

POWERFUL INSIDEOUT COACHING QUESTIONS

***WHEN YOU'RE READY TO
TEACH OTHERS TO LIVE FROM
THE INSIDEOUT***



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POWERFUL INSIDEOUT COACHING QUESTIONS

When you are a coach, your most valuable skill is your ability to ask discerning questions. Your client's success depends on it. Your ability to ask powerful questions come second only to building a trusting, supportive and challenging relationship with your clients.

InsideOut Coaching is about helping your clients articulate their goals, look at the behaviors they are currently using to accomplish those goals, uncover any self-sabotage they may be using, create a plan with a good chance of success, and hold your clients accountable to the actions to which they've committed.

InsideOut Coaching does not allow clients to spend a lot of time and energy on things over which they have no control. For example, we don't want people formulating goals for other people, hoping to improve or change someone who doesn't want to change. We also steer clients away from creating and maintaining a victim role, believing the reason they can't succeed at what they are trying to do is because of someone else or circumstances getting in their way.

We help people identify obstacles and then go around, over or through them toward their goals. When there truly is an insurmountable obstacle, which is rarer than you think, we help our clients to identify it as something over which they have no control. At which point they can work toward a new goal, challenge their perceptions about the goals, change their behavior to get more of what they want, or work on getting more of what they need when they can't have exactly what they want.



If this sounds like something you'd like to add to your skill set, then read on. You're going to love the Powerful InsideOut Coaching Questions I've compiled for you.

GOALS, HOPES, DREAMS AND DESIRES:

When you ask the question, "What do you want?" you are actually asking your client to tell you about his or her goals, hopes and desires.

There are many way to ask the question, "What do you want?" Some examples are:

- What do you want?
- What do you *really* want?

- What are you working on?
- If you could change one thing, what would it be?
- If you could improve your relationship with one important person in your life, who would that be?
- What's one thing, if you had it, would make you feel more successful?
- If things were perfect, how would they look?
- If I could wave a magic wand, what would you want to happen?
- If you found a genie in a bottle, what would be your three wishes?

The idea is to get at the person's ideal world—their “all they want” world. It's perfect there.

If clients won't tell you what they want, it is most often a case of not having a strong enough relationship with you rather than the client not knowing. There are rare times when a client might not know what he or she wants or perhaps is conflicted about it, but for the most part, people know what they want. They just aren't always willing to share that. In this case, you will want to stop asking that question and go back to working on strengthening your relationship so you can build trust.

DON'T WANTS:

Sometimes it's easier for people to tell you what they don't want. This is an OK place to begin but you, as the coach, always want to turn a “*don't want*” into a “*do want*.” There is far more energy available to work on what you want rather than complaining about what you don't want. Another way to look at it is if you wrote down everything you didn't need on your grocery list and went shopping, how likely is it you would come home with what you wanted to buy? And yet another thought is what happens when you tell someone to stop thinking about pink elephants? Of course, they are thinking about pink elephants. So, talking about what you *don't* want makes it quite difficult to accurately formulate what you *do* want.

So, how do you help a person turn their “*don't want*” into a “*do want*”? Ask them this:

- If you weren't doing that what would you be doing?
- If people stopped doing that, what would change for you?
- If you didn't have that, what would you have instead?
- If you could stop being that, how would you want to be?

Do you see how these are all designed to take the negative to the positive and then you have a goal you can work with.

WANTS AND GOALS THAT INVOLVE OTHERS:

Another thing that often happens is that people want something from someone else in order to be happy. If only my wife were more affectionate . . . If only my husband were more attentive. . . If only my children were more respectful . . . If only my boss appreciated all my hard work . . . None of these are positions of empowerment because the client has put their happiness in someone else's hands.

In these cases, asking this question will help:

- If "those people," [whomever they are] were doing exactly what you want them to do, what would change for you?

