



POWERFUL CHOICE COACHING QUESTIONS

HELPING PEOPLE
FROM THE INSIDE OUT

By Kim Olver



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Why Choice Coaching?

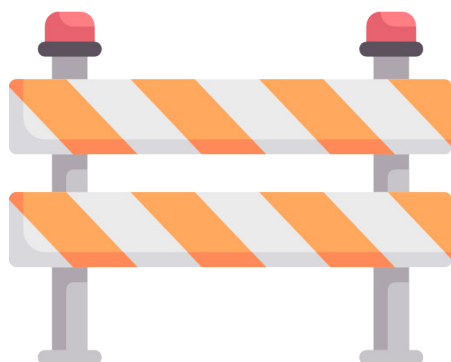
As a coach, your client's success depends on the relationship you build, the information you provide and the questions you ask. After you've built trusting, supporting, and provocative relationships with your clients and you share any missing, pertinent information, your ability to ask discerning questions is your most valuable skill.

With Choice Coaching, you will help your clients articulate their goals. By examining the behaviors they're using to accomplish those goals, you can help them uncover any self-sabotage or limiting beliefs that may exist. After creating a plan with a good chance of success, you will hold your clients accountable for the actions they've committed to.

Choice Coaching encourages clients to avoid spending their energy on things they have no control over. For example, clients may try to formulate goals for the people in their lives, hoping to improve someone who doesn't want to change. We also encourage clients to move away from creating and maintaining a victim role, blaming external circumstances for their lack of success.

First, we help people identify obstacles, then we support them as they go around, over, under or through them. When there truly is an insurmountable obstacle, which is rarer than you might think, we help our clients identify it as something they have no control over. After they accept this, they can work toward a new goal, challenge their perceptions about their

goals, change their behavior to get more of what they want, or work on getting more of what they need when they can't have exactly what they want.



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

Goals, Hopes, Dreams and Desires:

Asking your client what they want is actually asking them to tell you about their goals, hopes and desires. There are many ways to ask this question:

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

The idea is to get at the person's ideal world—it's perfect there.

If clients don't answer, it is likely that your relationship isn't strong enough for them to trust you with their answer. For the most part, people know what they want; they may be conflicted about it, but it's rare that they don't know at all. If they're not yet willing to share, stop asking that question and go back to working on building trust and strengthening your relationship.

In that rare event that they really don't know what they want, then ask:

- Is it fair to say that what you really want is to figure out what you want?

Don't Wants:

Sometimes it's easier for people to tell you what they don't want. It's okay to start there, but as the coach, you always want to turn a "don't want" into a "do want." There is far more clarity and energy around getting what you want rather than trying to eliminate what you don't. If you needed to go grocery shopping, would it be effective to make a list of everything you didn't want? How about if I told you to stop thinking about pink elephants, would it work? As you can see, talking about what you don't want makes it difficult to accurately formulate what you do want.

So, here are some questions you can ask to help a person turn their "don't want" into a "do want":

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

These questions are designed to turn the negative into the positive, revealing a goal you can work with.

Wants and Goals That Involve Others:

"If only my wife were more affectionate...If only my husband were more attentive...If only my children were more respectful...If only my boss appreciated all my hard work..." None of these are positions of empowerment because the client has put their happiness and success in someone else's hands; they believe they need something from someone else to be happy.

In these cases, asking this question will help:

- If they were doing exactly what you want them to do, what would change for you?

Keep asking this question until you uncover something the person actually has control over. Here are some examples:

- If my wife wasn't crazy, then I wouldn't have to worry so much.
- If my children were more respectful, then I wouldn't have to be so embarrassed when they disrespect me or others.
- If my wife was more sexual, then I wouldn't have to seek out other women.

Do you see how these answers are within your client's control? As a coach, you can help clients worry less, be unphased by the behavior of others, and take responsibility for the choices they make in their lives. After whittling the behavior down to something that's within a person's circle of control, you can reframe the want: "So what you really want is to worry less." Then you can continue working through the process from there. It's difficult to help a client "fix" something in another person, short of asking for what they want. Most of the time, the client is attempting to change someone to suit themselves instead of recognizing that the person is doing exactly what they need to do to get what they want.

Unclear, Vague Goals:

Clients can have goals that are vague or ambiguous. If your client lacks specificity, then you can move on to the have-do-be questions to add substance to the picture. The more detailed the want, the more likely the person will pursue it. Here are the have-do-be questions:

- If you were successful, what would you have that you don't have now?
- If you had what you want, then what would you do that you aren't doing now?

