, *Christ-Centered Coaching: 7 Benefits for Ministry Leaders* (St. Louis: Lake Hickory Resources, 2006), 1.

Because coaching helps people identify their talents and put them to use for a stated purpose, it's an excellent tool for discipleship – “for preparing God’s people for works of service so that the body of Christ may be built up.”¹⁵ “Put another way, coaching is a tangible way to address the coach’s role as equipper.”¹⁶

The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.... (Ephesians 4:11-12)

In addition, planning and resourcing in light of goals are foundational to coaching. There is biblical warrant for this as well:

If one of you wanted to build a tower, wouldn't you first sit down and calculate the cost, to determine whether you have enough money to complete it?
...Or what king would go to war against another king without first sitting down to consider whether his ten thousand soldiers could go up against the twenty thousand coming against him? (Luke 14:28, 14:31)

God is present everywhere and continually revealing things to us. Since a basic objective of coaching is helping the client discover new things, or simply to see what is habitually overlooked, coaching can be understood as a tool God has given us to help us see what God is revealing,

If people can't see what God is doing,
they stumble all over themselves;
But when they attend to what he reveals,
they are most blessed. (Proverbs 28:19)¹⁷

Another powerful biblical metaphor that coaching actualizes is that of the fish. Unlike the consultant whose job it is to give a fish (the answer or solution the client seeks), the coach helps the client to learn how to fish. “Come, and I will make you fishers of people.” (Matthew 4:19). In fact, coaching is a form of servant leadership that helps people to accomplish their goals.¹⁸

In sum, non-directive coaching has the capacity to appeal to that deepest and best place with a person, the Imago Dei. It provides a process and framework for it to express itself through God-given talents and resources so as to create in the world that which he or she most deeply desires.

¹⁵ Ephesians 4:12.

¹⁶ J. Val Hastings, *The Next Great Awakening: How to Empower God's People with a Coach Approach to Ministry* (Coaching4clergy, 2010), 13.

¹⁷ Eugene H. Peterson, *The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2002).

¹⁸ Ken Blanchard, Bill Hybels and Phil Dodge, *Leadership by the Book: Tools to Transform Your Workplace* (New York: Waterbook-Morrow, 1999), 152.

Additional Truths of Faith That Resonate with a Non-Directive Coaching Approach

Practicing silence

Unlike the business world, where coaching has flourished for several decades, the religious world has many resources we can draw upon that strongly support non-directive coaching, that allow it to feel familiar and make it easier to embrace its benefits. Silence is one. We often have intentional periods of silence during worship that help us to connect with the movement of the Spirit. Following Jesus' example, we encourage each other to practice periods of quiet time in daily prayer or retreats.

Intentional listening

A former pastor of mine often reminded her congregation that prayer is more than making requests of God – speaking to God. It's also *listening* to God, as highlighted in the practice of Lectio Divina and other prayer methods. Silence and listening go hand-in-hand and create space for the Spirit to move in our lives.

Making a choice

Coaching is essentially about bringing the person to choose – to actively choose what they now know they really want. Through choosing, saying *yes* to what we do want, we create our desired future. This contrasts with continually reacting against – saying *no* to what we don't want – hoping that our desired future will somehow miraculously find us. Jesus often challenged people to let go of established avoidance patterns in order to choose what truly brings life.

Asking a question more than once

The idea that one shouldn't have to ask a question twice (or three times!), or *be asked* a question more than once, is often interpreted as not paying attention. In fact, when accompanied by deep listening, the coach's asking the person a simple question such as, "What do you (really) want?" or "And what else?" often stimulates the person to deeper thinking.

Brief is usually better

Good sermons usually aren't the long ones. In fact, sermons that most move me are often the shorter ones, perhaps because they are more focused. The same goes for good coaching questions: shorter is often better. Jesus was master of brief language – both his statements and his questions.

Trust the power within you

“...If you say to this mountain, ‘Be taken up and thrown into the sea,’ and if you do not doubt in your heart, but believe that what you say will come to pass, it will be done for you,” Jesus said (Mark 11:23), urging people to tap into the power of God that wants to channel through us.

THE FAITH-FULL SIMPLE NON-DIRECTIVE COACHING MODEL

As I said earlier, the core of this book is to build on what is already working well and to make it better. Specifically, I am building on Bungay Stanier’s seven-question model¹⁹ for using a non-directive coaching mode to help people discover and solve their own problems in a business context, and adapting it for a faith community context.

With some adapting, this model can work well in a faith community context as the life of faith is also one of discovery and problem solving. I have found the most helpful “answers” to be ones that came from within, not given from outside. Traveling the path of discovery, as this model invites one to do, takes discipline. A *disciple* is one who musters the *discipline* to follow the path. Like the model, a life of faith based on a disciplined focus is often relatively simple, not to be confused, of course, with being easy.

The question asking process resembles the Quaker Clearness Committee process. Within the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers), the clearness committee represents a process for *discernment*. Clearness committees are often used when a member of the meeting seeks to reach clarity on how to respond to a concern or dilemma. The process is based on the principle that the inner light is present in all people. The process thus is one of aiding the person seeking clearness in finding the answer within, rather than offering outside advice or guidance.²⁰

Coaching is a process of discovery and possibility, of creation and accountability. The experience can seem like moving forward then backward over and over as you zero in on what you really want. I know this from personal experience though in my own life it has sometimes taken me many years to gain clarity about what I really wanted.

The beauty of this question-asking process is that it can help you get to what you really want much sooner. It offers a shortcut of sorts. Our culture says, “You must create something new and original to be valued...” but why? Why not build on processes that have already been shown to be effective? Accordingly, I have adapted Bungay Stanier’s model, building on it and contextualizing it for easy use by faith community leaders. I call it the “Faith-full Model.”

¹⁹ See Appendix.