You can keep asking this question until you burrow through to something the person actually has control over. Some examples are, "If my wife weren't crazy, then I wouldn't have to worry so much." "If my children were more respectful then I wouldn't have to be so embarrassed when they disrespect me or others." "If my wife were more sexual, then I wouldn't have to seek out other women." Do you see what each of these answers give you, the coach? Something you can work with because you can help clients worry less, not be embarrassed by the behavior or others, and take responsibility for the choices they make in their lives. You have whittled the behavior down to something that's within a person's circle of control and you can reframe the want, saying "So what you *really* want is to worry less." And then, you can continue working the process from there. It's difficult to help a client fix something in another person short of asking for what he or she wants.

UNCLEAR, VAGUE GOALS:

You may also run into a client who talks about a vague or ambiguous goal. If your client lacks specificity of his or her want, then you can ask the have-do-be questions to add substance to the picture. The more detailed the want, the more likely the person will be to pursue it. Here are the have-do-be questions:

- If you had what you want, then what would you have that you don't have now?
- If you had what you want, then what could you do that you aren't doing now?
- If you had what you want, how would you be different?

These questions help you get more detail to help your clients really zero in on what it is they want.

HAS THE ABILITY BUT ISN'T MAKING PROGRESS:

Another situation you may encounter is the client who knows what he or she wants and has the skills to get it but isn't making progress toward their stated goals. There are several things to ask in this situation:

- Is this what you still want?
- What other things do you want that are getting in the way of reaching your goal?
- What might you have to give up to get what you want?

These questions are designed to uncover other deeper things a person may want that they may not even be aware of. We say we want to lose weight but somewhere we know if we lose weight, we may have to give up time with our friends who don't support that. We want to go back to school but stall because it will seriously affect the stability of our marriage. We



want to move ahead in our career but don't do it because taking care of a sick parent takes precedence. Uncovering those competing wants and bringing them into the light help clients evaluate what's most important to them.

Exploring your client's perfect world, their heart's hopes and desires, is a very productive place to work with a client. Sometimes, we allow ourselves to stay focused more on listening to our client's story by talking about the past or things the client doesn't control. This can be a trap where clients have all kinds of excuses for their behavior. It is here they can stay victims. If

you want to help your clients learn the strength of *InsideOut™ Empowerment*, you want to focus on what they want instead of what they tell themselves about what they want.

Focusing the conversation on what your client wants and has control over goes a long way toward beginning the process for positive change.

EXPLORING CLIENT'S CURRENT BEHAVIOR:

When you know what your client wants, the next thing you want to do is explore what he or she is currently doing to get it. Only you don't just want to know the things clients are engaging in that are helping them get what they want. You also want to explore those things that may be getting in the way of them getting what they want.

And whenever you explore what a client is currently doing, you want it to be present tense. You are not yet attempting to make a plan by asking, "What else could you do?" Or, "What would you need to do to get what you want?" Those questions point to a future planned behavior. At this point, you want to find out what has already been done and what is the person currently doing as it relates to his or her stated goals and dreams.

In essence, you are asking your clients to reveal all they do, think, and feel as it relates to moving in the direction of what they want. Even the physical things happening in their bodies are considered current behavior. So you may want to ask about health, aches, or illnesses with a medical cause.

A client will proudly declare the behaviors that are helping but are not so quick to confess those things they do that may be sabotaging their forward progress.

Here are some examples of possible questions:

- What are you doing to get what you want?
- Is there anything you are doing that might be getting in the way?
- What are you thinking as it relates to your goal?
- What things do you tell yourself about obtaining this goal?
- When you imagine yourself doing, having, and/or being what you want, how do you feel?
- How do you feel without it?
- Is your body sending you any signals?
- Is there anything else you are doing?
- Are you hoping and wishing for it?
- Do you have any thoughts that get in the way of accomplishing your goals?

Of course, there are many other ways of asking the same questions. The idea is for you to find a way that is comfortable to you and that honors the person you are. You want to develop a style of questioning that works for you and your clientele. You don't have to sound like me.

