

and the next question is...

powerful questions for sticky moments



Rachel A. Alexander
and
Julia M.L. Russell

and the next question is...

powerful questions for sticky moments



Rachel A. Alexander
and
Julia M.L. Russell

Title Page

AND THE NEXT QUESTION IS

Powerful Questions for Sticky Moments

Rachel A. Alexander & Julia M. L. Russell

Publisher Information

First edition published in 2012 by MX Publishing
335 Princess Park Manor,
Royal Drive, London, N11 3GX
www.mxpublishing.co.uk
www.mxpublishing.com

Digital edition converted and distributed in 2012 by
Andrews UK Limited
www.andrewsuk.com

Copyright © 2012 Rachel A. Alexander & Julia M. L. Russell

The right of Rachel A. Alexander & Julia M. L. Russell to be identified as the author of this work has been asserted by them in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1998.

All rights reserved. No reproduction, copy or transmission of this publication may be made without express prior written permission. No paragraph of this publication may be reproduced, copied or transmitted except with express prior written permission or in accordance with the provisions of the Copyright Act 1956 (as amended). Any person who commits any unauthorised act in relation to this publication may be liable to criminal prosecution and civil claims for damage.

Although every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of the information contained in this book, as of the date of publication, nothing herein should be construed as giving advice. The opinions expressed herein are those of the author and not of MX Publishing.

Cover design by www.staunch.com

Dedication

Rachel dedicates this book to her four shining lights: Jacqui, Bonnie, Bex and Gill.

Julia - this book is dedicated to Roy, June, Mark & Jacqui and friends around the world; you continue to inspire me.

Foreword

I have heard it said that nonfiction writers often write the book they want to use. Rachel and Julia may have done that with the volume you are reading, and I am writing this foreword because I want it in print on my desk as well. The sooner the better - hardcover tooled leather, please.

There is something about having a reference at hand that assures us, when we are in the middle of chaos. Life often appears to be chaos, from any one single perspective at least. It usually is from mine.

Coaching sessions punctuate that chaos, with regular half hours or half days, sometimes only for a period of months, often for years. Coaching is incremental. Life happens a day or a week at a time; coaching happens one question at a time.

For people being coached, setting a regular time aside for themselves modifies the chaos of life. That marker holds the expectation that they will step back and allow themselves space to consider another week of doing and being. What do I want to build or develop? What do I want to let go of? What is next?

In many outstanding coaching sessions I have heard, the coach has only asked 6 or 8 questions altogether, and has not offered advice or solved anything. Masterful coaches ask well-timed questions, drawing from a repertoire they have added to over years of experience.

At the same time, experience can cause a coach to overuse a question or approach. This can happen with even the most powerful questions or the most skilled coaches. I was reminded of it as I read. As coaches, we need variety; we can't rely on a question or approach time and again. I found in this volume so many options to play with.

As I said at first, Rachel and Julia might have created this resource because they wish it had been available 10 years ago when they began coaching. It is for leaders and managers who want to improve their coaching style. For new coaches, what a

wonderful shortcut. For experienced coaches, here it is, finally, all the questions you will ever need in one volume.

Jan Elflin

Master Certified Coach (ICF)

Jan Elflin began coaching in 1993 and in 1998 she was one of the first forty coaches worldwide to be recognized as a Master Certified Coach (MCC) by the International Coach Federation. She was an early leader and pioneer in the field of coaching, bringing the language and tools of NLP into the practice of coaching. Her training organization, About Mastery, provides continuing education to experienced coaches worldwide.

Introduction

A great question is more valuable than a good answer. We invite you to look through these pages, find the right question for the moment and ask that powerful question which will unleash the innate wisdom in all of us. Read on.....

Objectives of the book

This is a working collaboration between two professional coaches whose objective is to reach out to more people, make a difference and contribute to the coaching profession by sharing knowledge through a published piece of work. **‘And the next Question is ...’** a very practical and easy to use book, which we hope will form part of every coach’s essential toolkit as it enables you to easily find key questions in some of the most distinctive areas of coaching, such as confidence, leadership, communications, balance and life-purpose.