²⁰ Friends General Conference. Clearness Committees. <https://www.fgcquaker.org/>

The Faith-Full Model

1. **THE DISCIPLES' QUESTION:** "What's up?"
2. **THE PERSISTENT FRIEND QUESTION:** "And what else?"
3. **THE MARY MAGDALENE QUESTION:** "What is the real challenge here for you?"
4. **THE JESUS QUESTION:** "What do you (really) want?"
5. **THE JETHRO QUESTION:** "What support do you need?"
6. **THE RICH YOUNG RULER QUESTION:** "If you're saying Yes to this, what are you saying No to?"
7. **THE EUNUCH'S QUESTION:** "What action will you take?"
8. **THE PEARL QUESTION:** "What has been valuable for you in this conversation?"

1. THE DISCIPLES' QUESTION: "What's up?"

The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples, and as he watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed, "Look, here is the Lamb of God!" The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. When Jesus turned and saw them following, he said to them, "What are you looking for?" They said to him, "Rabbi" (which translated means Teacher), "where are you staying?" He said to them, "Come and see." They came and saw where he was staying, and they remained with him that day." (John 1:35-39, NRSV)

I imagine that just before Jesus asked them, "What are you looking for?" he may have asked them, "What's up?" as in, "What's on your mind?" or maybe even, "What are you thinking?" It was the beginning of their conversation, and a life-changing one it turned out to be. One of the two who approached Jesus was Andrew, who then sought out his brother, Simon, proclaiming, "We have found the Messiah!" and brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at Simon and said, "You are Simon son of John. You are to be called Cephas" (which is translated Peter). (v. 42)

The simple question, "What's up?" or "What's on your mind?" led to Peter having his very soul read by Jesus, and initiated a grand adventure as both Andrew and Simon Peter then signed on as disciples of Jesus.

"What's up?" is an excellent starter question for initiating a conversation of discovery, insight, focus and creation, which is what coaching is all about. Such simple open-ended starter questions are numerous in scripture. Jesus may also have asked "What's up?" when Nicodemus came to him by night with his question, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God..." (John 3:2) Jesus had initiated a process of discovery through which Nicodemus gained insight about being "born of water and spirit."

Consider also the question Jesus asked Zacchaeus when he saw him up in the tree.

Now it's your turn. Find someone to practice with, someone willing to embark on the path of discovering what they really want. Warn them first, though. Let them know that you won't be speaking much. Rather, you'll be listening attentively – so to speak, listening with your ears, eyes, heart and all of your being; they will be doing most of the talking, and the work. You may want to alert them that you'll be using a simple question-asking process designed to help them resolve something that is on their mind and to move forward, rather than one that doesn't get to the heart of the matter.

A word about nomenclature – Here, “coach” means the person in the coach role. It doesn't imply that this person is a certified coach, but that the person is able to play this role within the framework of the coaching conversation model offered here. In the following dialogues, Person A is in the coach role; Person B is in the coachee role.

Dialogue 1

Person A: How are you?

Person B: Fine. And you?

Person A: Great! Are you going to the soccer game tonight?

Person B: No. Too much to do.

Person A: Okay. Maybe next time.

Reflection:

There's nothing wrong with this brief conversation. However, there may have been a missed opportunity: Person B may have something on their mind, something to be expressed or probed more deeply, just waiting for an opportunity. Here's how it might have gone using this first question (The Disciples' Question) from the Model, assuming proper set-up.

Dialogue 2 (per the model)

Person A: *What's up?*

Person B: Oh, I don't know.

Person A: I'd be glad to listen. *What's on your mind?*

Person B: Thanks. Oh, I don't know.

Person A: Okay...*so what's up?*

Person B: Actually, I'm bothered by....

Reflection:

It can be difficult to stick with just asking this one question, “What's up?” and then waiting for a response. Most of us are used to quickly moving to another question or statement. However, this shifts the focus away from inviting the coachee into deeper thinking, such as with Dialogue 1:

Are you going to the soccer game tonight? Accordingly, it's okay to offer words like, “I'd be glad to listen,” or “I have some time...” then follow with a similar question such as “What's on

your mind?” or “What are you thinking?” The important thing is to stick with this initial questioning theme and not to change the subject.

Next, after asking “What’s up?” once or perhaps twice, you’ll then ask another very simple question, and this one probably several times: “What else?”

2. THE PERSISTENT FRIEND QUESTION: “What else?”

And he (Jesus) said to them, “Suppose one of you has a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say to him, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; for a friend of mine has arrived, and I have nothing to set before him.’ And he answers from within, ‘Do not bother me; the door has already been locked, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything.’ I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, at least because of his persistence he will get up and give him whatever he needs (Luke 11:5-8).

Jesus’s Parable of the Persistent Friend, sometimes called the “Friend at Night” parable, illustrates the power of persistence. The neighbor eventually agrees to help his friend due to his friend’s persistent demands rather than because they are friends, despite the late hour and inconvenience.

Notice how the friend’s persistence isn’t for his own benefit but for another – his unexpected visitor. Similarly, by asking “What else” – persistently – the coach serves the coachee. It’s a drawing-out question. The idea is to get the coachee talking about something on his or her mind with “What’s up?” and then to keep them talking with “What else?” And talking and talking – spinning out their thoughts. It’s like those restroom faucets: push it once to get the water running, and then it turns itself off after a few seconds. Repeated pushing is often needed to get your hands clean. It’s the same here. After initially being asked, “What’s up?” most people will talk for a bit and then stop, even though more ideas are linked to the initial one – ideas yet to come into consciousness. So, being asked, “(And) What else?” several times coaxes out those other ideas. This question *assumes* there are more thoughts, which is usually the case.

