

‘What if...?’ questions



When the client is brainstorming and compiling alternative implications, he or she often forms sentences with negative comments. The coach may ask a “What if...?” question connect to these sentences.

When the client says:

- This would be a great idea, but there won’t be enough budget for it.

The coach should respond as follows:

- And what would you do if money was not an issue because there was an unlimited budget?

Such questions can help ensure the Coachee conveys her original thoughts to the Coach, and it may also lead to new ideas. This is equally true for the following statements:

- My boss or the owner would not consent to it.

The coach's response:

- What might the solution be if you were the owner or CEO?

Another common remark that coachees make:

- This would be an extremely time-consuming solution: I am too busy to adopt it.

The coach may pose another question:

- And what would you do if you didn't lack time and were a time-millionaire?

Such questions can expose all the self-limiting factors and even if the solution remains impossible, according to my experiences, partial solutions including very useful alternative ideas, always surface. Therefore, as coaches we should look out for our clients and serve them by not overlooking such negative statements but challenging self-limiting comments.

Case Study (Excerpt)



One of my clients had some challenges in finding joy in their current role. He had been in the current role for 3 years and did not feel proud of his accomplishments. Furthermore, the role and its responsibilities no longer fulfilled him on a daily basis. The Coachee was also continuously developing himself for a different role within the organization that had some connection to his current position. At the time, the company was undergoing a restructuring process and there were no opportunities to apply for his desired job role, however he wanted to feel better within his current role. During the coaching session we explored the tasks he had to carry out and he listed all his tasks that drained his energy. One of his responsibilities was the following: Assist Business Architects by reviewing acceptance criteria.

I asked him which aspect of this task drained his energy?

The coachee replied: The reason why it bores me is because this task takes away 50% of my work and I need to review what Business Architects write, proofread them before it is implemented within the company.

Then I asked: What would you do if you could focus on other responsibilities/aspects of your role?

The client answered: In that case, I would focus on something else where I find more joy, however I would lose the opportunity to be connected with this department and that relationship could come in handy for my future aspirations.

Then I asked: In your opinion, what could be the potential value of this task if any?

The coachee replied: It is important to proofread the material and the step-by-step guides, so that I can put myself in the shoes of my colleague who will work with the final product.



Case Study (Excerpt)



I raised the following question: What would you do differently if this task could support your desired future role?

The client replied: In that case, I could try to write it myself and ask for help from the Business Architects. This way, I could have more insights on how they work but I could also challenge myself and build new connections that can help me in the future in my desired role.

It was fascinating to see how the Coachee was able to change his mindset about the task. From an energy drain, it quickly turned into a positive task that could give him energy. At our next coaching session, he enthusiastically shared the next steps he took and how he learned new perspectives about this responsibility.