What this book is/is not

This book can be used in a number of ways; as a memory jogger for experienced coaches, a reference or resource tool for the new coach, a trigger to send you off exploring on a quest of your own or a way to prepare for a coaching session by flicking through all the pages and seeing what grabs your attention. You could also use this book to focus on a particular chapter which you believe may help your client, to gain inspiration or as an escape in those “sticky” moments when one’s mind goes blank.

What this book is not is an exhaustive list of all the questions one might need in a coaching session. It is a list of questions which we have gathered or created during more than 10 years of practical professional coaching experience, research and feedback from clients and colleagues alike and which we would like to share with a wider community.

These questions have helped us in “sticky moments” when we have thought “*what could be the next really great question I could ask?*” or “*Help, what do I say next?!*” Sometimes the answer may be “*Nothing*”; silence is golden (to coin a phrase) and often enables the client to find their own answer and sometimes another question for themselves. However, if something does come or needs to be said it is our hope that the following pages provide some assistance in finding the question that makes the difference, or moves you / your client on, maybe even that “killer question” or what we prefer a “powerful question”.

How to read/use this book

This book has been constructed as a reference or resource book. It is divided into chapters and at the beginning of each chapter is a guide as to the contents of that chapter, listed in alphabetical order for ease of reference. At the start of each section is a shaded area which provides our definition of that particular topic and any important points that we feel would enhance your experience of that section. The questions are then listed, in no particular order, although sometimes, you may find there is a flow or sequence to the questions, which you may or may not follow as is your wish. Some questions may appear similar and it is our way of providing alternatives as they may feel different / elicit a different response when asked in a different context. We also thought it important to replicate some questions as not all questions are mutually exclusive to any one chapter.

The questions are numbered to enable you to refer back to a particular question at a later date, select a few of your favourites and be able to pinpoint them “in the moment” with ease later on.

Also within each of the chapters, at the end, there is a blank page, entitled “My Favourite Questions”, to allow you to write your own notes or add further powerful questions, which may have been triggered from reading the questions on the previous pages.

Beliefs

Beliefs are the principles / rules / assumptions that guide our actions, they are our reality and we act upon them. Questions that challenge them can cause change - moving the client forward into a different, more positive action or place.

- What do you believe about time? [e.g. time is money, there is never enough time etc]
- What is really important to you about time?

Within some questions you will find an “X”. The intention is that where this appears the client’s own words are to be used within the question. For example:

- What has to happen before x?
- If you did more of X what would you get from this?

This book can be used across all of the different ways of coaching. In telephone coaching it can sit on the desk alongside the coach and provides easy access to questions “in the moment” by flicking through the pages. For face-to-face coaching it could be used to get into the right frame of mind prior to the session starting, to cherry pick some new questions to retain in a client folder specific to that session/client or as a revision/learning aid. The questions could also be used for team coaching in a workshop environment by choosing those pertinent to the topic under discussion.

Who it is for and why will it be useful?

This book is a significant resource aimed at the following:

New coaches to develop their collection of questions as they develop and grow as coaches.

Experienced coaches as a refresher of questions which they may have used in the past and forgotten, as a memory jogger, to provide variety and stretch them to step out of their comfort zone

External coaches

Internal coaches

Managers and leaders who use coaching skills within their business or company.

Individuals who want to use a coaching style to develop people in a non- business organisation or to self-coach.

In fact anyone and everyone who has an interest in asking questions as a means of developing, growing or improving themselves, their team or organisation and comes across those “sticky moments” when the mind goes blank, your flow stops and you reach for this book. You flick through the pages and the perfect question pops out at you. You ask it and are back into your flow with yourself, your client or whomever you are with.

This book has been written because a need was identified. We had been collecting, and sharing, questions for some time and there was no one place where we could go to find a large quantity of useful and powerful questions covering a number of common issues/topics which we had come across in our coaching sessions with clients. Our hope is that this becomes a major resource to the coaching and business community.