At this early stage, lots of things can stop the water flow. The water tapers off if the coach stops listening carefully – even for a bit. This is the first speedbump for learning to facilitate a non-directive coaching conversation. In fact, it’s not really a “conversation” since one person – the coachee – is doing most all of the talking. Remember, “The quality of the listening drives the quality of the thinking.”

You can even ask “And what else?” non-verbally by showing expectant body posture and encouraging eye contact.

Stick to the wisdom of the script, the model! Be dogged, like Paul in his passionate pursuit of spreading the good news of Jesus Christ, except the good news you’re spreading here is generous

listening. Intense focused listening is a huge gift. It's hard work to continually turn away from the impulse to ask other questions in the quest for more details to satisfy your curiosity, or to shift into problem solving mode, both of which hijack the coachee's own discovery process.

It can also be tempting to slip into judgment mode as often conveyed by questions like, "Why didn't you do that?!" or "Why didn't you ask Bill beforehand?" It may help to remember the general Christian injunction against judging another person: "Judging is God's job," a pastor of mine often said.

"Do not judge, so that you may not be judged. For with the judgment you make you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get. Why do you see the speck in your neighbor's eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye? Or how can you say to your neighbor, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' while the log is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbor's eye. (Matthew 7:1-5)

Stay out of judgment, out of preconceived notions of where the coachee's thinking is going. In my Introduction to Marketing class in business school we learned about the "Push" vs. "Pull" approach for influencing a potential buyer. Remember all those leaflets you used to get in your mailbox? It was all third-class bulk mail trying to sell you all kinds of things such as a new snow blower for Christmas, or "50% off!" on new windows for your house. The likelihood of your being interested is one-in-a-thousand. But it doesn't require much work by the advertiser: they just throw a bunch of stuff at you, hoping that at least one thing will stick. In the present day of email, it's called "spam."

In sharp contrast, a "Pull" approach doesn't send you anything, but rather draws out from you what you may be interested in buying. This approach requires a lot more upfront work by the seller, but the likelihood of making a sale is much higher. Likewise, the question, "And what else?" keeps pulling – drawing forth – the coachee's thoughts, one after another.

Continuing with Dialogue 2 above, let's see what the Persistent Friend Question might look like in action.

Note: Person A's italicized words indicate use of the questions from the Faith-Full model.

Person A: *What's up?*

Person B: Oh, I don't know....

Person A: I'd be glad to listen. *What's on your mind?*

Person B: Thanks. Oh, I don't know.

Person A: Okay, *so what's up?*

Person B: Actually, I'm bothered by all these stupid computer phone calls I'm getting.

Person A: Yeah. (nods her head)

Person B: They're wasting my time...

Person A: Ok. *And what else?*

Person B: They're tying up my phone.

Person A: *And what else?*

Person B: I'm waiting for an important call!

Person A: An important call – *and what else?*

Person B: My daughter is expecting her baby and may go to the hospital any time now.

Person A: Yes.

Person B: They may need me!

Person A: *Is there anything else?*

Person B: Yes! I want to be there when the baby is born!

Reflection

You may wonder how long to keep asking “What else?” Some people talk to excess or simply seem to be throwing out unrelated details. If you sense this is the case, you can ask, “Is there anything else?” a Yes or No question that invites closure – getting to the real issue, as happened with Person B above. If that doesn't work, and you sense the main thoughts have emerged, you can simply say, “Is it okay if we move on?”

Master Coach, Claire Pedrick, reminds us that “great coaching is all in the timing.” Though it's a slight exaggeration, timing is indeed key. The effectiveness of a question is to a significant degree determined by *when* it is asked, not unlike the timing of a comedian delivering their punchline.

Back to the content question. For those with a bit of coach training under your belt, but still unsure of yourselves, you probably can relate to the common experience of not knowing *what* question to ask next. I sure did. Remember, at this point your main job is to stay rock solid in listening mode until after the third, or fourth, or fifth time you ask, “And what else?” and nothing more is forthcoming, even after asking, “Is there anything else?” If so, that is your cue to ask the next (new) question: “What is the real challenge here for you?”

3. THE MARY MAGDALENE QUESTION: “What is the real challenge here for you?”²¹

Early on that first day of the week, Mary Magdalene came to Jesus' tomb with spices and oils to anoint his body for a proper burial. (Mark 16:1)

²¹ Bungay Stanier calls it, “The Focus Question.”

Such devotion. No doubt the big question on her mind was how to access his body since a large stone sealed the tomb's entrance, à la, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?" (Mark 16:3)

And yet, God had already taken care of that as she found the stone rolled away. However, the body was missing! Her initial challenge of gaining access to Jesus' body now changed to the real challenge she faced: locating Jesus' missing body. In response to the angel's question, "Woman, why are you weeping?" she replied, "Because they have taken away my Lord and I do not know where they have laid him," (John 20:13). That is the real challenge for her.

Mary came to the tomb in grief and devotion – so many things on her mind and heart. But she had focused on one thing in particular: how to remove the stone so she could get at Jesus' body. It turned out that wasn't her primary challenge. This often happens as a coachee is listened to into a deeper and deeper place: what they originally thought they wanted (to get, or to do, or to overcome) now seems to be quite different. Once Mary named her real challenge, her world shifted!

"What is the real challenge here for you?" Bungay Stanier, the creator of this brilliant question, points out that it has three vital components: the *real* challenge (which one), for *you* (not someone else), *here* (now, at this moment). Taken together these three aspects sharply focus the coachee's attention.

In Mary Magdalen's case, the real challenge was finding the missing body. It was her real challenge since it was she who so desperately wanted to be close to her master, even to his mangled dead body; and it was now, immediately, not tomorrow or next week.

As previously mentioned, this question is asked after several iterations of the previous question, "What else?" and a sufficient pause to determine whether or not the flow of thoughts is reasonably spent. Insight now begins to emerge.

