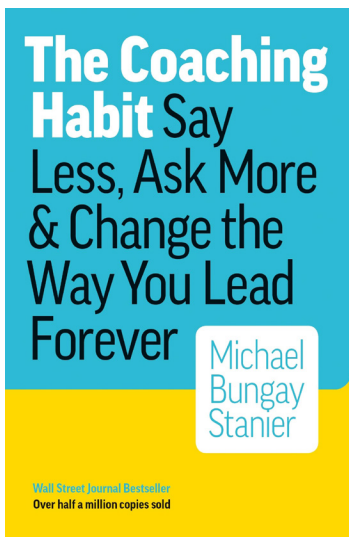


EXECUTIVE BOOK SUMMARIES

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Michael Bungay Stanier founded Box of Crayons, a learning and development company that helps organizations transform from advice-driven to curiosity-led. He currently leads MBS.works, a place where people find the clarity, confidence and community to be a force for change.

The Coaching Habit

THE NUTSHELL

Box of Crayons Press 2016

The essence of coaching lies in helping others and unlocking their potential. When you build a coaching habit, you can more easily break out of three vicious circles that plague our workplaces: creating overdependence, getting overwhelmed and becoming disconnected.

At the heart of this book are seven questions that will break you of these three vicious circles and elevate the way you work. The questions work not only with your direct reports but also with customers, suppliers, colleagues, bosses and even (occasionally) spouses and teenage children. These questions have the potential to transform your weekly check-in one-to-ones, your team meetings, your sales meetings and (particularly important) those non-meeting moments when you just bump into someone between scheduled events.

1. The Kickstarter Question: An almost failsafe way to start a chat that quickly turns into a real conversation is the question, “What’s on your mind?” It’s something of a Goldilocks question, walking a fine line so it is neither too open and broad nor too narrow and confining.

Because it’s open, it invites people to get to the heart of the matter and share what’s most important to them. You’re not telling them or guiding them. You’re showing them the trust and granting them the autonomy to make the choice for themselves. And yet the question is focused, too. It’s not an invitation to tell you anything or everything. It’s encouragement to go right away to what’s exciting, what’s provoking anxiety, what’s all-consuming, what’s waking them up at 4 a.m., or what’s got their hearts beating fast.

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2. The AWE Question: I know they seem innocuous. Three little words. But “And What Else?”—the AWE Question—has magical properties. With seemingly no effort, it creates more—more wisdom, more insights, more self-awareness, more possibilities—out of thin air. There are three reasons it has the impact that it does: more options can lead to better decisions; you rein yourself in; and you buy yourself time.

3. The Focus Question: You need a way to manage the temptation to jump into fixing that opening challenge. You need to stop yourself (and your team) from getting entangled in the first problem that’s put on the table. Slow down just a little and you’ll get to the heart of the issue. And here’s the question that makes all the difference: “What’s the real challenge here for you?”

These first three questions can combine to become a robust script for your coaching conversation. You’ll be surprised and delighted at just how often these are exactly the right questions to ask.

Open with: *What’s on your mind?* The perfect way to start; the question is open but focused.

Check in: *Is there anything else on your mind?* Give the person an option to share additional concerns.

Then begin to focus: *So, what’s the real challenge here for you?* Already the conversation will deepen. Your job now is to find what’s most useful to look at.

Ask: *And what else (is the real challenge here for you)?* Trust me, the person will have something. And there may be more.

Probe again: *Is there anything else?* You’ll have most of what matters in front of you now.

So get to the heart of it and ask: *What’s the real challenge here for you?*

4. The Foundation Question: “What do you want?” We often don’t know what we actually want. Even if there’s a first, fast answer, the question “But what do you really want?” will typically stop people in their tracks.

5. The Lazy Question: The power of “How can I help?” is twofold. First, you’re forcing your colleague to make a direct and clear request. That may be useful to him. He might not be entirely sure why he started this conversation with you. Sure, he knows he wants something, but until you asked the question, he didn’t know that he wasn’t exactly clear on what he wanted. Unless he was, in which case the question is useful for you, because now you can decide whether you want to honor the request. Second (and possibly even more valuably), it stops you from thinking that you know how best to help and leaping into action.

6. The Strategic Question: “If you’re saying Yes to this, what are you saying No to?” This question is more complex than it sounds, which accounts for its potential. To begin with, you’re asking people to be clear and committed to their Yes. Too often, we kinda sorta half-heartedly agree to something, or more likely, there’s a complete misunderstanding in the room as to what’s been agreed to. But a Yes is nothing without the No that gives it boundaries and form. And in fact, you’re uncovering two types of No answers here—the No of omission and the No of commission.

The first type of No applies to the options that are automatically eliminated by your saying Yes. If you say Yes to this meeting, you’re saying No to something else that’s happening at the same time as the meeting. The second type of No you’re uncovering—which will likely take the conversation another level deeper—is what you now need to say to make the Yes happen. It’s all too easy to shove another Yes into the bag of our overcommitted lives, hoping that in a Harry

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Potter magical sort of way it will somehow all be accommodated. This second type of No puts the spotlight on how to create the space, focus, energy, and resources that you'll need to truly do that Yes.

7. The Learning Question: "What was most useful for you?" With this question, you now complete the pair of questions known as the Coaching Bookends. You start with the Kickstart Question: "What's on your mind?" That takes you quickly into a conversation that matters, rather than meandering through small talk or spinning your wheels on data that's more distracting than it is useful. As you look to complete your conversation, before everyone rushes for the door, you ask the Learning Question: "What was most useful for you about this conversation?" Answering that question extracts what was useful, shares the wisdom and embeds the learning. If you want to enrich the conversation even further—and build a stronger relationship, too—tell people what you found to be most useful about the exchange. That equal exchange of information strengthens the social contract.

I believe that if you can make just these Seven Essential Questions part of your management repertoire and everyday conversations, you'll work less hard and have more impact, and your people, your boss, your career and your life outside work will thank you for it. But the real secret sauce here is building a habit of curiosity. The change of behavior that's going to serve you most powerfully is simply this: a little less advice, a little more curiosity.