When you are exploring current behavior, it is acceptable for you, the coach, to mention behaviors you have noticed that the client might not report. This should never be done with an accusatory or judgmental tone. You would simply add the behavior to your summary of what the client has already mentioned. So, for example, your client says he wants better grades in school and the behavior he is using is taking books home every night, going to all classes, and having the teachers like him. And you know the student is also not studying for tests or doing homework, then you would say, "You want better grades so you are going to all your classes, having good rapport with your teachers, taking your books home and not studying for tests or doing homework." You are simply adding it to the list with no value judgment about whether it is good or bad. It's simply another thing the client is doing. You want your clients to look at all behavior—the good, the bad and the ugly.



WHAT IF NOTHING IS THE ANSWER?

Sometimes when you ask a client what he or she is doing to move toward their goal and the answer is, “Nothing.” This is more common when you are working with clients who have bought in to the victim mentality. They have convinced themselves there is nothing they *can* do so why would they even try.

When your client tells you he or she is doing “nothing,” you have a decision to make. Do you think your client most needs support or a kick in the behind? Sometimes one client will need support, while another would need the kick. In fact, there may be times, the same client would need support in one circumstances and the kick in a different circumstance. As the coach, it is up to your judgment which approach to use.

If you assess your client needs support, then you are going to list all the things you are aware of that he or she is doing, e.g. thinking about it, hoping for it, wishing for it, talking to you about it. Then you can ask, “Is there anything else you can think of?” This will usually generate some information from your clients as to some things that he or she *is* doing to accomplish the goal.

If you believe your client needs a more confrontive approach, then you might say something like this, “If you keep doing nothing, do you think you are going to accomplish your goal or get what you want?” This must be delivered with a neutral tone of voice. If you sound accusatory in your delivery, you run the risk of criticizing and that will not be good for the therapeutic process.

And if you think your client needs a combination, it might sound like this, “Well now, you’re talking to me about it. That’s something. I’ll also bet you are thinking about it. Maybe wishing for it. If you keep doing that, do you think you’ll get to your goal?”

Peter Finley Dunne, an American humorist, was quoted as saying, “My business is to comfort the afflict and to afflict the comfortable.” I’m in full agreement this is also what a good coach does. If your client is upset and frustrated, you comfort him. If she is comfortable and needs a little more incentive to move forward, you afflict her by asking skillfully time self-evaluation questions.

FACILITATING SELF-EVALUATION:

This is by far the most powerful part of the coaching session, securing a self-evaluation from your client. This is the part where you hold up a mirror for your clients and ask whether the behaviors they have been engaging in are likely to get them to the goal they want. **It is critically important that the client answers this question, not you.**



For example, you may be tempted to say, “So, what you are doing doesn’t seem to be helping you get to your goal.” That would be a mistake.

This process is called **self-evaluation** for a reason. If you answer the evaluation question, it is no longer your client's **self**-evaluation, it is a **coach**-evaluation. Your opinion really isn't important here. It's what your client evaluates that's important.

Ask the question and then wait for the answer. There may be pain in the silence but remember, you are attempting to "afflict the comfortable," so the more pain, the better. Resist the urge to make it all better by answering the question for the client. Let him or her sit with it for as long as it takes.

When the coach does the evaluating, you are in essence, giving your client an excuse not to look at his or her own behavior. With you doing the evaluating, the client can focus their attention on you and how you are wrong. And just who do you think you are anyway? An evaluation by you can be perceived as criticism. This is one deadly relationship habit you want to avoid in coaching.

Here are some ways to ask self-evaluation questions:

- If you keep doing things the way you have been, do you think you will get what you want?
- If you change nothing, will you get there?
- Does all this help you move in a forward direction?
- Is that helping or hurting?
- If you keep doing "nothing," will you accomplish your goal?
- Will this bring you closer to this person or pull you further away?
- What's most important?