Claire Pedrick suggests that a good coaching process creates a container²² that frames, or contains, the coaching conversation. The coach's questions and listening help the coachee to decide what's in and what's out, so that focus can be achieved. The container-creating aspects of this question are three-fold. Each is vital to realize the full potential of the question. The question is basically about challenge, but not just any challenge. Several difficulties may be in the person's mind. You want him to focus on the *real* one – the central one.

For you: coachees often bring other people's difficulties into the coaching conversation, sometimes as a way to avoid acknowledging their own central difficulty. It's easy to see why: others' difficulties are easier to talk about and you have little responsibility for them. *For you* keeps the focus on the coachee's problem – which is the only place the real work of coaching can be done. Non-directive coaching only works for those engaged in the conversation.

²² Pedrick likens the container quality of a coaching conversation to a laboratory test tube. The physical boundary of the test tube confines the elements inside to close proximity, and when heat is applied (the coach's input of energy into the conversation), the reaction happens (coachee's core insight) much faster than it otherwise would have.

Here: now, at this point in the conversation, not earlier or later. Again, this cuts off those myriad other tempting routes that avoid the central challenge the facing of which is where the reward lies.

Asking this question in its entirety it may help to pause at each part: “What is the *real* challenge (pause) *here* (pause) for *you*?” And remember, it’s okay to repeat earlier questions: “And what else?” can foster further focus.

This illustrates how important the delivery elements of a question are. Elements include not only timing, but also pace, tone and volume. Since each element adds a layer of meaning, the more control, i.e. awareness, the coach has for these non-verbal meaning-making elements of the question, the more effective the coaching will be.

Let’s now look at how *The Mary Magdalene Question* could play out with a new example featuring the common challenge of having young children present in worship. The dialogue below illustrates how it may go without the help of our coaching framework. In this example, M is Mary, an older member; P is the Pastor.

M: We need to bring in more young people with children if we’re going to survive!

P: Sure! I’d love to have more young families, too.

M: So, where are they? Why aren’t they coming to our church? We’re friendly and we preserve our building in top shape.

P: Actually, we have had some young families come, but they didn’t stay long.

M: Why is that? Your sermons are excellent and we have a good childcare program to look after their children during worship.

P: That’s the problem: They want to have their children with them during worship.

M: But that’s why we have a childcare program. When I was ushering last month, I remember asking that mother to please take her children to childcare as they were causing such a disturbance during your sermon.

P: Right. And we haven’t seen that family since.

M: Well, I don’t think young children belong in our main worship service. It’s for adults.

Consider how this might have gone if the pastor and the older member had used the Faith-Full Model:

P: Hi, Mary, you seem to have something on your mind. *What’s up?*

M: We need to bring in more young people with children if we’re going to survive!

P: Sure! I’d love to have more young families, too.

M: So, where are they? Why aren’t they coming to our church? We’re friendly and we keep our building in top shape.

P: So, I'm hearing that you're upset about the lack of young families in our church?

M: Yes!

P: And what else?

M: Well...how are we going to survive without more young families?

P: Say more about that.

M: I mean, when I first came to this church 30 years ago there were lots of young families, including my own.

P: Yes, it must have been a wonderful time. What else are you thinking?

M: They can sure make a racket, can't they?

P: Who?

M: The kids.

P: The Kids?

M: Yes, the kids in worship. Some parents bring their small children to Sunday service.

P: And....(what else?)

M: The noise those kids make is distracting. They ought to be in the crib room, or the nursery.

P: Yes, young children often do make more noise than the adults, which clearly is bothersome to some adults. I get that. So, tell me, Mary, what is the real challenge here?

M: The real challenge is getting those young parents not to bring their children into worship with them – to drop them off in the nursery.

P: Since we don't have control over others' behavior, let me rephrase it: What is the real challenge here for you?

M: I just want my old church back?

P: Say more about that.

M: I want those parents to put their children in the nursery during worship!

P: I hear your frustration and I sense your loss. Unfortunately, it's hard to control the behavior of other people. So, what do you want – really want?

Reflection

Some words, phrases, or even whole sentences can function as questions without being in the grammatical form of a question. They invite deeper thinking and discovery. Everyday speech is filled with them. Examples of single words that can function as questions include, "Well..." and, "Okay..." Depending on the tone of voice and non-verbal aspects of the speaker, these two words could convey, "Say more about that," a question-like statement that can function as "What else?" or "And what else?" as seen in the above dialogue.

This question paves the way for the next question, the one lying at the very heart of any true coaching conversation, "What do you (really!) want?" It's where the discovery really gets traction.

Paraphrasing, Mirroring and Messaging

Paraphrasing signals “I’m with you.” It acknowledges attentive listening, thereby inviting the deeper trust and vulnerability often needed for probing one’s mind and heart. In the above dialogue, that pastor offered this paraphrase: **“Yes, young children often do make more noise than the adults, which clearly is bothersome to some adults. I get that.”** This acknowledged her feelings without taking sides either way. It also helped her go deeper into her thinking.

Signaling “I’m with you,” is important especially when the person is sharing his feelings in a vulnerable way. For example, “André, I understand that you really want to take more time off to regenerate, but since you’ve used all your regular vacation time you feel trapped in an exhausted condition. Did I hear you correctly?”

Mirroring can be verbal or non-verbal. Just like the word means, to mirror is to reflect or to match the person’s language, emotion or behavior. It conveys solidarity and encourages the journey. The Pastor mirrored the church member’s enthusiasm in the above dialogue when he said, “Yes, it must have been a wonderful time!”

Messaging also re-enforces the person’s thinking and the boundary of the conversation. In the above dialogue the pastor’s messages to Mary about her seeming wish to control the behavior of others: “Unfortunately, it’s hard to control the behavior of other people.” This brings the focus back to Mary’s behavior, which is the only behavior over which she has control.