About The Authors

Both Rachel and Julia are Professional Certified Coaches accredited by the International Coach Federation (ICF) and follow the code of ethics and coaching competencies as set out by the ICF. Coaching has become well known over recent years and there are many different forms and models of coaching. The ICF defines coaching as *partnering with clients in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximize their personal and professional potential.*

In addition we would like to add that to us coaching is not just focused at the behavioural level; it also covers generative change at all levels and is about helping people effectively achieve their outcomes. Our coaching is, mainly non-directive and incorporates many different models from the coaching world. The essential elements for us at all times are to be fully present with the client, always to demonstrate flexibility and remain with the client’s agenda, whichever way that twists and turns.

How we came to write this book

Rachel - Since studying psychology in 6th form and later as part of my degree, I have been fascinated by how and why people operate as they do, but it was only when I began to lead teams that I really began to focus this fascination in the practical world. As I trained to be a professional coach I was aware of the number of books written and published concerning coaching - also the number of books that I seemed to buy, but barely dipped into and that at the end of the day the most used and useful “book” I had was one I had created myself. The 24 pages of Powerful Questions I had compiled was not only a great tool for scanning prior to a coaching call to get me into the right frame of mind, but it was also the right resource, especially when I was a novice coach - available at the right time i.e. during a coaching call - if I needed some inspiration to help my client move forward.

I knew this tool was right for me and I felt strongly it was something that would be right for other coaches too. There was nothing similar on the market that I could find. The idea took shape - this was the book, as early as I could remember that I would like to write - with someone who felt as passionately as I did - enter my co-author, Julia.

Julia - My journey started as a 4 year old growing up in Africa where my love of books developed and grew by feeding my imagination and love of exploration, adventure and travel. I have always been fascinated by language, how different people connect and communicate and throughout a long career in finance and business travelling the world asking questions, listening to the answers and gathering information was a common theme. When I left the corporate world to establish an international coaching business my route to becoming an Executive Coach (ICF PCC accredited) was through Neuro Linguistic Programming (NLP) which I studied to NLP European Coaching Certification.

I had become known, during my training, as the research expert by dint of the number of books I had on all manner of topics and was often contacted for information, help with a tricky situation or just to bounce ideas off. From the beginning I had also started collecting powerful questions as a way of embedding the learning along the journey and shared some with colleagues. Throughout my life people have come along who have been significant in accompanying me on my journey; who have shared my values, provided encouragement and seen some potential - Rachel is one of those people and we had reached that point in the road together which said - write that book!

Acknowledgements

We would like to acknowledge our many coaching colleagues, clients, trainers and “influencers” in our coaching journey over the last 10 years who have fed our love of questions and in particular Jan Elflin who has provided both guidance and encouragement for many years and told us to just get on and do it!

Our special thanks go to all those who reviewed our work and supported us along the way as it developed particularly the following, who spent an inordinate amount of time reviewing the book in its entirety - David Buswell (thank you especially for your

meticulous editing!), Ivan Waters, Valerie Malisse and Jacqui Alexander.

Finally we would like to acknowledge the importance of the ICF to us both in maintaining standards in the coaching profession and providing an internationally recognised professional body to which we are both delighted to belong.

Chapter 1

Client - session management

1st Coaching Session

These questions reflect the need to build the foundations of the coaching relationship and explore the reality of your client's world.