These questions represent ways of asking your client to look at their present behavior and compare it with what they are saying they want. You are mostly asking your clients to change their focus. Most of us look at what we want and then compare it to all the reasons we can't get there. We want to hold onto our excuses and blame others for our inactivity or lack of success. In asking self-evaluation questions, you are actually asking your clients to shift from the land of excuses, victimhood and blame, and focus on the one thing over which they have total control—themselves!

When you ask your clients to look at their behavior, it isn't a comfortable shift. They may resist. It may require some expert explanation on your part as to why you want them to stop blaming outside circumstances for their situation. There is the past, there are other people, there are circumstances beyond one's control. I usually tell my clients all that may be true. I'm not arguing that things may be difficult.

What I tell clients is that I want them to be in control. I want them to have all their power. And I remind them that the only thing they can control is their behavior and their thinking. If they want to be empower, strong and achieve success, then they must focus on those

things over which they have control. History is what it is. People are going to continue doing



what they do. Uncontrollable circumstances will continue to exist. What is the variable of change? YOU! This explanation delivered in a supportive, understanding way will generally give clients enough information so they understand the usefulness and importance of looking at their own behavior.

LESS RESPONSIBLE CHOICES

Sometimes you'll encounter a situation where your client has effective behaviors to get what he or she wants but it isn't responsible. What's the difference? Effective behavior simply means it works to get the person what they want. It works, that's all. A bully who wants power and beats people up to get it has an effective behavior to get power. It works and that's all effective means.

However, many times our goal as coaches is to help our clients learn *responsible* ways to get what they want. How is this different? *Responsible* means you get your needs met while not interfering with others meeting theirs. So there are some additional questions to ask a person who says what they are doing is working but it may only be effective and not responsible.

Here they are:

- Is it against the rules?
- Is it against the law?
- Does it hurt anyone, including yourself?

Once a person admits their behavior is either against the rules, against the law, or hurts someone, then you have some follow up to do. First you want to talk to him or her about the consequences of continuing the behavior. A question might sound like this:

- And if you keep doing what you have been doing, what do you think will happen?
- If you get caught, what will be the consequence?
- Are you willing to pay the price?
- Is it worth it?

The goal in asking these questions is to be able to discuss the consequences. Many people continue in effective but not responsible behaviors because they don't know a better way. They might not think they will have to pay the consequences because they're either unaware of the consequences or they don't think they'll get caught. Having the conversation

about consequences in a nonjudgmental way you can help your clients consider the effects of their behaviors.

It is important to note that you should not be threatening consequences that you are going to impose. That would be using two Deadly Relationship Habits—threatening and punishing. You want to talk about societal consequences or what the demands of your job will force you to do. You don't ever want your client to get the impression you will relish doling out consequences should he or she continue with behavior that isn't responsible. In order for you to maintain a need-satisfying relationship with your client, you need to stay as divorced from negative consequences as you can.



You would then attempt to reframe the want and you would go back to the beginning of the process and exploring the ideal world. You might ask the question, "If we could figure out a way for you to have the power you want, without breaking the rules and hurting people, would you be interested in at least talking about it?" If he or she says yes, then you now have a new goal and you can ask the powerful questions about this new desire.

Once you have explored what a person wants and have asked the powerful questions, hopefully your client is ready to do something different. He or she realizes that what they have been doing isn't working to get them what they want. If this didn't happen and in the client's self-evaluation he or she determined what they were doing was working just fine and there was no need to change anything, then wish them well, always leaving the door open for them to return should they want to.

When someone believes what they are doing is working, he or she will not be willing to make any type of plan to do something different. Nagging will not do it. Threatening them will not do it. Wish them well and do not get in the way of whatever the consequences are. Do not intervene on behalf of your client. You can go back to your client if you have new information to give but short of that, allow them to live out the choices they have made.

