

The coaching spectrum

Socrates saw himself as a 'midwife to understanding'. He believed that one can help people understand, but that one cannot make people understand – just as a midwife delivers the child, but does not give birth to it.

Similarly, the coach is a 'midwife to skill building', and is not typically a highly didactic teacher. The coach's most important decision is whether to instruct / suggest, or whether to ask a question – or indeed whether to use a style of interaction somewhere between these two extremes. You will face this decision in a wide variety of coaching situations – when deciding the topic on which to help the coachee, when providing feedback or when helping the coachee decide what to do next.

At work, many 'bosses' rely on telling others – directly or indirectly – what to do and (sometimes) how to do it. But, as a coach, it's important to have a broader range of approaches in your repertoire. The pivotal question is often more powerful than the instruction, as Socrates knew.

If there is one thing you do differently as a result of reading this book, simply try asking a few good questions where you might otherwise have issued an instruction or leapt into providing advice, as illustrated by Alex's story on the preceding pages.

The ask/tell repertoire