- What is currently impossible for you to do, that if it were possible, would change everything?
- How will you let me know if we are getting into territory you would rather stay out of?
- What is your personal goal for our time together?
- What do you think this experience might teach you?
- How might the learning you get from this experience help you in the future?
- How will stretching in this way develop your abilities?
- What do you want to notice while you are taking this action?
- What could we work on that would make the biggest difference to you?
- What is the biggest challenge in your life today?
- How will you know we were successful?
- What is it about coaching that will make it a good fit for you?
- Would you like me to ask you about that?
- Are you choosing the life you live?
- How will you choose to live your life instead?
- How will you treat yourself well?
- If you thought of yourself as the majority stakeholder in your life - how does that change things?
- What would be 100% right now?
- What will you say 'yes' to?
- What will you say 'no' to?
- What strategic decisions will help the system flourish into the next decades?
- How would dwelling in reality, not possibility, cause a difference?
- How would dwelling in possibility, not reality, cause a difference?
- What has to happen before X?
- What do you want instead?
- How do you want to use me as your coach?
- What do you know about what motivates you?
- What help do you need to move quickly towards your goals?
- Do you want me to hold you accountable to take action?
- What might you achieve if you committed to in-between assignments?

- What is working for you?
- What is not working for you?
- What might you want to change?
- What additional resources will move you forward?
- How will you want to use me in this area?
- What is the real issue?
- What makes this an issue now to you / to others?
- Who owns this issue / problem?
- How important is it on a scale 1 - 10?
- How much energy do you have for a solution on a 1 - 10 scale?
- What would increase your energy?
- What have you already tried?
- If you could imagine this problem has already been solved - what would you see, hear, feel?
- What did you / or do you do to get in your own way?
- What enables you to be really present?
- What interferes with you being really present?
- What is it like for you to be really present?
- How would you like to use this time now in the present?
- Where will you try and get me to give you feedback?
- Where will you get slippery with me?
- How will I know you are avoiding an issue?
- What would be the most valuable topic to focus on?
- What topic are you hoping I won't bring up?
- What do you perceive threatens your peace?
- What do you perceive threatens you / your work / business?
- What do you perceive threatens your health?
- What do you perceive threatens your personal fulfillment?
- What does all this mean for you?

Accountability

Is about having your clients account, without blame or judgment, for what they said they were going to do.

- What will you do?
- When will you do it?
- What will you do to monitor your progress?
- How will you know?
- What will you need to know, to know that you've achieved it?
- What milestones will you set up?
- How will you know you're on track?
- How often will you check you're on track?
- What do you believe got in the way of achieving what you said you would do?

- How will you report back to me when you have taken this challenging step?
- What resources could you begin to explore before our next session?
- What do you already have?
- Where will you find the resources you need?
- What is going to help you stay on track?
- What would help you remember to do this?
- What kind of structure would serve you?
- How can this structure work better for you?
- How do you want to track your progress with this task?
- What support do you need from me to take the action you want to take?
- How will you record your progress?
- Who else can you enlist to support your agreed outcomes / coaching accountabilities?
- What has enabled you to stay on track in the past?
- What important learning might come out of taking this action?

Beginning a Session

These questions enable you, and your client, at the beginning of a session to set the context and focus on the outcomes they want to achieve during that particular session.

- When you leave this coaching session, how would you like things to be for you?
- How do you want to spend our time together?
- What are you hoping for from this session?
- Where do you want to focus your attention today?
- What is your agenda for this session?
- Where do you want to start?
- What would you like to have happen by the end of this session?
- What is the most important thing that you and I should be talking about today?
- What has become clear since we last met?

End of Each Session Debrief

Rounding off a coaching session with a series of reflective questions allows the client to integrate / consolidate.

- What stands out for you from this session?
- If you could capture your learning from this session in three or four words, what would they be?
- What do you take away from our conversation that will influence your actions?
- How will you use it?
- When you reflect on our time in this session, what do you notice?

- What is the learning from today?
- What did you notice about your process as we were working together?
- What, if any, ideas do you have about how this task was accomplished?
- What future changes have come out of your learning?
- What did you enjoy?
- What was successful?
- What was easy?
- What would you like more of?
- What would you like less of?
- Where might you have dug deeper into what was really going on?
- What would have really stretched you?
- How will you make time to achieve your accountabilities before our next session?
- What method would you like to use to report back to me?
- What would you need to do between now and the next session to make it even more impactful for you?
- On a scale of 1 - 10, how much closer did you move towards your outcomes?
- What would you like to do before our next appointment that would move you forward on your outcomes?
- Do you have an enquiry / question that you would like to ponder before our next meeting?
- What more can I do to assist you?
- What do you want to take away from this session?
- What are you grateful for?
- Did you do your best today?
- What can you do better tomorrow?
- What are you going to achieve tomorrow?
- What is your intention as you leave this session?
- How do you suppose it will all work out?
- What will that get you?
- Where will this lead?
- What are the chances of success?
- What is your prediction?
- Is there anything else you want to add to this subject or are we done?
- What stood out for you in our session today?