Whose life is it anyway? Who has to live with the consequences of their choices? How can you know what could possibly be better for another person? You experience the world from two different places with vastly different experiences, beliefs and values. Allow clients to do what they believe will be best for them and support them in that right. Do not judge their choices and do not take it personally if clients choose something other than what you want them to. Then, should things not work out so well, they will be willing to come back to you because you didn't burn any bridges with them.

If, on the other hand, your client has evaluated that change is needed, there are really two parts to making the plan. The first involves exploring the options and the second involves making the actual plan he or she intends to follow.

EXPLORING THE OPTIONS:

Exploring options is about accessing the person's resourcefulness to find out what behaviors the person has available. Questions might sound like:

- What else could you do to get what you want?
- Have you considered anything that would move you closer to your goals?
- What have you thought of doing?
- What might work better than what you've been doing?
- Can you think of anything else to try?

WHOSE PLAN IS IT?

The idea in asking these questions is to see if the client can come up with his or her own plan. You increase the possibility of follow-through when there is ownership of the plan. The best way to get ownership is if the client comes up with the plan on his or her own.

What can happen as you explore options is:

- 1) The client has a plan and is ready to move forward with it.
- 2) The client has several ideas of what might work and is undecided about which is best.
- 3) The client has no idea at all what to do.

Your response will be different depending upon which scenario you encounter. Should the client already have a singular plan in mind, you can attempt to talk to him or her about alternatives but most people, when they think they have the solution, won't be interested in trying anything else until they learn their solution won't work. If you have information that will help them evaluate their solution will not work, then by all means, give it to them. If they consider what you say, then you will move into one of the other two scenarios.



However, if a client stays fixed on one solution, your best approach is not to fight it. Help the client think it through from every angle and then allow them to implement their plan. If, in the implementation, it doesn't work, your client will most likely return to you to discuss other alternatives. And who knows? It just might work and then the problem will be solved!

When clients have multiple options available to them, you want to help them brainstorm, thinking of as many choices as possible. You do not evaluate any of the options until they are all out on the table. If

you have some to add to the list, by all means add them, but do not give any more weight to one over the other. At this point, they are just ideas. Once the brainstorming has ended, you will guide the client in a systematic consideration of the benefits and the tradeoffs of each choice. Then step back and allow your client to choose the best option for him or her.

Should you find yourself in the scenario where the client has absolutely no idea of what to do next, then is it all right for you to make suggestions? Of course it is. How can a person know what they don't know? If a client has completely exhausted their repertoire of behaviors, then they are looking to you for answers. I do, however, have a strong word of caution here. If you are called upon for solutions and plans, then it is best to give at least three options.

Remember, one is advice and that is never good. If you are right, your client may become dependent on you for all their answers. If you are wrong, then you are the "bad guy." Two options feels like a dilemma or ultimatum. But three choices allows the clients to consider his or her options and still make the best choice, thus ensuring the choice becomes his or her own.

I use two models of providing three options when I am struggling to come up with them. One is: You can keep doing it exactly the way you are. You can do it better or you can do it worse. And then we talk specifically about what each of those options looks like, as well as their possible outcomes. Another model that works particularly well when looking at relationships and job situations is this: You can change it, accept it, or leave it. We then spend time going over each option and its consequences.

CREATING THE PLAN:

There are several things to consider when making the actual plan. The first is to be as certain as you can be that the client is really ready to make a plan. Sometimes, coaches rush to a plan before the client is really ready. How will you know when your client is ready? When you get a sincere, honest self-evaluation from the client that what he or she has been doing isn't working.

A good plan should be:

1. Simple. The plan should be easy to do. Sometimes we can cause paralysis in our clients when we create convoluted plans that have too many big steps. The client is unable to do the plan in the time allowed. When the goal is so big, sometimes clients don't make progress because they simply don't know where to begin.
2. Attainable. The plan should be something the person is capable of doing. It shouldn't be out of a person's reach but it should be enough of a stretch that the person feels a sense of accomplishment when finished.



