



YOUR KINDLE NOTES FOR:

Leaders Who Ask: Building Fearless Cultures by telling less and asking more

by Corrinne Armour

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45 Highlights

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 171

Sometimes we feel the responsibility of having to 'know' everything and as leaders, we can get anxious if we don't have all the answers.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 210

Your primary expertise in (say) medicine does not automatically give you a secondary expertise in leadership. You may need help to build leadership capabilities to engage, empower, and develop your people. Like asking more and telling less.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 324

The Present Leader may also be erring on the side of too much coaching by taking a coaching approach when other tools from their leadership toolkit would be more appropriate.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 369

Frank asks the kind of questions that keep you thinking way after the conversation has ended. One of Frank's special skills is silence; he asks a question and waits patiently while you gather your thoughts (and sometimes muster up courage to voice what you are thinking) and respond. He never fills the space, waiting instead for others to take up the invitation.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 398

In the late 90s and early 2000s, 'Leader as Coach' programs were popular in the corporate world. The basic proposition of most of these programs was that: •Coaches develop people effectively. •Leaders need to develop people effectively. •(Therefore) all leaders should be coaches (all the time). This was not a smart idea, any more than it would be a smart idea to insist that all our leaders adopt a command and control leadership style. Turning all our leaders into coaches is: •Unrealistic: Coaching is a professional discipline. Learning to be a coach takes extensive training, supervision and experience over long periods. With the leadership development budget available to most leaders in corporate Australia, this level of investment and attainment is unavailable. •Unwise: Coaching is one leadership and development intervention. Insisting that leaders coach during every interaction is

about as smart as inviting a chef to use a vegetable paring knife to cut all her ingredients. The best leaders are those with flexible leadership styles, and those who are able to adopt a situational approach. In this book, we talk about complementing a leader's skills and not overwriting them. To build Fearless Cultures, leaders need to add coaching skills to their existing leadership toolkits. They must make conscious choices about when to use elements of coaching skills right across their current leadership style.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 415

Mentoring Typically, a mentor has expertise in their field, and transfers knowledge, skills and experience to a less experienced practitioner. The mentor is 'older and wiser', either literally or metaphorically. A leader acts as a mentor when they 'tell' a member of their team how to do something based on their experience.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 428

Training A trainer teaches a person, or typically a group, how to do something. This could be a formal classroom session, or informal, on-job training. Leaders tend to train more often in junior leadership roles where they are showing people how to use predefined processes or approaches. A leader acts as a trainer when they train operational staff on how to use a particular system, or when they teach someone how the company approaches customer service.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 436

Directing Directing involves providing clear authoritative instructions, consistent with a 'command and control' approach. This approach has strong merit in some situations, and yet does not allow for the creation of 'insight': that flash of inspiration that brings together seemingly unconnected concepts to give a new understanding. (Insight is explained further in Chapter 3: How does the Leader Who Asks support insight?) A leader directs when they tell staff what to do in clear and explicit terms, and no negotiation is invited.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 447

Counselling Counselling has therapeutic origins and typically involves a focus on the past. While some developmental conversations may reference the past, leaders are not trained counsellors. Where it seems that overly strong emotions are at play, and resolution of the past is required, leaders should refer a person to their organisation's Employee Assistance Program or other professional counselling providers for specialist support.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 468

If mentoring is about 'telling' and training is about 'showing', then coaching is about 'asking'. A key distinction of a coaching approach is the use of questions—a coach asks questions that help others develop their own insight and answers. A coach tells less and asks more.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 471