Messaging can also function to affirm the person, which is critical when they are struggling in another area. For example, messaging to a pastor who struggles with time management but works hard at pastoral care could be, “Sue, I’m picking up how much you care for your parishioners. Wonderful!”

Affirming the coachee is essential to coaching. Even one word of messaging can help to encourage the person to keep up the progression of their thinking. For example, when they respond to the initial question (Disciples’ Question) of “What’s up?” (or “What’s on your mind?”) you could add, “Nice!” or “Sweet!” while nodding your head. Then, when it is natural, ask the second question (Disciples’ Question), “And what else?”

Subsequently, ask questions such as the others that segue between the model’s primary eight questions, such as “Shall we move on?”

4. THE JESUS QUESTION: “What do you (really) want?”

“What do you want?” is a pointed question. It’s a focusing question. It’s an edgy question, especially with the “really” qualifier.

Jesus so often posed this question to those he encountered that I call it the Jesus Question. It has many variations. At the pool of Bethsaida in Jerusalem where he encountered a man who had been lying there ill for 38 years and was complaining about his lack of assistance, Jesus asked him, “Do you want to be made well?” (John 5:2) The man’s reason for not becoming well was that he had no one to help him into the waters after the angel stirred them (the first one in gets healed!). Jesus didn’t buy it, so he challenged him with a question that is so basic it’s considered to be the foundation of coaching: “What do you (really!) want? In this case, it came out as, “Do you want (really want) to be made well?” The implication was that if the man really did want that he wouldn’t let his limitations define his circumstances.

Another variation of the Jesus Question arose on the road from Jericho when Jesus and his disciples passed by Bartimaeus, a blind man who was begging by the road side. When Bartimaeus learned that Jesus was nearby he began shouting out, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” Many tried to shut him up but couldn’t. Jesus heard him and had them bring Bartimaeus to him, whereby Jesus put the question to him plainly, “What do you want for me to do for you?” Bartimaeus was ready. He knew what he really wanted. “My teacher, let me see again.” And that clear articulation of his deepest desire paved the way to bring it into reality. Jesus responded, “Go; your faith has made you well.” Regaining his sight, Bartimaeus followed Jesus on the way. (Luke 18:35-43)

No doubt, “What do you want?” was also the question in the air when the ten Lepers approached Jesus as he was going through the region between Samaria and Galilee, calling out to him, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!” As Luke relates this story, that clear articulation of their desire, (mercy’s relationship to sin and healing....) led to their being made clean, made well. (Luke 17:11-19)

And with Nicodemus in John 3, I imagine that “What do you want?” was written all over Jesus’ face when Nicodemus came to him under the cover of darkness – taking the very real risk of others knowing of his trust in, and relationship with, Jesus, given Nicodemus’ position in the religious hierarchy who opposed Jesus.

As described earlier, “What do you want?” is asked after a silent pause of sufficient length that you’re pretty sure that “And what else?” has drawn out all the “water” it can. If so, ask it. And wait. Listening with all your being – powerfully. If the coachee continues with more thoughts (water), that’s fine. You can loop back with “And what else?” until there’s another long pause. Then ask again more pointedly, “What do you *really* want?” And wait. Again.

As before, resist temptations to ask other questions like a “Why is this so hard for you?” – a judgment question. Resist giving in to your curiosity to ask about some detail. Stick to the wisdom of the script. The coachee is working hard. Discovering what you really want is not for the faint of heart, which is why so few people really know what they want in any given situation. Your patient, persistent, focused listening is a huge gift. Let yourself feel the joy of giving it.

A cultural reflection:

Have you ever downsized your house? Your office? The several times I've downsized, usually by moving, I discovered all kinds of stuff. It was stuff I hadn't seen in years, much less actually used. In some cases, I couldn't even remember how I acquired some of it. This impulse begins early in life. I remember the wood lathe I bought (actually my *dad* bought it at my request) in junior high school. I used it only a couple times. After that, it sat there in my parents' house for thirty years. Or that third pair of skis or those two had-to-have sweaters, or....

In each case, I simply had given in to the emotional urge to have that thing. It's the upsizing urge. I once worked for a company whose corporate motto was "More Is More." From my perspective now it seems quite superficial, but many of us at the time thought it was great. It caught the spirit of upsizing and acquiring that was so prevalent.

With a nod to St. Francis of Assisi, what might daily life be like if our guiding motto was "*Less is More?*" Rather than ask, "How much can I afford?" ask, "How little do I need?" In recent years I've come to increasingly embrace this motto. It's not that I'm aiming for sainthood, but rather that I find that after the essential needs are met, additional stuff only clutters – clutters my mind and clutters my heart. It can actually hinder quality of life.

Non-directive coaching embodies a "Less is more" approach. You've probably noticed that the questions used by this non-directive coaching model are short, sometimes *very* short, unnaturally and awkwardly short. That is only because we're used to the idea that more is better – more words are better. More words, especially in questions designed to stimulate discovery or perspective or clarity of thinking, often do the opposite: they can distract or obfuscate.

Accordingly, all eight questions in this model are based on the idea of the *least* the coach needs to say to help the coachee move forward in their thinking. A well-crafted short question can actually ask more of the coachee than a long one. Effective coaches say less while asking more.²³

Let's see how The Jesus Question can function in the continuing coaching conversation from above.

P: I hear your frustration and loss. Unfortunately, it's hard to control the behavior of other people. So, *what do you want – really want?*

M: I want to be able to have some peace on Sunday mornings...

P: And....

M: It's the only time I hear God's voice.

P: So, what you really want is a space to hear God's voice. Is that right? And you need a quiet peaceful place for that to happen. Right?

M: Yes!

P: *Say more about that.*

²³ The phrase, "Say less, (and) ask more" is borrowed from the title of Bungay Stanier's book: *The Coaching Habit: Say Less, Ask More & Change the Way You Lead Forever.*

M: Come to think of it, when I used to have my morning meditations at home, I often heard God's voice.