3. Measurable. How will you and the client know if the plan has been completed if it isn't stated in measurable terms? When making a plan, ask yourself, "How will I know that the client has been successful?"
4. Specific. A good plan clearly spells out who is going to do what by when. There is nothing left to chance. All the loop holes are tightened up.
5. Immediate. A good plan is something the client can begin to do as soon as he or she leaves the coaching session. It shouldn't be something that has to wait.
6. Positive. A good plan describes what the client will begin to do, not what he or she is going to stop doing. As stated previously, there is no energy around a "stop doing" plan. And if you haven't created a positive plan for what you want the client to do while they aren't doing the thing they've committed to stop, then you have created a failure plan. "What are they going to do instead?" is the question you want to ask if you want them to stop doing something.
7. Repetitive. Research shows it takes about 30 days to create a new habit. Therefore, if you want your client to learn a new way of being, you want them to perform the plan every day for at least 30 days. Make the plan something that can be done daily and that it builds on previous skills.
8. Non-contingent. Make sure your client's plan does not depend on the cooperation of anyone else. When clients make plans that involve the cooperation of other people, it adds variables to the equation that will provide excuses for why the plan didn't work. Then the client takes no responsibility for the failure of the plan.

If this is the first time you've made a plan with a particular client, then you will be starting from scratch. But if you have a history with this client and you know there have been things that stood in the way of success in the past, then you will want to have a portion of the plan dedicated to addressing what has created problems in the past. For example, if you know your client is highly susceptible to peer pressure, then you will want to build into the plan strategies for managing peer pressure.

When you and your client feel good about the plan and you are reasonably assured of its success, get a commitment from your client. This can be verbal, a handshake, a pound or any other culturally acceptable agreement that both of you are committed to the plan's success.

FOLLOWING UP:

You can do the best job working with your clients, building a trusting relationship, asking wonderful questions, getting a commitment and if you leave out the follow up, you will decrease your effectiveness and may even lose clients.

When you and your clients take the time to delve into a situation and make a plan together, it is an implied commitment on your part to see them through to the end. When you casually work out a plan, shake your client's hand, never to revisit the plan again, you are communicating that all the work you put in is not important and that you really don't care about the outcome.

The interesting part is that this is how most amateur “helpers” have likely operated with their clients up until this point. In fact, your clients may be counting on it. If your clients have experienced inadequate to no follow up in the past, then they may be counting on the same behavior from you. They have learned they can make commitments to “helping” people and get away with limited or no accountability.

This creates a situation where people simply go through the motions of working on a plan, knowing they won’t be held accountable. They can make all kinds of grandiose commitments, realizing they will not be held to task.

That does not mean when you work with someone, he or she is not sincere. That will be determined in subsequent sessions. It simply means many people are accustomed to a half-hearted commitment from whomever is helping them change behavior so they have been conditioned to give a half-hearted commitment as well. Don’t be surprised by this or misinterpret its meaning.

So what does it mean? At this point, you don’t know. Your job is to wait for the agreed upon time to elapse and then do a check in to see if your client has been successful with whatever was agreed upon. If he or she was, then great! You can celebrate together. If there is additional work to do, then you can plan the next step.

TEN REASONS CLIENTS DON’T REACH THEIR GOALS

Whenever clients aren’t successful, there are many things to explore, but you can bet you won’t be exploring any of them if you forget the follow up action. Let’s look at the possibilities when a client hasn’t been successful.

1. Was the proposed action too big?

Sometimes clients encounter paralysis in their forward movement because the plan they made constitutes a huge, giant step for them. If the step is too big, people don’t know where to start.

I remember early in my career when working with a schizophrenic client who wanted a volunteer position. After talking about it, her assignment was to get a volunteer job. When I met with her the next week, she had done nothing. We broke it down into smaller steps, e.g. look in the Yellow Pages, make a list of places you might like to work, call each of them to see if they use volunteers, if they do ask what the next step is. When I saw her the next week, she had a job at the local hospital.