The Leader Who Asks is not a coach There are three key areas in which the leader who asks is not a traditional coach. 1. The leader who asks retains some influence over the coaching focus. Coaching in an organisational

setting has evolved from both therapeutic and sporting origins. In *Challenging Coaching*, authors John Blakey and Ian Day argue that early organisational coaching took its biggest inspiration from person-centred therapy, which is grounded in the view that the client has vast resources needed for development, and the therapist's role is to guide the client to find their own answers according to the client's own agenda.⁷ This approach has formed the basis for traditional organisational coaching methods, where the coach has a role of holding the space while the client works things through. The leader who asks has more influence over of direction of the conversation than a traditional coach might, and coaching by the leader who asks is often developmental in nature. 2. The leader who asks may have knowledge. Another way in which the role of the leader who asks may differ from a professional coach is by having subject matter expertise. While a coach does not need subject matter expertise, coaching leaders will often have knowledge, and may have done the job of the coachee in the recent past. As we will see later, this knowledge often needs to be put aside during a coaching conversation. 3. The leader who asks chooses when to coach (and when not to). A professional coach coaches—that is their job and that's what they do. The leader who asks has a much broader job description, and coaching is not their job. Coaching is simply a tool that a leader will use to achieve KPIs through their team. The leader who asks chooses when to coach and when to use other forms of intervention such as those outlined above—and many others—based on the needs of the situation, the people, and the task, in the moment.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 508

People are much more likely to remember things that they have worked out for themselves, than things their boss has told them.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 539

When people solve a challenge for themselves—rather than being 'told'—'insight' is involved. Insight is that sudden understanding—a 'Eureka' moment—when the brain takes seemingly unrelated ideas and puts them together in new ways to reach a new understanding. Insights engage the brain's reward systems and trigger a release of dopamine: a neurotransmitter associated with the brain's rewards system known as a 'happy chemical'.⁹ The simple act of searching for our own answers is rewarding to the brain.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 606

When we redraw the model in Figure 3, we see it is also a framework for coaching conversations—the 3D model of Coaching. Beginning at the bottom, we discover 'what's the issue?' We then decode 'what's the cause?' And finally, we design a response, confirming 'what's the action?' The leader who asks works with their people to follow this 3-step framework, while maintaining an awareness of how they are showing up themselves (leader state) and the environment for change (the broader context).

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 613

The 3D model of coaching

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 711

Awareness precedes change. The leader who asks knows that discovery is a critical first step—with no awareness, there can be no development.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 860

Questions for opening So what's on your mind? What is an/the issue you would like to work on? What's the best use of our time today? What would you like to be different by the time we have finished our conversation/meeting? What are we here to achieve today? What would you like to gain from this meeting? What would you like to have by the end of this conversation? What do you REALLY want? What do you want to happen as a result of this conversation? What makes this goal important? What is important about this goal that you need to share with me? What would other people like to achieve? In the long term, what is your goal in relation to this issue? What is the timeframe? From where you are now, what would be a first step that you could feel good about?

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 874

Questions for focusing What is happening that you don't want to happen? What would you like to happen instead? What would be the result of that? If you could summarise the problem in two sentences, what would you say? If you had to put the challenge in a 140-character tweet, what would it be? What's not working here?

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 879

Questions for broadening awareness What do other people (stakeholders, clients, colleagues) think is happening here? What is the impact of this on other people? (eg peers, clients, senior staff, their reports, external stakeholders) What else bothers you? ... And what else? ... And what else? What could you do to reward yourself/them? What will be the evidence that you have achieved this? What is the impact of this on business results? (eg team, division, company) What is the impact of this on you personally/professionally? How do others perceive you/the situation? Is this approach/behaviour currently getting the results you want? What behaviours are derailing your performance, and what are the consequences? How do you know that? How are you doing in relation to <challenge>? Thinking about <habit/behaviour>, how well is that serving you right now? What is the impact of this on your reputation/leadership brand/future opportunities? Where did you get your information? How do you know that is correct? What do you think they are thinking? What's the worst-case scenario here? What is the concern that lies behind the dissatisfaction? What's your ideal time frame on this? By when would you want that to be the case? What would you want people to say at your funeral about the impact you have had?