Final Session

This session is a time for integration, consolidation and reflection of the whole coaching programme.

- What themes have we covered?
- How does this piece fit into the whole?
- How is this similar to other experiences you have had?

- How is this dissimilar to other experiences?
- What does this learning build upon?
- How does this fit with your values?
- What is the learning from this experience?
- How do you make sense of this?
- What accountability / action would be appropriate to take now we have concluded our coaching?
- How would you now describe where we started?
- What patterns did you notice?
- What worked that you want to continue with?
- Where will all this take you?
- What will you do differently?
- How will you teach / instruct others to work with you?
- What have others told you that they have noticed?
- How do you now want to work with colleagues / family?
- What behaviour changes have you noticed?
- What was the single most important change?
- What are the most valuable ideas and techniques you have received from this coaching programme?
- How will you strengthen and maintain your gains from coaching?

Personal Strategies

This section focuses on more in-depth questions relating to how your client operates.

- What strategy do you have to make the changes you would like to?
- How do you get from where you are to where you want to be?
- How would you do that?
- If you did more of X what would you get from this?
- What is the pay-off of being where you are now?
- What would you need in order to create a clear direction?
- If you've identified a clear direction, do you feel on track?
- What do you need to do to feel on track?
- What would you like to commit to - that you're really clear about?
- What requires immediate attention?
- Are you completely free to talk about X?
- Is it all right for us to go further with this issue?
- How receptive are you to hearing a hard truth?
- How receptive are you to others commenting on your behaviour?
- What speed would you like to travel at with coaching?
- How will you let me know if we are getting into territory you would rather stay out of?
- What is the underlying pattern that you have observed?
- Is there anywhere you would rather we didn't go?

- What would be the most important topic to focus on right now?
- Which outcome would be most valuable for you?
- By undertaking this coaching, what will be different for you?
- What is the bottom-line of the current situation?
- What could we work on right now that would really put a smile on your face?
- What makes this a good time to make a commitment to achieving your goals?
- If money was not a consideration, how would you live your life?
- What thoughts are going through your mind in this particular situation?
- What would you like to do / focus on first?
- What is the clear and specific goal you would like to achieve?
- What could you do?
- What would you really like to do?
- What is out of harmony?
- What do you do to restore it?
- If you couldn't fail, what would you do?
- What can you do now to create that reality?
- What issues could this create for you?
- How will you tell this story in the future?

Ponderings (aka Enquiries)

This section provides open-ended questions for the client to take away and ponder in-between the sessions. Sometimes called enquiries.

- What is 100% for you in life / work / relationships?
- What is it to have a full, rich life?
- What is integrity?
- How do you operate?
- What is your prevalent mood?
- When you think about your prevalent mood - is it a habit?
- What is choice?
- What is it to choose?
- Are you being nice or are you being real?
- Where is your attention? (*On self, others, work, daydreams, vision*)
- What keeps you going?
- What frees you up?
- Where are you too hard on yourself?
- What is present when you are at your best?
- When are you unable to laugh at yourself?
- Who are you becoming?
- What motivates you?
- What is it to be creative?
- What is it to be tenacious?
- What is it to be passionate?