Some questions to ask might be:

- Do you know where to start?
- Does this all seem a bit overwhelming?
- What would your first step be? Then what?

2. Did the client really not want what he or she said they did?

Sometimes clients don’t want to reveal what they really want for several reasons. They may not trust you yet. They may not think they can get what they want. They

may think you'll find them foolish. They don't want to be told they can't have what they want, etc.

When this happens and a helper is asking them what they want, they may just throw out a random answer to move the conversation away from the uncomfortable. When this is the case, it's not difficult to understand why the client doesn't make progress toward something he or she doesn't want.

A couple of possible questions are:

- Is this what you really want?
- Are you sure this is what you really want?

3. Did they make a half-hearted commitment?

Have you ever said you would do something when somewhere inside you knew you probably wouldn't? People do this a lot. It's a way of taking the pressure off. As a teenager, when my mother would ask me to clean my room, I would say, "OK, Mom." I had no real intention of doing it but I wanted her off my back.

In an attempt to end the questioning of a coaching session, a person might make a commitment they don't intend to keep.

In this case when following up, you might ask:

- So are you really serious about doing this?
- Do you really want this?

4. Has the client's wants and priorities shifted?

Clients may want one thing one week and then, during the week, they realize they actually want something else. Priorities can shift and change. Information and opportunities can change priorities.

Let's say one week your client plans to quit his or her job but then that week gets a raise. His or her priorities may change resulting in the changing what he wants.

You can ask:

- So is this what you still want or do you want something else now?

5. Did he or she just tell you what you wanted to hear?

Sometimes when you work with clients who are people pleasers and high in the need of love & belonging, they attempt to glean what you think is the "right" answer and simply give you that. They are attempting to seek your approval and avoid any type of conflict.

They have a strong desire for you to like and approve them. That desire can supersede any of the other goals they may have for themselves.

The best way to counteract this is to remain objectively neutral and not give away what you believe is the “right” answer.

You might ask your client this question:

- Is this really something that’s important to you or do you simply think this is what I want you to do or what I think is best?

6. Was the client just giving the socially-acceptable answer or trying to please someone else?

This happens most often when someone is not voluntarily seeking help. Someone is “making” them come to you for assistance with some problem they don’t think they have. In these situations, there is almost always a company line. There is a socially-acceptable answer.

When a company hires you to do executive coaching with their employees, there will be company expectations and desired outcomes. Your client will certainly be aware of those. He or she will also be acutely aware of just who is footing the bill for your services. The answers they give you about what goals they want to work on may not represent what they *really* want. Clients may think what they *really* want is not something you’d be interested in hearing and it may even get them in some trouble.

In this case, there may be no question you could ask to uncover the truth since the client’s goal is to deceive you of their actual intent. Instead of a question, you may want to make an observation coupled with a question such as:

- I’m a little surprised to hear you say you *really* want _____ since you haven’t made any progress toward that goal in quite some time. Could it be this isn’t actually what you want?

7. Did they allow life to get in the way?

It is hard to make changes in one’s life. Sometimes it’s easiest to break the commitments we make with ourselves. Let’s say you have a client who wants to lose weight and commits to exercising five days a week and you found they only exercise two. They have all kinds of reasons why they couldn’t do it. They got an unexpected client job. Their child needed a ride to school for missing the bus. The dog got sick. There is always a reason people can find for not honoring their commitments.

Some good questions to ask this person is:

- Just how important is this to you?
- What will happen if you do it?
- What’s the risk if you don’t?

8. Did a legitimate emergency prevent them from being successful?

Let's face it. Sometimes seriously legitimate tragedies overtake our lives and we can't be successful with our plans. Deaths, illnesses, natural disasters and fires come to mind. Whenever something legitimate, overwhelming and unavoidable comes into your clients' lives, you simply need to ask:

- Are you ready to refocus your energy on your plan?

Honor your client's answer and adjust the plan to meet the special needs of your client's reality at that time.