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 904

What is the reality of the current situation as you see it? What action/steps have you taken so far? How often does this happen? What do you see/hear/feel happening? What other factors are relevant? What need is behind your/their behaviour? What do you think is driving their behaviour? What is the result of all that? How would your colleague/boss/partner explain this situation? What help do you need for the work to get done? What do

you think your superpower is? What might be the flipside of your key strengths? What activities have meaning for you? How can that skill help you in the workplace? How have you/we contributed to that? What could you/we have done differently to avoid the situation? What could we have done to plan for this better? How much of this situation do you feel is within your control? Can you help me to understand what's behind that for you? What, if any, internal obstacle(s) or personal resistance(s) do you have to taking action? If you had to state a purpose for your life, what would it be? If you had to state a purpose for this project, what would it be? Thinking about <behaviour>, what was your highest positive intention? Thinking about <situation>, what were you trying to achieve? What happened instead? What did you learn from that? How would you need to think/feel/believe/decide differently to get a different result? What are you afraid of? What is the excuse you have used to yourself so far for not achieving this? Imagine it were six months from now, what would you describe if you looked back to today?

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 935

Questions to develop options to move forward What could be done to achieve the outcome you are seeking?* What are some of the ways you could approach this?* What could you do as a first step?* What else could you do? ... And what else* What's one more thing you could do?* If you were guaranteed to succeed, what would you do? What could you do if you could start again today, what would you do?* What would you tell me to do if I were in your situation? What advice would you give to someone in this exact same situation? What possibilities for action do you see? If there were another option, what would it be? What have you seen work in situations like this in the past? Who do you know who does this stuff well? What might they advise you if they were here?

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 948

Questions to gain commitment to action What will be done to achieve the goal? What option(s) do you think will work best? What action has the most clarity and energy for you? Which option(s) do you choose? What specifically are you willing to commit to? When will you start/finish? What might get in the way of this? What will you do to prevent/overcome this? Who might be able to help? What support do you need and from whom? What can I (as coach) do to support you? How can I help you work on this? What commitment (scale of 1–10) do you have to completing these agreed actions? What could you do to raise this to an 8 (9 or 10)? What are the next steps you are committing to take?

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 960

Questions for accountability What do you need from me? From others? How will you measure success? How will we track achievement? When will we check in again? How often? How often do you want feedback from me? In what way?

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 968

Wild card questions that can be used at any time Imagine you were an <engineer/actor/politician/football player/CEO>, how would you consider this situation and the possibilities? For when they say they don't know: What if you did know the answer? What would it be? For when they want you to tell them what to do: What do you

think I am going to advise you to do? For when they want you to tell them what to do: What is the question you don't want me to ask you right now? For when you are unsure where to go next: What is the next question I need to ask you right now?

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 975

'Non-questions' to deepen their thinking and understanding Tell me more about that. I am curious about <behaviour/action/comment just made>. Help me to understand <behaviour/action/comment just made>. Tell me more about your thinking on <behaviour/action/comment just made>. Talk me through how you came to decide <decision made>.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 1028

Sue Desmond-Hellmann, CEO of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, talked about avoiding 'CEO disease'. 14, 15 She was asked: 'How do you remain accessible to people and not allow that sense of "she's different from me" to seep in?' She concluded: •by having family or friends who help you make sure you don't take yourself too seriously •by inviting the hard questions, and feedback (positive and negative), and thanking people for their willingness to be critical •by being overt on how you operate: 'I made sure people in the company knew that I asked questions because I was interested, not because I thought there was something wrong' •by being aware, that as CEO, you are treated differently.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 1063