P: Nice! And what else?

M: For some reason I've stopped that practice but I guess I could start again.

5. THE JETHRO QUESTION: "What support do you need?"

The next day Moses sat as judge for the people, while the people stood around him from morning until evening. When Moses' father-in-law saw all that he was doing for the people, he said, "What is this that you are doing for the people? Why do you sit alone, while all the people stand around you from morning until evening?" Moses said to his father-in-law, "Because the people come to me to inquire of God. When they have a dispute, they come to me and I decide between one person and another, and I make known to them the statutes and instructions of God." Moses' father-in-law said to him, "What you are doing is not good. You will surely wear yourself out, both you and these people with you. For the task is too heavy for you; you cannot do it alone. Now listen to me. I will give you counsel, and God be with you! You should represent the people before God, and you should bring their cases before God; teach them the statutes and instructions and make known to them the way they are to go and the things they are to do. You should also look for able men among all the people, men who fear God, are trustworthy, and hate dishonest gain; set such men over them as officers over thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens. Let them sit as judges for the people at all times; let them bring every important case to you, but decide every minor case themselves. So it will be easier for you, and they will bear the burden with you. If you do this, and God so commands you, then you will be able to endure, and all these people will go to their home in peace." So Moses listened to his father-in-law and did all that he had said. Moses chose able men from all Israel and appointed them as heads over the people, as officers over thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens. (Exodus 18:13-25)

Jethro was the father-in-law of Moses. In Exodus 18, Jethro sees how Moses is overwhelmed with all that he was doing for the Israelites – taking too much onto himself as they camped in the wilderness after escaping from Egypt. One of Moses's jobs was to mediate disputes among the people. It seemed people from all over hill and dale were bringing their problems to him, big and small, exhausting him. So, Jethro said to him, "What is this that you are doing for the people? Why do you sit alone, while all the people stand around you from morning to evening?" (FN) Jethro then counseled Moses to share the burden by selecting trustworthy men to mediate all the relatively minor disputes, leaving only the important ones for Moses. This allowed Moses to devote his energies where they were uniquely needed so as to be a more effective leader.

"What support do you need?" is a resource question. Jon Donne rightly put it, "No man is an island." Bringing into reality that which we deeply want usually requires (or at least is greatly facilitated by) others. Their counsel, material support, cooperation, and sometimes even permission, are needed. It's a vital question to ask.

And yet, “What support (or resources) do you need?” is often an overlooked question. Just recently I was coaching another pastor about his goals for the coming year. Challenging him to think big, I asked, “If one year from now you said to me, ‘Jim, this past year was beyond wonderful!’ what would have made it so?” After some thoughtful silence the ideas poured forth: relating to worship, engagement in the community, leadership development, and self-care. Next, I asked, “What support or resources will you need?” (Note: this isn’t the Yes or No question: “Do you need support?” Rather it assumes that support will be needed, a message that overly self-sufficient pastors have a hard time hearing.) He spoke of the support he would need inside the church from his leadership team, and from external sources, such as coaching, counseling, and a gym membership. He then said how helpful it was to name these needed sources of support and that he would never have thought to ask this question of himself.

Ask “What support do you need?” after the coachee has clarity about what they want. If there is no immediate response, don’t worry. After some silence, ask it again. You might qualify it by asking “What *resources* do you need?” Still, avoid further qualifying. Ask it expecting an answer. Then hold the silence. You can be sure support and resources of some kind are needed, so you’re doing the coachee a big favor by hanging in there with this question. Don’t let them off the hook.

It may also help the person to follow up with, “What else do you need?” a version of the Persistent Friend Question. If it produces some fruit, which it almost always does, ask it again.

Again, it’s okay to link back to ask an earlier question from the model if it feels natural and will serve the coachee.

Continuing the dialogue, let’s see how The Jethro Question could function to help Mary move forward in her thinking.

P: *Say more about that.*

M: Come to think of it, when I used to have my morning meditations at home, I often heard God’s voice.

P: *Nice! And what else?*

M: For some reason I’ve stopped that practice...but I guess I could start again.

P: *So, what support do you need for that to happen?*

M: I need to set aside time for it. Ever since I agreed to babysit my grandchild my personal time has been disrupted.

6. THE RICH YOUNG RULER QUESTION: “If you’re saying Yes to this, what are you saying No to?”²⁴

²⁴ Bungay Stanier calls it “The Strategic Question.”

A certain ruler asked him, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus said to him, “Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. You know the commandments: ‘You shall not commit adultery; You shall not murder; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; Honor your father and mother.’” He replied, “I have kept all these since my youth.” When Jesus heard this, he said to him, “There is still one thing lacking. Sell all that you own and distribute the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.” But when he heard this, he became sad; for he was very rich. (Luke 18:18-23)

Jesus holds up before the rich young ruler the choice he faces, yet was apparently unaware of: to get what he wants, he must make space for it by releasing something else he also wants. Saying Yes to inheriting eternal life, Jesus says, requires him to say No to holding on to his material possessions – release his attachment to them. He must prioritize what he wants.

It’s not an obvious choice. At that time, being rich was viewed as having God’s favor. Both choices were good and honorable. Yet, the notion was that if he didn’t unburden himself of his many possessions, he wouldn’t be able to follow Jesus and experience the eternal life he said he wanted.

This simple question continues to refine the container of the coaching conversation: what’s in it, and what’s not in it. Characteristic of a coaching conversation is bringing the coachee to choice. And since the choices aren’t always obvious, you serve the coachee powerfully by serving up this question. And persisting. Divide the question if need be: “What do you want to say Yes to?” – allowing the coachee to say out loud again what they want. What they want may have shifted. Fine. After clarification, you could ask, “Given that, what do you need to say No to so as to make space for it?”

