

Coaching for Change: A Leader's Guide to Asking the Right Questions



Six Lenses for Choosing the Right Coaching Questions

Effective coaching isn't about asking more questions—it's about asking the right kind of question at the right moment.

1. BUILDING PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY

(Use these first—especially when resistance or hesitation shows up)

- What feels hardest about trying this right now?
- What concerns do you have that we haven't talked about yet?
- What feels risky about this change for you?
- What support would make this feel doable—not perfect, just doable?
- What would help you feel more confident trying this next time?

2. SURFACING BELIEFS & ASSUMPTIONS

(Use these when behavior or mindset feels stuck)

- What do you believe students need in order to be successful here?
- What assumptions might we be making about this student or group?
- How might this behavior make sense given the demands of the task?
- What experiences might be shaping how students are responding?
- How does this belief shape what students experience in the classroom?

3. COACHING INSTRUCTION AS BEHAVIOR SUPPORT

(Use these during lesson debriefs or walkthrough follow-ups)

- What were students being asked to think, feel, or do in this lesson?
- Where might students have gotten stuck cognitively or emotionally?
- Which part of the lesson required the most self-regulation?
- What instructional demand may have exceeded the supports provided?
- What could we build into the lesson next time to prevent frustration or shutdown?

4. IDENTIFYING SYSTEM BARRIERS

(Use these when multiple adults are struggling with the same issue)

- Where is the system making this harder than it needs to be?
- What expectations might be unclear or inconsistent?
- What routines or structures are missing or not working as intended?
- What supports are we expecting teachers to create alone?
- If many people are struggling with this, what might that tell us?

5. SUPPORTING ADULT LEARNING & SKILL DEVELOPMENT

(Use these to move from compliance to capacity-building)

- What part of this skill are you still developing?
- What feels manageable to try next—not everything, just one step?
- What would help you practice this in a low-risk way?
- What kind of feedback would be most helpful right now?
- Who could support you as you work on this?

6. USING DATA FOR GROWTH (NOT PUNISHMENT)

(Use these to keep data conversations productive and non-threatening)

- What does the data help us understand—not judge?
- What patterns are we noticing across students or classrooms?
- What's working that we should protect or build on?
- What's one small adjustment we could test next?
- How will we know if the change is helping?

OPTIONAL CLOSING QUESTIONS (GREAT FOR REFLECTION OR FOLLOW-UP)

- What's one thing you want to keep working on?
- What's one support you need from me?
- What would success look like a few weeks from now?
- What questions are still lingering for you?

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