The 3 golden rules of listening for the Leader Who Asks 1.80–20 talk time. 2.Use their language. 3.Allow the silence. 1) 80–20 talk time. When I turn on my Bluetooth phone head set, a digital lady tells me in a clear voice 'You have 5 hours of talk time available'. What if, when I put on my coaching mindset, that same voice told me 'You have 20% of talk time available'? What would that do for the balance between my talking and listening? Leaders—almost all of us—tend to talk too much and listen too little. If you are doing more than 20% of the talking, you are probably not coaching. The more listening you do, the more awareness you will facilitate in others, and the more trust you will build. 2) Use their language. In listening skills 101 (active listening), we are taught to paraphrase what others tell us, then play it back to ensure (and demonstrate) that we have understood. While this might be useful in some contexts, it's less useful for the leader who asks, as our coachee's words have special meaning to them. Words are at best an approximation of what a person means to communicate. When we paraphrase, we can take the person further away from their original meaning. Using different words can disrupt their flow of thinking. Instead, in coaching we practice attentive listening—listening for the coachee's words and using those words. If the goal is unlocking their potential to maximise their own performance, then using their language will keep them in flow. 3) Allow the silence. The coaching leader listens while others are speaking. And they listen while others are quiet. When you ask somebody a question and they're silent, it's usually a good sign that they're thinking. It's not an uncomfortable silence, so avoid the temptation to fill the space.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 1100

Listening is such an important skill that books have been written on that topic alone. An excellent book for the leader who asks is my good friend Oscar Trimboli's, *Deep Listening: Impact beyond words*.¹⁷ Oscar also has an excellent podcast on *Deep Listening* that you can find on iTunes.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 1142

But what is confidence? Writing in a Harvard Business Review blog, leadership author, researcher and academic Rosabeth Moss Kanter defines confidence as ‘the sweet spot between despair and arrogance’.¹⁸ The Confidence Code by authors Katty Kay and Claire Shipman offers a definition of confidence as ‘being prepared to fail’.¹⁹ Both of these definitions serve our purpose as the leader who asks.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 1154

Five tips for building confidence in your coaching approach: 1.Practice: As you use your coaching skills more and more, your confidence will increase. 2.Be prepared to ‘fail’: Try things out. Keep going and learn along the way. 3.Start small and safe: Try out one or two coaching questions. Build your confidence using them and then extend your reach. 4.Transfer confidence from another context. 5.Practice some more: Did I mention that the more you coach, the more your confidence will build?

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 1201

People want feedback As I work with leaders and leadership teams, I often see a lack of courage in the area of providing feedback and addressing poor performance. The concerns leaders hold about providing ‘constructive feedback’ is often unjustified. People actually want the bad news that you don’t want to give them. Research has found that people want corrective feedback more than praise, providing it’s given in a constructive manner. 72% of respondents said their performance would improve if their manager provided corrective feedback.²⁰ So be courageous and have the conversations that need to be had.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 1264

Taking the time and focus to build comfort in people by communicating in their communication preferences, and to ensure that they feel ‘heard’ will support you in building rapport. The Bible tells us to ‘do unto others as you would have them do unto you’. While this may be an excellent way of living, it is not an excellent way of communicating. To maximise the effectiveness of our communication, we need to ‘do unto others as they would be done unto’. So, if I am calm and measured as a communicator, you will be most effective in building rapport with me if you can also be calm and measured. If I am strongly analytical, your arguments will be more persuasive if you are more analytical when speaking with me.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 1317

When you believe someone is undermining the team, or can’t be trusted, your awareness will be raised, and you will find abundant evidence that this is the ‘truth’. This is known as the ‘Golem Effect’ where people will perform to the low standards you expect of them, and it’s unhelpful.²⁴ The opposite happens too. In the 1960s, there was a (now) famous study done at the Spruce Elementary School in San Francisco. Kids were given a false IQ test, and the teachers were told that randomly assigned kids had potential. What’s remarkable about this study is that over the next year, those kids excelled. In fact, by the end of the year, their IQs had risen by up to 29 points.²⁵

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 1348

Be overt with your intentions, and work to align your behaviour with your intentions.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 1382

Curiosity is the antidote for judgement. Like a spritz to the face on a hot day that wakes us up, curiosity refreshes our relationships and our perspectives. That's what we need in business (and in pleasure!). The leader who asks is curious. Leaders like AG Lafley, chairman and CEO of Procter and Gamble who, each week, asks himself 'What am I going to be curious about?' He does this to remind himself that the strategic insight needed from a CEO requires deep curiosity.²⁶ Curiosity is needed by leaders at all levels of the organisation.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 1430