9. Is there something else they want that's getting in the way?

Sometimes clients are not successful in what they want because they don't just want the one thing you focused on in your planning session.

Suppose a client planned to complete a project that had been long overdue. The day she had blocked off to complete it was a day her daughter planned a surprise by coming home from college for a visit. The client wants to get the project done and also wants to be a good mom who readily welcomes spending time with her daughter.

Two possible questions might be:

- "How can you make a plan for spontaneous time and still create space to get your commitments completed?"
- "Can you see a way to both visit with your daughter and still complete your project?"

10. Is there something important they would have to give up in order to get what they want?

I usually reserve this question for when I think there is something that's subconsciously getting in the way of a person's success. These are usually in the form of long-term entrenched beliefs and thoughts that a person is constantly playing in the background of his or her life.

This is a bit complicated so I will give three examples. The first one involved a woman, Sally, who became a moderately successful entrepreneur. Her father had also been an entrepreneur but didn't seem to experience consistent success. He would do well in a business and then lose interest and start another. Do well in that one, lose interest and start another and so on. Sally was desperate to take her business to the next level but just couldn't seem to do it. When I asked her what she would have to give up to get what she wants, she suddenly answered, "My father's approval." She didn't believe her father would want her to be any more successful than he was. Most of these beliefs aren't even true but we have been living with them for so long, they tend to be our puppet masters behind the scenes. Once Susan was able to really look at that issue, she let go of that belief that no longer served her and doubled her income the following year.

The second example involves a woman, Diane, who had been trying to lose weight her whole adult life without success. Every time she began eating healthier and exercising, she would do well in the beginning only to hit a plateau and then began slowly to put the weight back on she had lost. When I asked her what she would have to give up to get what she wanted, she surprisingly answered, "My husband." I say surprisingly, because this answer even seemed to surprise her, coming from a place she wasn't aware of consciously. When I explored that with her, she explained that her husband was a functional alcoholic. He was a good husband and father; went to work every day, and only began drinking when he got home. He was never angry or abusive but drinks about two six-packs a beer nightly. Diane believed if she got healthy enough to lose her weight, then she wouldn't be able to stay with her husband because his dysfunction would be so obvious by comparison. She decided her marriage was more important than losing weight and has stopped beating herself up for the extra pounds.

The third example involves a man, Joe, who wanted to kick his roommate out of his apartment for lifestyle reasons. We had spent a long time developing a plan for Joe to talk to his roommate. We had even practiced the conversation. Joe left feeling confident he would do it but when he returned the next week, he hadn't broached the subject. When I asked him, "What would you have to give up to tell your roommate you want him out?" Joe responded with, "Our friendship." Once I had that piece of the puzzle, the goal picture changed from "I want my roommate out of our apartment" to "I want my roommate out of our apartment and to maintain our friendship." It became easier to make a plan to accomplish this goal than when we were leaving that important piece out of the plan.

Some possible questions in this situation might be:

- What would you have to give up to get what you want?
- Is there any way you can see to have both?
- What would that look like?
- If you can't have both (a true dilemma), then which is more important?
- Are you willing to give up what you want right this minute for the long-term gain of what you *really* want for your future?

As the helper, it is your job to follow up. Let your clients know you care about their progress. Support them through the tough times and kick their butts when they are being complacent. However, be careful you do not become someone using Deadly Relationship Habits by nagging your clients to do something they really don't want to do. Part of following up involves always rechecking to be sure the goal clients are stating they want to achieve is still important to them.

The field of coaching is wonderful field to be in. It is immensely rewarding to help people realize their potential and make progress toward their dreams. This book, *Powerful InsideOut® Coaching Questions*, will help you get started if you are new to coaching and will increase your effectiveness, showing you new opportunities for growth if you are already an experienced coach.

If you haven't already, I hope you will consider our BCC-approved InsideOut® Coaching Program at [The Academy of Choice](#) where you will learn to help your clients live their lives from the InsideOut®!