

Coaching Tip: The Five Whys

Welcome to my coaching tip of the week on the Five Whys, why it's the most valuable tool in your tool kit and how to properly use it with your clients.

Although I have previously mentioned the potency of this tool in prior coaching tips, as a coach mentor I find that many coaches leave this tool to collect dust on the bottom of their coaching kit. So today, I want to talk to you about the value of this tool, why it's not only a "thought" excavator but also a values clarification tool and finally, provide you with two examples of how to apply this tool properly.

But first, some background:

The Five Whys is a root-cause analysis technique pioneered by Taiichi Ohno, pioneer of the Toyota Production System in the 1950's that saw problems not as a negative, but, in fact, as "a kaizen (continuous improvement) opportunity in disguise." "Observe the production floor without preconceptions," he would advise. "Ask 'why' five times about every matter."

Although The Five Whys was initially used in manufacturing plants to get beyond putting Band-Aids on the symptoms of a problem, and instead address the underlying causes, its application can be used in almost any situation whether it's coaching or trying to figure out why your home grown artichokes looks like a dried out Greek olive.

The Five Whys is one of the most potent and effective tools you can use in coaching but unfortunately, it's also the most underutilized. I've asked many coaches why they avoid it and this is what they say:

- It's too confrontational
- It's too abrupt
- It's rude
- It's uncaring
- It's too direct

Can you relate?

Just like any other tool you apply, please keep in mind that it's the energy and intention you bring that will determine how it lands with your client rather than the tool itself. Use it with love, curiosity and compassion and it's likely to be received that way. You will also notice how quickly you can sift through the extraneous details of your client's story and get to the bottom of their suffering in no time at all. That's why your clients hire you, right? To get to the bottom of their upset, pain or inertia. Avoiding this tool is like visiting a doctor who is hesitant to prod you in those tender areas because you may flinch or have a negative reaction but that's why you're paying him or her. Remember, it is never rude, or off-putting when you can excavate the root cause of your client's pain, in fact, it's rude not too!

In short, The Five Whys help you work with clients to uncover the root causes of what is driving their feelings and actions and craft the most compelling, powerful, and lasting solutions by chipping away at their painful thought patterns. Conversely, WHY is your power – it is the drive, fuel and passion that propels your business, your passion, your North Star if you will. It can never be taken from you, damaged or broken because it's based on your values and what is deeply meaningful to you. In a minute, I'm going to provide you with two examples that demonstrate how this tool can immediately access the root cause of your client's suffering and as well as reveal your client's true values, what really matters to them deep in their heart.

As a newer coach, I get how tempting it is to jump into problem solving with your clients but if your client's challenge is a symptom (over-eating, procrastinating, losing her temper with her subordinates) rather than taking the time to locate the root cause (loneliness, fear of being rejected, believing her boss doesn't respect her) solutions like

dieting, forcing action or quitting the job will be temporary and the problem will likely re-emerge.

In summary, the Five Whys is to problem solving and critical thinking what removing weeds at the root is to gardening. Fix a symptom in your life but not the underlying cause, and, much like a pulled weed with the root left in the ground, the symptom is bound to sprout up again. Fix the underlying cause of a problem at the root, and you will see lasting improvement.

Here's how it works. When presented with a problem, ask questions that start with why?

Example #1

Client: I hate my job.

Why?

Client: Because my boss makes me work overtime.

Why do you work overtime?

Client: If I don't I might lose my job.

Why would that be so bad?

Client: I'll never find a job that pays this well.

Why do you need a job that pays that well?

Client: So I can send my daughter to graduate school.

Why do you need to pay for her grad school?

Client: Because I'm her parent.

So, it sounds like you believe that a good parent pays for their kid's education (painful thought), tell me where I'm wrong.

Example #2 (using the same thought)

Client: I hate my job.

Why?

Client: Because my boss makes me work over-time. (Although I might question that since no one can make you do anything but I would address this with her later.)

Why is that a problem?

Client: It eats into my time with my family.

Why is that so bad?

Client: I barely get to see my kids because they're in school all day and have activities on the weekends, so working overtime means I don't get to have dinner with them and sometimes I don't see them before they go to bed at night because I work over-time.

So, it sounds like family time is deeply important to you, tell me where I'm wrong.

Using only three why's, I've drilled down to one of my client's **core values**. This is significant because I'll use this information later if my client fails to discover it on her own to demonstrate how she betrays her core value when she believes that a good parent pays for her child's education.

From here, I would Byron Katie her thought (apply the Four Questions) and include the following sub-questions to show her how her belief is driving her to marginalize her integrity which is why she not doesn't set boundaries with her boss.

Question Three: When you're working over-time and believing a good parent pays for her child's education, how do you react?

- What does it cost the relationship with your daughter? (time, intimacy, connection??)
- Other family members? (time with them???)
- When you believe that a good parent pays for their kid's education, what does that cost you personally?

The cost of this belief is in direct conflict with what she values most: family time. I would share this with her if she can't see it herself.

Continue with The Work, showing them who they would be without the thought and how it might support their core value of spending time with family all the way through the Turnarounds.

I hope you're enjoying my coaching tips!! I also remind you that I have a private-based month-to-month membership group called The Coaching Den, where you can connect with other coaches, get coaching from me and enjoy business development classes to help you build your coaching practice with confidence and ease.

Remember, we're not meant walk this path alone!

Check it out here: <http://jackiegartman.com/coachingden-2>.

Cheers,

Jackie