Questions trump directions. In fact, I would go so far as to say that the question mark is the golden child of punctuation. When you give directions, the person's 'rational brain' may be listening, but this won't necessary help with recall or ownership. Nor will it help someone apply the 'advice' you have just given them to other contexts. As we mentioned in Chapter 3 (How does the leader who asks support insight?), questions are more likely to lead to self-discovery, insight and the results you want.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 1444

Ask:Tell ratio Here's a simple way to build your awareness around questions. Monitor a conversation you have with someone who reports to you. Notice your 'Ask:Tell ratio'. How often are you asking searching questions that cause them to think and lead them to their own answers? And how often are you telling them what to do? What more could be possible if you upped the percentage of ask? And how about your team meetings? How often are you in broadcast mode, spouting forth the latest updates and parroting key corporate messages? How often are you asking them questions that challenge people to think, and encourage them to relate corporate messages to their own work and life? The next time you lead a team meeting, monitor your Ask:Tell ratio.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 1470

Think of the classic question words that create open questions: •Who? •What? •When? •Where? •Which? Did you notice there is one 'w question' missing from that list? 'Why?' is missing. What's the reason for this do you think? Imagine I asked you, 'Why did you do that?' (You might also be imagining me with my hands on my hips and using an accusatory tone.) If you were successful in imaging that, what did you notice about your immediate response? 'Why' should be avoided as it can lead to defensiveness and shutting down—not the response you want in a coaching conversation. As an experienced coach now, I use 'why' sometimes with my clients. I use it infrequently and advisedly, and only when I have a solid rapport with the client, in both an absolute sense and in that specific moment. Before I reached this level of mastery, even as a professional coach, I avoided 'why?'

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 1483

Try these alternatives: Why? => Alternative questions 1Why did you do that? => I am curious as to your thinking on that one. 2Why do you want 'x'? => What is it about 'x' that is so important/attractive to you? 3Why did 'x' upset you? => Talk me through what was going on for you in relation to 'x'. 4Why do you care so much about that? => Help me to understand what's behind that for you. 5Why would you take that direction? => Tell me more about your thinking on that direction.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 1531

When you do need to tell them There are times, as a leader, where you do need to 'tell'. Support your people to integrate and apply the information you have given them, and encourage them to make their own connections with questions such as: 1.How might this work here? 2.What surprised you about this? 3.What would you do differently to what I have just outlined? 4.What similar experiences have you had in the past? 5.How can we leverage this to have the biggest impact?

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 1615

Empathy is defined as 'the power of understanding and imaginatively entering into another person's feelings'.³¹ Sympathy is 'the fact or power of sharing the feelings of another, especially in sorrow or trouble; fellow feeling, compassion, or commiseration'.³² So empathy is about UNDERSTANDING the feelings of another, sympathy is about SHARING those feelings. While there is a place for both processes, in leadership empathy is more useful and less taxing on your energy. As leaders, we want to be able to understand the emotions (and probable emotions) of others and to have the skill to demonstrate our understanding. We don't necessarily want to share the feelings. Understanding gives us insight with an appropriate detachment, whereas sharing emotions could render us less able to assist.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 1630

Paul Ekman best known for his work studying facial expressions and emotion, has classified three types of empathy³⁴: •Cognitive empathy. Perspective-taking: knowing how the other person feels and what they might be thinking. •Emotional empathy. Emotional contagion: feeling physically as the other person does and being well-attuned to another person's inner emotional world. •Compassionate empathy. People with compassionate empathy not only understand a person's predicament and feel it with them, but are spontaneously moved to help, if needed.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 1744