- If you had what you want, how would you be different?

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

Has the Ability but Isn't Making Progress:

It's possible your client knows what they want and has the skills to get it, yet no progress is being made. There are several things to ask in this situation:

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

These questions are designed to uncover other deeper wants your client may not be consciously aware of. Maybe they want to lose weight but understand they may have to give up time with friends who don't support that. They want to go back to school but stall because it will seriously affect the stability of their marriage. They want to move ahead in their career but taking care of a sick parent takes precedence.

Shining a light on those competing wants helps clients formulate a way to have both or, if that's not possible, evaluate what's most important to them.

Exploring your client's perfect world—their heart's hopes and desires—is a very productive place to explore. It's easy to remain focused on our client's story, talking about the past and other things the client can't control. Here, clients have all kinds of excuses for their

behavior—it is where they will stay victims. If you want to help your clients learn the strength of Choice Theory® psychology, you must be focused on what they want—not the stories they tell themselves about what they want. Focusing the conversation on what your client wants and has control over goes a long way in the journey toward positive change.

Exploring Client's Current Behavior:

Once you know what your client wants, you can explore what they're currently doing to get it. Then, you can examine their behaviors and determine which ones may be getting in the way of accomplishing their goals.

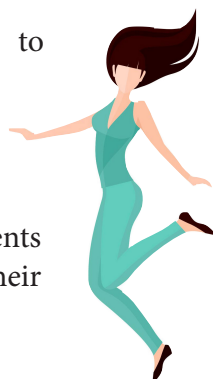
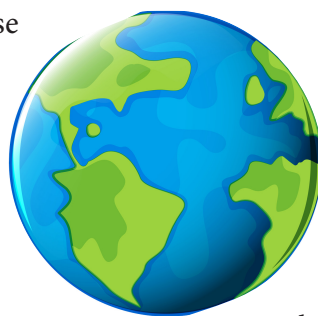
Whenever you explore what a client is currently doing, you want to keep it in the present tense. You are not attempting to make a plan by asking, "What else could you do?" Or, "What would you need to do to get what you want?" Those questions point to a future behavior. At this point, you want to find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

In essence, you are asking your clients to reveal all they do, think and feel as it relates to moving in the direction of what they want. Even the physical things happening in their bodies are considered current behavior, so you may want to ask about health, aches, or illnesses without a medical cause.

Clients will proudly declare their helpful behaviors, but are not so quick to confess those things that may be sabotaging their forward progress.

Here are some examples of possible questions:

- What are you doing to get what you want?
- Is there anything you are doing that might be getting in the way?



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

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

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

What if Nothing Is the Answer?

Clients may tell you they're doing nothing to move toward their goals. This is more common when you are working with clients who have bought into the victim mentality. They have convinced themselves there is nothing they can do, so why would they even try?

When your client tells you they are doing "nothing," you have a decision to make. Do you think your client needs support or a kick in the butt? Use your judgment as a coach: Some need support, and others need a challenge. In differing circumstances, the same client could need support here and challenge there. It's up to your discretion.

If you assess your client needs support, then list all the things you are aware of that they are doing, e.g., thinking about it, hoping for it, wishing for it, talking to you about it. Then you can ask, "Is there anything else you can think of?" This will usually nudge clients into offering other things that they're doing to accomplish the goal.

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

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

Peter Finley Dunne, an American humorist, was quoted as saying, "My business is to comfort the afflicted and to afflict the comfortable." I believe this is also what a good coach does. If your client is upset and frustrated, you comfort

them. If they are comfortable and need a little more incentive to move forward, you afflict them by asking skillfully timed self-evaluation questions.

Facilitating Self-Evaluation:

Securing a self-evaluation from your client is by far the most powerful part of the coaching session. This is when you hold a mirror to your clients and ask whether their chosen behaviors are likely to get them to the goal they want. It is critically important that the client answers this question, not you.

For example, you may be tempted to say, “What you are doing doesn’t seem to be helping you reach your goal.” That would be a mistake. This process is called self-evaluation for a reason. If you answer the evaluation question, it is no longer your client’s self-evaluation, it is a coach evaluation. Your opinion isn’t important here. It’s what your client evaluates that’s important.

