**Coaching questions: 6 types and 71 powerful examples every coach and counsellor should know**



Asking powerful questions is one of the most important skills in coaching and counselling. The right questions help your clients to get clear on their goals, as well as to find answers and solutions to their problems.

Knowing the right types of questions and ask them at the right time is the key to a successful coaching process.

This article shows 6 different types of questions which are a powerful tool in coaching, counselling and therapy. Each type comes with several examples you can use in your daily practice.

**Coaching questions: 6 types and 71 powerful examples**

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**1) Circular questioning: What would your client say?**

Circular questioning gives your clients the chance to change their perspective and point of view. They won’t be asked about their own approach and position, but about the position of other people in their circle (environment). Circular questioning has its origin in systemic psychotherapy (family therapy) and systemic counselling, but it’s also a powerful tool in coaching.



It may be surprising, but the circular questioning model is primarily done with one client and not the whole group. The coach/counsellor (A) asks her client (B) what another person (C) might think about a particular question.

In some cases (family therapy, partnership coaching’s) it can be helpful that (C) is present while (B) answers. The direct confrontation can improve the mutual understanding. Client (B) makes an assumption about C’s behaviour or way of thinking. Of course, this doesn’t have to match with what C is really thinking or how she would act.

Oftentimes the answers are quite surprising for the other side (who is just listening). A very good example is couples therapy (or coaching) where one of them assess the actions and reactions completely different than the partner itself.

Circular questioning is also a powerful tool in one-to-one sessions. They give the coach or counsellor detailed insights on the thoughts of their client with regard to their environment.

**Benefits and effects of circular questioning:**

* Helps to change perspective and gain a new point of view
* Break free from old thought patterns and creating new ideas and solutions
* Helps the coach or counsellor to gain information about circumstances and processes within a group or system

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**Circular questioning examples for coaching and counselling:**

**Private:**

How do you think your mother feels when you’re always fighting with your sister?
How would your father react when you make your mother cry?
How does your son feel, when you’re always helping your daughter?
How does your wife feel, when you yell at your kids?
How would your partner answer this question?
What do you think does your partner expect from this relationship?
How does this behavior look like from the perspective of your wife?
Why did your friend react as she did and not like you expected her to do?
How would your partner react to this change?

**Business situations:**

How do you think your co-worker feels in this situation?
How would your colleague evaluate the situation?
How would your clients react to the increase in prices?
How would your boss to this change?
What would your co-workers say, if you represent this point of view?
How would your boss handle this situation?
What would your business partner say if you suggest this change to her?
From the standpoint of your boss: Who’s the better employee? You or your colleague?
If you ask your boss about the atmosphere within the team: What would she reply?

**2) Scale questions: On a scale of 1 to 10 questions**

What is a scale question?
Scale questions in coaching and counselling are a good tool to find out things that are difficult to measure or to call by its name. Scale questions make it easier to talk about subjective perceptions such as satisfaction, motivation, cognition, impressions, feelings and progress. They become measurable and comparable. These questions are usually on a scale of 1 to 10 (or on a scale of 1 to 5), while 1 is the weakest and 10 the strongest (consent, feeling). The client can answer the question and give it a certain value without having to define and express what exactly that means for her.

**Benefits and effects of scale questions:**

* Changes, improvements, differences and progress can be realized
* Can encourage self-monitoring
* Coach or counsellor gains information about feelings and perceptions without the need for clients to write them out

Scale questions are a good starting point for a deeper conversation. For example:

On a scale of 1 to 10: How well did you do since our last session?
If the client’s answer is a 5 the next question could be why just a 5? And what would have made it a 7?

**Scale questions – examples for coaching and counselling:**

On a scale of 1 to 10: How motivated do you feel?
How would you rate the importance of the problem on a scale of 1 to 10?
How would you rate your relationship on a scale of 1 to 10?
How happy are you with your new job on a scale of 1 to 10?
How would you rate your performance on a scale of 1 to 10?
On a scale of 1 to 10: How stressed are you during a presentation?
On a scale of 1 to 10: How happy are you with this decision?

**Possible follow-up questions:**

What has happened since the last time as you changed your rating from 5 to 7?
How did you manage to make it a 6?
What exactly needs to happen to make it from 6 to 8?
What do you think: Why did you reduce your rating from 6 to 4?

**3) Hypothetical questions: What if questions**



Hypothetical questions are usually future-orientated and give the client the possibility to think about a different point of view and new solutions. It’s not so much about finding a concrete solution to a certain problem but more about evaluating possibilities. The coaching client describes possible scenarios to solve a problem or to accomplish something. She proactively shows creativity.

Many times the clients find out very fast if this scenario or idea is feasible and worthwhile. They learn to estimate and calculate the consequences of this change or solution for them and their environment.

In difficult and deadlocked situations, the coach could ask:

What would you need to do to make your situation even worse?