- How have you withheld yourself from life?
- Is what you are doing, right now, life affirming or life numbing?
- What is the lie?
- Where do you give your power away?
- Who do you give your power to?
- When do you give your power away?
- What are your false assumptions?
- What do you pretend (to know or not to know)?
- What do you need to leave alone?
- Where are you an automatic “no” or “yes”?
- Where do you limit yourself?
- What is it to move towards the fear?
- Where are you selling out on yourself?
- Where are you uncompromising?
- Where are you too flexible?
- What are you unwilling to risk?
- What is it to be grateful?
- What will recharge your batteries?
- What is fun?
- How can you contribute to your reserves of fun / balance / resourcefulness?
- How can you have this be easy?
- What is grace / serenity?
- What truly makes you laugh?
- Do you choose heavy or do you choose light?
- What is abundance?
- How can this be playful and light?
- When will you take a break today?
- What is it to be generous with yourself today?
- What do you regret?
- What are you unwilling to change?
- Where are you taking your foot off the gas?
- What decision have you been avoiding?
- Where do you stop short?
- What are you being right about?
- What are you settling for?
- What are you overlooking?
- How do you sabotage yourself?
- What do you expect of yourself?
- What is it to be proactive?
- What is it to be fluid / flexible?
- What is completion?
- Where are you incomplete?
- Who have you become?
- What have you learned about yourself?
- What is momentum?
- What will keep you on track?

- What acknowledgement would you like to give yourself?
- What would be a big stretch for you before our next session?
- What do you consider beyond your ability?
- What would be a stretch for you?
- What makes you think anything is beyond you?
- What would happen if you tried it?
- How could you raise the bar for yourself?
- What would be an even bigger goal?
- What is the highest you could aspire to?
- What would you aspire to do if you hadn't set a limit?

Reality Check (with a balance wheel)

Questions to assist your client, when they have completed a coaching balance wheel, in taking a snap shot of how satisfied they are with their current work / life right now.

- How satisfied are you with the current state of balance?
- How fulfilled is your life right now?
- What struck you when you viewed your balance wheel?
- What do you notice as you look at your wheel?
- What surprises you about it?
- What segment needs urgent attention?
- Which sections are too small?
- If each section were marked as 10 / 10 what would it look like / feel like?
- If you could take one action what would it be?
- What would you like to change?
- What could you do to change this?
- What would that do for you?
- How would changing a section make a difference?
- When any section is the right size, how does it enhance what is going on in all the other sections?
- Specifically how does it impact the whole wheel?
- What sections, if any, benefit disproportionately?
- What do you want to do to prioritise these?
- What else are you willing to explore in creating balance for yourself?
- Which section requires immediate attention?
- If you changed one section where would you derive the greatest benefit with the least amount of effort?
- What actions could change more sections of the wheel?
- Who else could be impacting the balance of your wheel?
- What trade-offs are you willing to make?
- What will you now do to be seen / heard?

Values

These questions elicit what is truly important to your client. They are unique to your client, the qualities that define them and help them make choices. Values relate to principles rather than morals and are why we do what we do.

- What is important to you?
- What is important to you about work / relationships?
- What is it about that, which makes it important?
- When did you decide that that was important to you?
- What do you really care about?
- What really matters to you?
- What incredible / peak moments have you had?
- What makes them so special?
- What emotions were happening at that time?
- What really annoys you?
- What is it about that which causes you to feel that way?
- What actions are most aligned with your values?
- Are you living your most important values now, in the present?
- What would you need to be doing differently?
- What bits are missing?
- What would your top five values be?
- What do you want to change or improve upon in order to be more congruent with your values?
- As you look at each of your most important values are they moving you towards what you want or away from what you don't want?
- How will you know the difference?
- If you had all your values present in your work, what would make you leave it?
- What is it that makes you feel really motivated?
- What happens to you that lets you know you're motivated?
- What needs to be present to be motivated?
- What is really at stake in living your values?

Year End Review

A series of questions that will enable your client to reflect, take the learnings and focus on the future, leaving the past behind.

- What lessons have you learned this past year?
- What do you need to stop, start and / or change in the year ahead?
- What reasons do you have for doing these things?
- What New Year resolutions have you made in the past that you have stuck to?
- What made you be successful with them?