Ask the question and wait for the answer. Waiting through the silence might be painful, but remember, you are attempting to “afflict the comfortable,” so the more discomfort, the better. Resist the urge to answer the question for the client. Let them sit with it for as long as it takes.

If you offer an answer to this question, you’re essentially giving your client an excuse not to examine their own behavior. You give the client an opportunity to focus their attention on you, how you are wrong, and just who do you think you are anyway? An evaluation by you can be perceived as criticism—a mistake you want to avoid in coaching.

Here are some ways to ask self-evaluation questions:

- If you keep doing things the way you have been, do you think you will get what you want?
- If you change nothing, will you get there?

- Does all this help you move in a forward direction?
- Is that helping or hurting?
- If you keep doing “nothing,” will you accomplish your goal?
- Will this bring you closer to this person or pull you further away?
- What’s most important?

These questions guide your client into comparing their current behaviors with what they say they want. We tend to look at what we want and compare it to all the reasons we can’t get there. We want to hold onto our excuses and blame others for our inactivity or lack of success. In asking self-evaluation questions, you are actually asking your clients to shift their focus from the land of excuses, victimhood and blame to the one thing they have total control over—themselves!



When you ask your clients to look at their behavior, it isn’t a comfortable shift. They may resist, and as an expert, you may be required to give an explanation as to why you want them to stop blaming outside circumstances for their situation. You’re not arguing that things may be difficult; there is the past, there are other people, and there are circumstances beyond

one's control. I usually agree with my clients that while these things are true, I want them to be in control and have all their power. I remind them that their behavior and thoughts are the only things they can control. If they want to be empowered, strong and successful, then they must focus on what they can control. History is what it is. People are going to continue doing what they do. Uncontrollable circumstances will continue to exist. The only variable of change is them! Explaining this in a supportive, understanding way will generally give clients enough information to understand the usefulness and importance of looking at their own behavior.

Less Responsible Choices

Sometimes you'll encounter clients who use effective behaviors to get what they want, but the behaviors aren't responsible. What's the difference? Effective behavior simply means it works. A bully who wants power and beats people up to get it uses an effective behavior to meet their goal, but it isn't responsible.

As coaches, our goal is to help our clients learn responsible ways to get what they want. How is this different? Behaviors are responsible when they meet your needs without interfering with others meeting theirs. When a client says what they're doing is working, ask these additional questions to determine whether the behaviors are responsible:

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

If your client answers yes to any of those questions, you'll want to talk with them about

the consequences of continuing the behavior. A question might sound like this:

- If you keep doing what you have been doing, what do you think will happen?
- What are the consequences of getting caught?
- Are you willing to pay the price?
- Is it worth it?

These questions open discussion about the consequences of your client's effective behavior. Many people continue using effective but not so responsible behaviors because they don't know a better way. Perhaps they think they won't have to pay these consequences, but it's also possible they're unaware the consequences exist. Discussing possible consequences in a nonjudgmental way can help your clients consider the effects of their behaviors.

It is important to note that you should not be threatening consequences imposed by you. That would be using two Disconnecting Relationship Habits—threatening and punishing. In order for you to maintain a need-satisfying relationship with your client, you need to stay as divorced from negative consequences as you can.

Your next step is to reframe what they want. Go back to the beginning of the process and explore your client's ideal world. You might ask the question, "If we could figure out a way for you to have the power you want without breaking the rules and hurting people, would you be interested in at least talking about it?" If they say yes, you can now work toward a new goal.

After exploring what your client wants and asking the Powerful Questions, hopefully they are ready to do something different. If your client has determined the less responsible behavior is



working just fine and there's no need to change it, then wish them well and remind them that your door is always open.

When people believe what they are doing is working, then they see no reason to make any type of plan to do something different. Nagging will not do it. Threatening them will not do it. Let them be, and do not get in the way of whatever the consequences are. Do not intervene on behalf of your client. You can go back to your client if you have new information to give, but short of that, allow them to live out the choices they have made.

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

If your client has evaluated that change is needed, you can begin with the first of two parts of making a plan. The first involves exploring the options and the second involves making the actual plan your client intends to follow.

Exploring the Options:

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

- What else could you do to get what you want?
- Have you considered anything that would move you closer to your goals?
- What have you thought of doing?

- What might work better than what you've been doing?
- Can you think of anything else to try?

Whose Plan Is It?