It’s a good way to find out the essential conditions to solve this problem.

**Benefits and effects of hypothetical questions:**

* They stimulate the creativity of a client when they search for ideas and possible solutions
* Coach or counsellor can use the answers to evaluate the next steps in the process

**Best hypothetical questions – Examples for coaching and counselling:**

Usually, the questions start with „what would you do“ or „what if“.

How would you attack this challenge if money object?
What would you need to do, if you want to accomplish this goal faster?
What if you could decide alone what to do?
How would you solve this problem if time is not an issue?
What would a typical work week in this job look like in your opinion?
What would your partner do, if you put this plan into practice?
What if you would just stop complaining about your boss?
How would you react if someone asks you for help in this case?
How would your dream job look like?
What if you don’t solve this problem within 6 months? What are the consequences?

**4) The miracle question (Magic question): A must-have in your coaching toolbox**

What is the miracle question?



The miracle question is a great thought experiment in coaching and counselling. The question has its origin in the solution-focused therapy and its name is credited to Steve de Shazer and Insoo Kim Berg. The focus is on the future, on the goal the client wants to achieve. Instead of thinking how bad the situation is right now, the client switches attention to how life would be after the problem is solved. The miracle question is a hypothetical question which we’ve been talking about before.

This question makes the client think about how the perfect solution would look like to a difficult or „hopeless“ situation. The miracle question helps to find new motivation and provokes positive thinking.

**The miracle question – Examples for coaching and counselling:**

What if this problem would disappear from one day to another?
How would the following day look like (without this problem)?
How would you realize that this problem disappeared?
How would it change the relationship between you and your partner/co-worker/boss?
What would change if you wake up tomorrow and accomplished your goal?

**5) Paradox questions: What could you do not to win any clients?**



What’s paradox?
Paradox means contradictory. It’s a question that seems absurd but in reality, expresses a possible truth. Paradox questions in coaching and counselling aim to surprise the client by aggravating the problem. The question exaggerates the situation and gets the client thinking about new ideas and possible solutions.

Depending on the situation of the client it could make sense to announce the paradox question before asking. The coach confronts her client with a contrary scenario that she would expect and that could cause irritation. For example, you could ask your client what it would need to completely ruin her relationship. Paradox questions are a powerful tool whenever the client is stuck. The client will be forced to imagine how she completely loses control over the situation, which oftentimes leads to valuable reactions and statements.

There’s an exercise which allows the client to be angry about her boss every day on purpose, but only for ten minutes. The client actively thinks about the problem in a state of awareness. This exercise is helping to remove old patterns or habits and establish new ones.

**Paradox questions – Examples for coaching and counselling:**

What more would you need to do in order to have a burnout?
What needs to happen until your boss fires you?
What needs to happen to get your wife/husband to divorce you?
What would you need to do to completely ruin the project?
What could you do to sleep even worse?
What could you do to escalate the situation with your kids?
How could you go even less motivated to work every day?
What needs to happen that you’re even more upset about your boss?
What could you do to make the problem worse?

**6) Solution-focused questions (Focus questions):**



What is a focus question?
When we deal with problems we often have negative things on our mind. The focus questions in coaching put the clients focus on strengths, instead of weaknesses. The focus is on competencies, not inadequacies, on „what can“ rather than „what can’t“ be done. The focus is on the solution, not the problem.

Solutions focused questions in coaching, therapy or counselling give you the possibility to steer the conversation in a positive direction. They help to find out which strategies and options have already been tried and which capabilities and chances are still undetected.

**Benefits of focus and solution-focused questions:**

* Conversation in a positive and constructive direction
* Client concentrates on possibilities, resources and helpful people in his environment

**Solution-focused questions examples for coaching, therapy and counselling:**

In which situations is everything working fine and you don’t have these concerns or problems?
What is different in these situations?
How could you avoid these concerns during a positive period?
What do you need to change in order to have these positive periods more often?
How could help you with this?
Which resources or capabilities would be useful to accomplish this?
Did you overcome similar challenges in the past? How did you do it?
How did you manage to keep the situation under control?

**7) Conclusion: Powerful Coaching Questions – How and when to use them**

These 6 different types of questions can be summarized as systemic questions. They are not only a fundament for coaching but also for (systemic) counselling, (systemic) psychotherapy and family therapy. Asking the right questions to the client is an essential part of any coaching call, but they are also a perfect way to keep the process going between sessions.

You can use them as a tool to make the clients recap each session (What did I learn? What are my next action steps and to-dos?). Regular homework like questionnaires and worksheets are a great way to initiate an inner dialogue and the reflection of each client. Writing the answers down has a huge effect compared to just answering them spontaneously in a session. The client has as much time as she needs to think about the answer without the „pressure“ to say something immediately.
That’s also a huge benefit for the coach or counsellor. She doesn’t need to react or follow-up immediately but has a chance to think about the next steps in the process.