“In every life there is a crossover moment, after which a person will never be the same again. Somewhere, somehow the challenge comes that sets us on a different path: the path of purpose, the path of integrity, the path of transcendence that lifts us – heart, mind, and soul – above the pitiable level of the comfortable and the mundane.”²⁵

The story of Martha and Mary is another instance of Jesus using a version of this coaching question.

Now as they went on their way, he entered a certain village, where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. She had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord’s feet and listened to what he was saying. But Martha was distracted by her many tasks; so she came to him and asked, “Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to help me.” But the Lord answered her, “Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her.” (Luke 10:38-42)

²⁵ R. Rohr, “Richard Rohr’s Daily Meditation,” 11/20/19

Martha envies Mary's choice of choosing to sit at Jesus feet so as to listen to him carefully, to learn from him, to receive his good energy. On the other hand, Martha seems also to want to be close to Jesus yet can't get herself to make that choice; it would require her to say No to her compulsive need to be the perfect hostess. Jesus tells her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part."

Again, there is no obvious good or bad choice here. Both are good and honorable: spending time with the guest or preparing the food.

Yet, one can't do both. "If you're saying Yes to this, what are you saying No to?" is a critical reminder to the coachee that focus and prioritizing are needed to get what they really want. Maybe even sacrifice. Martha would have to sacrifice her self-image of being the perfect hostess or to give up her passive aggressive ways of trying to manipulate her sister.

Put differently, "What must you say No to so that your Yes to what you really want can be a strong Yes?"

Sometimes what the person needs to say No to is tolerating the offensive behavior of others. Congregations that value accepting all people, such as many in the UCC, often repeat the motto, "No matter who you are or where you are on your journey, you are welcome here." This makes it difficult to deal with the occasional person who exhibits anti-social behavior toward others, whether in worship, meetings or other church events. So, I remind them, "all people are welcome but all behavior is not." Saying Yes to all people sometimes requires us to say No to certain behaviors.

And yet, it can be remarkable hard to say No – just ask Martha. To gain some empathy for those to whom you, as coach, ask "The Rich Young Ruler Question," try practicing saying No yourself a few times.

Maybe Paul had this challenge in mind with his words to the rambunctious people in the Corinthian church, "So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!" (2 Cor. 5:17)

This 8-question coaching conversation model also employs another feature of non-directive coaching that makes it powerful: empathy. I distinguish sympathy and empathy as follows: Sympathy – I feel *for* you; empathy – I feel *with* you.

Brené Brown puts it this way: "Empathy fuels connection; sympathy drives disconnection."²⁶

The coach comes alongside the coachee like a dance partner participating in the dance rather than a teacher or mentor observing or directing from the sideline.

²⁶ Brené Brown, in *Dare to Lead...*

Nursing scholar, Teresa Wiseman, studied professions where empathy is key. She distilled four top characteristics of empathy:

1. Perspective taking (ability to take the perspective of another person; recognize their perspective as their truth).
2. Staying out of judgment.
3. Recognizing emotion in other people and then communicating about that.
4. Feeling *with* (not *for*) people.

An empathic response rarely begins with, “At least...” words we often use out of sympathy for the person’s pain, attempting to put a silver lining onto their pain. In fact, “at least...” usually does the opposite: it makes the person feel even more isolated.

Sticking to this model will keep you out of a well-intended sympathetic, “At least...” Stick to the wisdom of the script! Don’t try to make things better. Rarely can a response make things better. What makes things better is *connection* – communicating that the person isn’t alone by deep empathic listening and using the selected powerful questions offered here.²⁷

Continuing the above dialogue, let’s see how The Rich Young Ruler Question might function.

P: *So, what support do you need for that to happen?*

M: I need to set aside time for it. Ever since I agreed to babysit my grandchild my personal time has been disrupted.

P: *So, in order for you to say Yes to having personal quiet time at home, what do you need to say No to?*

M: I think I need to say No to taking this on by myself. I could ask my husband to watch them sometimes too.

7. THE EUNUCH’S QUESTION: “What action will you take?” (“What small step will you take?”)

Look, here is water! What is to prevent me from being baptized? (Acts 8:36)

In the books of Acts, Luke tells of an Ethiopian eunuch, a high court official, returning from Jerusalem in his chariot. Bumping along a wilderness road, he is reading scripture from the prophet Isaiah, but not understanding it much. Touchingly, at the urging of the Holy Spirit, Philip runs up to the chariot and offers his help. Riding along together the Eunuch embraces the good news about Jesus as shared by Philip. Armed with this life-changing insight, the Eunuch takes action to make real his new relationship with Christ: “Look, here is water! What is to prevent me from being baptized?” He orders the chariot to stop and Philip baptizes him on the spot. (Acts 8:26-37)

²⁷ Brené Brown...

Action makes insight real. Action brings what one wants into reality. It doesn't have to be a big action. In fact, small may be better. It converts your Yes into reality. "This is what I really (really) want and now this is my first small step to bring it into reality, to create it, to make it happen."

Scripture has many other examples of action making insight real. Consider the two disciples on their way to the village of Emmaus on that third day after Jesus' crucifixion, talking about all that had happened in Jerusalem. A stranger joins them and interprets scripture for them about the meaning of these days. At the dinner table that evening, they finally recognize this esteemed stranger as no less than the risen Christ himself! Filled with joy, they immediately take action, returning to Jerusalem to share their discovery with fellow disciples. (Luke 24)

I often get asked about the difference between non-directive coaching and spiritual direction. They have much in common, notably the centrality of deep listening and powerful questions. However, coaching has two qualities that must be present for it to be coaching: an identified goal (what you want), and an agreed upon action plan (at least one clear step) to achieving it.