These questions invite your client to make their own plan. You increase the possibility of follow-through when there is ownership of the plan, and letting clients formulate their own plan is the best way to do this.

Exploring options with your client will bring you to one of these scenarios:

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

Your response will be different depending on which scenario you encounter. Should the client already have a singular plan in mind, you can attempt to talk with them about alternatives. However, when they think they have the solution, most people won't be interested in trying anything else until they learn their solution doesn't work. If you have information that will help them realize this, then, provide it. If they consider what you say, then you will move into one of the other two scenarios. However, if a client stays fixed on one solution, rather than fighting it, your best approach is to help the client think it through from every angle before encouraging them to implement their plan. When they see it doesn't work, clients will most likely return to you to discuss other alternatives. And who knows? It just might work, and the problem will be solved!

When clients have multiple options available to them, you want to help them brainstorm. You do not evaluate any of the options until they are all out on the table; just list all the possible choices without judging any of them. At this point, they are just ideas. Once the brainstorming has

ended, you will guide the client in a systematic consideration of the benefits and the tradeoffs of each choice. You will then step back and allow your client to choose the best option for them.

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

Remember, offering only one option makes it advice, and that is never good. If you are right, your client may become dependent on you and never make another decision without your input. If you are wrong, then you are the "bad guy." Presenting only two options can come across as a dilemma or an ultimatum. It sounds like, "You can do it my way or your way; the right way or the wrong way; the easy way or the hard way." The client typically knows which one you think is best. Three choices, however, allow clients to consider their options and still make the best choice for themselves, thus ensuring the choice becomes their own.

When your client knows what you think is best, then they aren't just considering which option is best. You have become part of their decision-making process. They want to do what they think is best, and they need to consider if that decision will please or frustrate you. Depending on their relationship with you and their natural tendencies, they might choose the option to please you or the one that will frustrate you to prove they are in charge. In both situations, they aren't simply doing what is best for them. This is why you want to stay neutral in the planning process.

Clients might ask you what you would do in their situation. It is up to you whether you answer that question. My tendency is to remind the client that what I would do isn't relevant because we are different people. What might

be the right decision for me could be the wrong decision for the client. If they still want to know, I would answer their questions and underscore what made that the right decision for me and how it might conflict with the client's best interests.

If you find yourself struggling to come up with three options, think of these three models. The first model offers these choices: keep doing it the way you are now, do it worse, or do it better. Sometimes coaches are concerned about throwing out a worse option, fearing it will give the client ideas they hadn't thought of previously. This is almost never the case. Most clients know a worse option but are consciously not choosing it. You bringing it up lets them know you are not oblivious to what could be done worse. If it is the option they choose, then you have the opportunity to discuss what that choice looks like, along with the probable consequences. After laying out the options as you see them, ask, "That's all I can think of. Can you think of any other options?" Often, laying out three choices will prompt clients to come up with other options, which you can include in the discussion. Then, evaluate each option and its possible outcomes.

When working with more external circumstances, like a job or a relationship, I use the second model: you can change it, accept it, or leave it. It's likely they've already tried to change the situation or other people that they can't control, but they could also try changing themselves. Accepting it means, in the grand scheme of things, the client realizes the thing they are frustrated about is only a small portion of the overall job, relationship or situation, and they decide to give up their anger and resentment about it. If they continue feeling angry and resentful, they are still attempting to change things. And finally, they can leave it. This can be done physically or mentally. Then ask your client if they have any additions to these options and spend time going over each choice and their consequences.

The third option is helping clients identify ways they could change their behavior, change what they want or change their perception. Ask them if they have any ideas to add, and then, consider the potential consequences of each option.

Once the client has chosen the option they think is best, you are ready to make the plan.

Creating the Plan:

There are several things to consider when making the actual plan. The first is to be as certain as possible that the client is ready to take this step. It's not difficult to rush into a plan prematurely. You will know when your client is ready when you get a sincere, honest self-evaluation from the client that what they've been doing isn't working.

A good plan should be:

- Simple. The plan should be easy to do. Creating convoluted plans with too many big steps can paralyze your clients. The client is unable to do the plan in the time allowed. When the goal is too big, sometimes clients don't make progress because they simply don't know where to begin.

- Attainable. The plan should be something the person is capable of doing. It shouldn't be out of a person's reach, but it should be enough of a stretch that the person feels a sense of accomplishment when finished.