Fixed and growth mindset Stanford Professor Carol Dweck has conducted and interpreted ground-breaking research into what she has termed 'fixed' and 'growth' mindsets.³⁶ She describes these as two ways of thinking and viewing yourself and the world: Fixed mindset is the belief that skills, talents, and capabilities are predetermined, finite and, therefore, cannot be developed. You either have a talent, or you don't, and the same applies to other people. Growth mindset is the belief that talents and abilities can be developed over time; that there is a potential to foster new skills in yourself and others. The leader who asks has a growth mindset, and

believes that people can and will over time get better at what they do through learning and experience. They see failure as an opportunity that could lead to mastery, and take full responsibility for their own learning.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 1849

The leader who asks uses more ask and less tell wherever possible to help a new recruit learn all that is needed. Not only will asking questions that prompt them to generate their own solutions increase the likelihood they will remember, it will also help them apply knowledge from previous roles to this one.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 1967

When good asking goes bad Sometimes leaders try a coaching approach for a short time, and then give up. Here are the top six reasons why a coaching approach fails, and what to do about it. 1. Too much telling, too little asking We have talked about the implications of telling: people tune out, forget what you say, fail to accept accountability, disengage etc. Telling denies our people the opportunity to learn for themselves. After reading a book called 'Leaders Who Ask', it's hard to imagine this happening, right? And just in case it does, here's what to do. Mitigations: •Monitor your Ask:Tell ratio. •Ask a question before 'telling' anything. •Begin with a few questions, and gradually build your repertoire. 2. You followed the framework and forgot your state A beautiful coaching framework (such as the 3D model) perfectly executed by a leader focused on judgement, or a leader not listening, will never result in a beautiful coaching conversation. The framework is a helpful guide. Focus first on your state as a leader; otherwise, your questions may feel more like integration than a supportive conversation. Mitigations: •Go back to the Core Competencies mapped out at the start of Chapter 7. How are you showing up? Where do you need to focus? •Remember that these seven Core Competencies are the most important (and the others will come with time and practice): Listening, Courage, Focus, Curiosity, Questions, Compassion and Purpose. 3. You focused on your agenda and not coachee's agenda Yes, you are the leader. And right from the start of this book I said that you have more influence over the direction of the conversation than a traditional coach might. And ... if it's only your agenda that's getting your attention, it's likely to feel like telling, regardless of the number of question marks in your grammar. Mitigations: •Ensure that the purpose of a conversation is co-created and agreed up front, and that the coachee has input into outcomes. (Core Competency: Purpose) •Recommit to listening and review the Listening Core Competency. 4. Lack of clear outcome and accountability Asking and not telling does not imply a lack of accountability. One strength of a coaching approach is a mutually agreed purpose that gives the conversation direction. An accountability framework should be agreed in the design phase of a coaching conversation. Due to the nature of coaching, a coachee should feel a strong sense of accountability to delivering the results agreed. Mitigations: •Review your last few coaching conversations. Was a clear purpose agreed? If not, focus on ensuring that happens in your next coaching conversation. •What about accountability? Did the coachee commit to actions that are measurable? Was an accountability framework put in place? If not, that's an area for future focus. •Were you invested in the outcome, and not the coachee? Look out for that next time. Becoming the leader who asks and building your coaching competencies, takes time, focus and practice. 5. It wasn't really a coaching opportunity To a carpenter with a hammer, everything looks like a nail. Not every moment is a coaching opportunity. Just as 'telling' in every situation is unwise, the same goes for asking. Sometimes swift and decisive action is needed by the leader. At other times, you might be guiding someone who does not have the knowledge or experience to answer the questions, and another approach such as mentoring would be best. Mitigations: •Make a conscious choice in the moment about whether this is a coaching opportunity, based on what is best for the people, the situation and the

task. 6. A coaching approach felt awkward, so I gave up Becoming the leader who asks and building your coaching competencies, takes time, focus and practice. You can expect to feel awkward. Interestingly, people in my Leader Who Asks training programs often report feeling uncomfortable and having 'clunky' conversations when I give them practice time. Yet the person being coached reports the conversation as 'natural' and 'in flow'. You know what's needed to get past each of these failure points. Give it a go. See what happens. Practice makes perfect.

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