It's the agreed upon action step that takes the identified goal out of the realm of an aspiration or a hope, and into the realm of concrete reality. Granted, hopes and aspirations will probably be shared during the conversation up to this point, but now it's time to make a commitment – to take ownership for making what you really want.

As a former coach of mine used to say after I'd focused on something I really wanted: "Jim, what's the tiniest step you can take toward that?" Point: it doesn't have to be big, but it does have to be an action of some kind. It's not a coaching conversation without an agreed action to be taken.

Follow up questions to support "What action will you take?" could be: "What action do you *need* to take?"

- For visual learners it's helpful to ask, "What will it (the action or behavior) *look* like?"
- For an aural learner it could be, "What will it *sound* like?"
- And for the kinetic learner it could be, "What will it *feel* like?"

What simple step can you take *now* toward what you want?

Let's see how The Eunuch's Question could function in our ongoing conversation.

P: *So, in order for you to say Yes to having personal quiet time at home, what do you need to say No to?*

M: I think I need to say No to taking this on by myself. I could ask my husband to watch them sometimes too.

P: *Nice insight! So what action will you take?*

M: I will ask (negotiate, actually) with my husband to look after them a few hours a week to make space for my alone time.

P: Mary, I want to acknowledge your creative thinking around getting this important need of yours met. And this way, our young families who want to have their young children with them in worship will feel more welcomed!

M: Yes! I would like that. And maybe we'll even have more of them coming to us!

8. THE PEARL QUESTION: “What has been valuable for you in this conversation?”

The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it. (Matthew 13:44-46)

A coaching conversation often leads to an insight, an outcome, of real value for the coachee, one for which they have worked hard. That is the nature of non-directive coaching: no one hands you the answer or solves your problem for you. Rather, the non-directive coaching process is a rich process for discovering and using the coachee’s own inner resources that enable them to solve a problem themselves. Accordingly, ownership for the outcome is high, increasing the likelihood of implementation or follow-through.

Still, sometimes not high enough. Our fast-paced multi-tasking world fosters short attention spans that quickly turn elsewhere at the end of a coaching conversation. Bright ideas and inspired commitments can have a short half-life. Reinforcement is needed, like a vivid dream that startles you awake in the middle of the night: you’re eager to share it with a friend, confident that the vividness has embedded it firmly in memory. Back to sleep you go, only to discover only its bare remnant in the morning. The rich details have hidden themselves in some remote difficult-to-access region of memory. A treasure, yes, but now one hidden in a field.

Enter the Pearl Question. Asking the Pearl Question is both a gift from you to the coachee, and also a gift from the coachee to themselves – a double gift! You serve them powerfully with this invitation to hold on (catch) those pearls of insight and intended action before they fade away, and the do the same by sifting through the highlights of the conversation for those valuable insights that will enrich their world.

If the coachee’s first response seems spare, you can loop back the Persistent Friend question asking, “And what else?” as many times as seems helpful so as to keep the flow of pearls tumbling forth.

Notice that the Pearl Question is another open-ended question: it isn’t “Was this conversation valuable for you?” That question can be answered with a simple Yes or No, which is of little value to the coachee. Rather, its open-ended nature evokes an answer, confident that treasure *is* there.

I'm always amazed at the value delivered by this question – not only a firmer grasp of the pearls themselves, but also a realization of the progress the coachee has made during the coaching conversation – the payoff for their efforts. It sets them firmly on the new path they have created, supporting their future action toward what they want.

Lastly, the Pearl Question can have different versions, depending on what you want to emphasize. “What are you taking away?” “What is your main take-away?” “What was most useful from this conversation?” “What is top-of-mind for you as we conclude?” All are good. The one I prefer is, “What was most valuable from this conversation?” as it emphasizes the *value* for the person – and that coaching delivers value.

Here's how The Pearl Question could function in our ongoing dialogue –

P: Mary, I want to acknowledge your creative thinking around getting this important need of yours met. And this way, our young families who want to have their young children with them in worship will feel more welcomed!

M: Yes! I would like that. And maybe we'll even have more of them coming to us!

P: Lastly, *what has been valuable for you in this conversation?*

M: I've realized that Sunday worship isn't the only place I can hear God's voice and that I don't have to allow others to deprive me of it!

P: Wow! I love it!

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

The non-directive coaching process employed by this simple eight-question Faith-Full model is a leadership tool that can be used to good effect by most anyone willing to try. Adding this to your toolbox will make you a more effective leader. Faith communities stagnate or move forward in direct relation to the quality of their leadership. We know this.

Non-directive coaching resonates with what preaching master, Rev. Fred Craddock, observed, “Good preaching is speaking *for* the people not *to* them.” Rev. Michael Piazza added, “By that, he meant that good preaching isn't when people are awed by the preacher's wisdom and insight, but when they are allowed to discover their own.”²⁸ The coach stays in the background allowing themselves to be a vehicle facilitating the coachee's journey of discovery.

For any group or organization to remain vital, it must change, and often. Contrary to the oft-touted idea that people don't like change, my experience is that it isn't that they don't like change, it's that they don't like the experience of *being changed* by an external force. Non-directive coaching helps people to change in the way *they want* to change – to choose it themselves. This kind of change is much more likely to endure.

²⁸ Michael Piazza, *Fishing in a Shallow Sea*...p. 69

APPENDIX

Bungay Stanier's Seven Question Model

1. **THE KICKSTART QUESTION:** What's on your mind?
2. **THE AWE QUESTION:** And what else?
3. **THE FOCUS QUESTION:** What is the real challenge here for you?
4. **THE FOUNDATION QUESTION:** What do you want?
5. **THE LAZY QUESTION:** How can I help?
6. **THE STRATEGIC QUESTION:** If you're saying Yes to this, what are you saying No to?
7. **THE LEARNING QUESTION:** What was most useful for you?

REFERENCES