- Measurable. How will you and the client know if the plan has been completed if it isn't stated in measurable terms? When making a plan, ask yourself, "How will I know that the client has been successful? What will I see?"

- Specific. A good plan clearly spells out who is going to do what by when. There is nothing left to chance. All the loopholes are tied up.

- Repetitive. Research shows it takes about 30 days to create a new habit. Therefore, if you want your client to learn a new way of being, you want them to perform the plan every day for at least 30 days. Make the plan something that can be done daily and builds on previous skills.

- Immediate. A good plan is something the client can begin to do as soon as they leave the coaching session. It shouldn't be something that has to wait.

- Non-contingent. Make sure your client's plan does not depend on the cooperation of anyone else. When clients make plans that involve the cooperation of other people, it adds variables to the equation that will provide excuses for why the plan didn't work. It leaves room for the client to take no responsibility for the failure of the plan.

- Positive. A good plan describes what the client will begin to do, not what they are going to stop doing. As stated previously, there is no energy around a "stop-doing" plan. If your client wants to quit smoking and you haven't created a positive

plan for what the client should do instead of smoking, then you have created a failure plan. Define in clear terms what they will do instead if you want them to stop doing something.

- Timebound. There should be dates by which each step will be implemented and an overall date of when the client wants the plan to be accomplished.

If this is the first time you've made a plan with a particular client, then you will be starting from scratch. Otherwise, a portion of the plan should address whatever created problems in previous plans. For example, if you know your client is highly susceptible to peer pressure, then you will want to build strategies into the plan for managing peer pressure.

When you and your client feel good about



the plan and you are reasonably assured of its success, get a commitment from your client. Whether verbal, written or sealed with a handshake, your client's commitment to the plan's success should be clearly stated.

Following Up:

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

When you and your clients take the time to delve into a situation and make a plan together, it is an implied commitment on your part to see them through to the end. Failing to revisit the plan sends a message that all the work you put in is not important and that you really don't care about the outcome.

Helping your client make a plan without following through is how amateur "helpers" operate, and perhaps they already have with your client. If your clients have experienced inadequate or no follow-up in the past, they could be counting on the same behavior from you. They have learned they can make commitments to helping professionals and get away with limited or no accountability.

This creates opportunities for people to go through the motions of working on a plan, knowing they won't be held accountable. They can make all kinds of grandiose commitments with the understanding they will not be held to task.

That does not mean when you work with someone, they are being insincere; that will be determined in subsequent sessions. It simply means many people are accustomed to half-hearted commitments from those helping them, so they have been conditioned to give a half-hearted commitment, as well. Don't be surprised by this or misinterpret its meaning.

For now, your job is to wait and check in

after the agreed-upon time has elapsed. If your client was successful, great—you can celebrate together! If there is additional work to do, then you can plan the next step.

10 Reasons Clients Don't Reach Their Goals

Whenever clients aren't successful, there are many areas to explore—of course, this exploration won't happen without any follow-up action. Let's look at the possible reasons clients don't succeed.

1. Was the proposed action too big?

If the step is too big, people don't know where to start and can become paralyzed. I once worked with a client with schizophrenia who wanted a volunteer position. After talking about it, her assignment was to get a volunteer job. When I met with her the next week, she had done nothing to report, so we broke it down into smaller steps: look in the Yellow Pages (this was before the internet), make a list of places you might like to work, call each of them to see if they use volunteers and, if they do, ask what the next step is. When I saw her the next week, she had a job volunteering at the local hospital.

Some questions to ask might be:

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

2. Did the client not want what they said they did?

Sometimes clients don't want to reveal what they really want for several reasons: they may not trust you yet, they may not think they can get what they want, they may think you'll find them foolish, they don't want to be told they can't have what they want, etc.

When asked what they want, clients who don't know, or don't want to reveal the answer, may just throw out something random to move

the conversation away from the uncomfortable. When this is the case, it's not difficult to understand why the client didn't make progress toward something they don't want.

Here are a couple of possible questions:

- Is this what you really want?
- Is it possible you want something else but you aren't ready to tell me yet?

3. Did they make a half-hearted commitment?

People sometimes say they'll do something despite knowing deep down they probably won't. It's a way of taking the pressure off. As a teenager, when my mother would ask me to clean my room, I would say, "Okay, Mom." I had no real intention of doing it, but I wanted her off my back.

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

In this case, when following up, you could ask the following questions:

- Are you serious about doing this?
- Do you really want this?
- On a scale from 1-10, how committed are you to this plan?

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

Clients may want one thing and, during the week, they realize they actually want something else. Information and opportunities can change priorities, and they can also shift for no reason at all.

Let's say your client plans to quit their job because they want better pay, but then they get a raise. Their priorities may change, resulting in a new goal. Now, they want to stay at the job they wanted to quit.

Here are some questions you can ask:

- Is this what you still want or do you want something else now?
- Has something happened to change your focus?

5. Did the client just tell you what you wanted to hear?

Some clients can be people-pleasers, attempting to glean what you think is the "right" answer. They are seeking your approval and working to avoid conflict. Their desire for you to like and approve of them can supersede any of the other goals they may have for themselves. The best way to counteract this is to remain objectively neutral and not give away what you believe is the "right" answer.

You might ask this question:

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

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

Clients could have people in their lives who believe they have a problem and are attempting to "force" them to get help. The client isn't voluntarily seeking help and they may not even believe a problem exists. In these situations, there is almost always a company line. There is a socially acceptable answer.

When a company hires you to do executive coaching with their employees, there will be company expectations and desired outcomes. Your client will know what the company wants so they will likely provide that as an answer. There may be no magic question you could ask to uncover the truth since the client's goal is to deceive you about their actual intent.

You could try something like this:

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

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

It is hard to make changes in one's life. Sometimes it's easiest to break the commitments we make with ourselves. People can manufacture all kinds of excuses for not honoring their commitments.

Here are some good questions for this situation:

- How important is this to you?
- What will happen if you do it?
- What's the risk if you don't?

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

Sometimes seriously legitimate tragedies overtake our lives and interrupt our success. Deaths, illnesses and natural disasters come to mind. Some things are simply legitimate, overwhelming and unavoidable.

Here's a question you can ask in this situation:

- Are you ready to refocus your energy back on your plan or do you need time to adjust?

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

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

It's possible clients fail to achieve success because they want more than what's been focused on during the planning session. Maybe your client wants to lose weight while eating whatever they want. Perhaps they want to set a boundary with a friend, but they also want to maintain the relationship. Sometimes people want to build their savings, but they also want to go on vacation.

Here are some possible questions:

- Can you do both?
- If not, which is your priority at this time?

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

I usually reserve this question for when I think there is something that's subconsciously getting in the way of a person's success. These are usually in the form of long-term entrenched beliefs that play on a loop in the background of a person's life.

This is a bit complicated, so I will give three

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

The second example involves a woman, Diane, who has tried to lose weight her whole adult life without success. Every time she began eating healthier and exercising, she started strong, only to fizzle out and slowly gain back the weight she had lost. When I asked her what she would have to give up to get what she wanted, she answered, "My husband." Her answer seemed to surprise her, coming from a place she wasn't aware of consciously. When I explored that with her, she explained that her husband was a functional alcoholic. He was a good husband and father who went to work every day and only began drinking when he got home. He was never angry or abusive but drank more than a six-pack every night. Diane believed if she got healthy enough to lose weight, then she wouldn't be able to stay with her husband, because his dysfunction would be so obvious by comparison. She decided her marriage was more important than losing weight and has stopped beating herself up for the extra pounds.

The third example involves a man, Joe, who wanted to kick his roommate out of his apartment for lifestyle reasons. We had spent a

long time developing a plan for Joe to talk to his roommate. We even practiced the conversation. Joe left feeling confident, but when he returned the next week, he hadn't broached the subject. When I asked him, "What would you have to give up to tell your roommate you want him out?" Joe responded with, "Our friendship." Once I had that piece of the puzzle, the goal changed from "I want my roommate out of our apartment" to "I want my roommate out of our apartment with our friendship intact." It became easier to make a plan to accomplish this goal than when that important piece was missing from the picture.

Here are some possible questions for similar situations:

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

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

Coaching is a wonderful field. It is immensely rewarding to help people realize their potential and make progress toward their dreams. This book, *Powerful Choice Coaching Questions*, will help you get started if you are new to coaching. For experienced coaches, this book will increase your effectiveness by showing you new opportunities for growth.

If you haven't already, I hope you will consider our BCC-approved Choice Coaching Program at the Academy of Choice where you will learn to help your clients become bigger than anything that happens to them while living from the inside out.