

SESSION 4

PROVOCATIVE QUESTIONS





## Structuring the Coaching Session The GROW Model

Goal	Reality	Options	Wrap-up
<b>AIM</b> Set long-term aim if appropriate	<b>ASSESSMENT</b> Invite self-assessment	<b>RANGE</b> Cover the full range of options	<b>ACTION</b> Commit to action
<b>OBJECTIVE</b> Agree specific objective of session	<b>EXAMPLES</b> Offer specific examples of feedback	<b>SUGGESTIONS</b> Invite suggestions from the player. Offer suggestions carefully	<b>OBSTACLES</b> Identify possible obstacles and how to overcome them. Agree support
<b>TOPIC</b> Agree topic for discussion	<b>ASSUMPTIONS</b> Avoid or check assumptions. Discard irrelevant history	<b>CHOICES</b> Ensure choices are made	<b>MILESTONES</b> Make steps specific and define timing

Adapted from: "The Tao of Coaching", by Max Landsberg

1000ventures.com



how  
where  
when  
why  
what  
whose  
who

Provocative questions are those that encourage a stakeholder to think creatively and laterally. They help to uncover any perceived constraints, and can help to evaluate whether those perceived constraints are real or imaginary. They can help to confirm or uncover the business driver behind a project/requirement, and they promote a level of creative thinking which might not be obtained through purely straight forward questioning.

These questions help to challenge our stakeholder's preconceptions, and ensure that we understand the business driver behind the project/requirement. By explicitly externalising these ideas and constraints early in a project's lifecycle, it is also an opportunity to spot any conflicts or areas of disconnect between stakeholder groups. This also provides the opportunity to debate and gain consensus on the objective of the project, before moving into discussions over potential solution options.

## 7 Provocative Questions...

What leaders ask when they feel overwhelmed

What question, if answered could make the most difference to the future of this specific situation?

What is one action I could take immediately that would make the greatest difference in the current situation?

What's one change I could make in my lifestyle that would give me more peace?

Who is one of the most optimistic problem solvers I can think of...? How would they see this situation differently?

If my whole attention is focused on producing an effective result, what will I gain? Why is that important to me?

Who could I talk to who would help illuminate this issue?

What are three of my greatest strengths and how can I apply them to this situation?



## What is Coaching?

From time to time, we get impulses for change. It might be because we get inspired... We might see someone else having what we want... A new possibility might occur to you... You get a flash of insight... A friend or colleague challenges you... Most often it's because something has gotten worse than we're willing to tolerate and we say, "I've had enough!"

Whatever the reason, this impulse for change comes along at certain intervals in our life. However, we all know the impulse rarely lasts. Last week I had an impulse to exercise... (again). However, it's not particularly consistent, and doesn't always come at times when it's convenient for me to exercise.

You may have thought: "You know – my relationship really could be better. Surely this isn't as good as it gets." And the next day the impulse is gone. Or "What would it take to double my profits? I'm really going to make some changes

in this business when I get less busy.” A few days later your focus is on something else.

Or... are you the kind of person who takes on new projects with gusto, to find out that a few weeks or months later it feels old hat, and you follow a familiar pattern of switching to something else?

### **Impulses for Change Do Not Usually Last**

This is why we human beings do not make many of the changes that are possible in our lives. Without Coaching – without a STRUCTURE – our natural tendency is to keep our patterns. Go to work. Make money. Keep the same relationships. Keep the same barriers. Want the same things to change. – but don’t change them. Feel an impulse for change – lose the impulse for change. Staying the same is the natural outcome.

### **Do We Need to Change?**

No. But wouldn’t it be wise? These impulses for change are the signals telling you what is next for you in life. They are your intuition letting you know that you are missing opportunities. They are messages (sometimes subtle) about what you would “really” like to do in your life, what your business needs, the perfect job, who you should be with right now.

If I may get a little deep for just a moment – they are not only the signals that will help us achieve the goals we are striving for, but the signals that are telling us how to evolve as people. If we ignore these impulses, we’ll feel restless at a very deep level – knowing something is wrong, but not sure what. Not understanding this restlessness, we must seek

ways of quieting it – TV, movies, alcohol, smoking, over-reading etc.

OK – I'm getting a little off track but I think you get my point. It's important that these impulses do not get left by the way side. You want the secret to achieving your goals and having an amazing life?

***Find a Way to Harness These Impulses!***

## **Types of NLP Coaching Services**

### **Personal NLP Coaching**

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Experience what it feels like to have someone who is fully on your side, to energize, encourage and empower you to be the best you can be and to live life more fully. That is what Personal Coaching is designed to do for you.

### **Professional NLP Coaching**

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Professional coaches are trained to listen and notice patterns of success and limitations, to customize their approach to your needs, and to elicit solutions and strategies from you.

### **Business NLP Coaching**

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Increasingly, business people, good leaders and managers are recognizing the benefits of using coaching in the workplace.

## **Common Indicators that You'll Benefit from Personal, Professional, or Business NLP Coaching**

1. Have you reached a plateau where you are in your *comfort zone* just coasting along but not really doing

what it takes to keep advancing to new and better personal, career, job and business opportunities?

2. Feel you don't have enough *free time* and sometimes seem to be overwhelmed or too busy to really enjoy life to its fullest?
3. You need to be better organized, there is turbulence and sometimes even chaos in some areas of your life—just look at your desk and your in-box, your computer desktop, and your to-do lists and your garage to see if you are in harmony and balance and well organized.
4. Are you needing a change, wanting a change, or about to make a change in your: career, business, job, home, relationship, personal health and fitness (exercise, diet, etc)... or in any area of your life?
5. Do you want more motivation, proactive behaviors or to drop off unwanted or limiting beliefs, attitudes, behaviors?

## **The Coaching Structure**

At it's simplest, coaching may be described as a structure. Coaching harnesses the energy for change; those impulses that last from a moment to a few weeks. If you feel an impulse to exercise more, you may exercise somewhat – until the next impulse. But if you join a gym for a year and hire a personal trainer, you will be fit! In fact it would be very hard to avoid it, having set up this structure.

Coaching is a similar structure, for any goal that's important to you. You make a commitment to your goals, and to working for a certain time frame with a coach. This is often 3 months or 6 months, usually with one or more review points to assess progress. Normally, once a week by phone, you

have a conversation with your coach and you commit to specific actions to move you forward.

Within a coaching structure your natural tendency is to pursue your goals and achieve them. It's hard, in fact very hard, to keep your limiting patterns and your life the same when you focus so much consistent attention on what you really want and make commitments to a third party.

With a coach, the person who feels an impulse to change careers isn't still thinking about it in three months time. He's hired a coach, found a new career possibility which inspires him, he's got a new resume and ten interviews lined up.

With a coach, the woman who wants to organize her business so that she has time for herself isn't still complaining about it in six months time. She's hired a coach, created an empowering time allocation, set her boundaries, hired an assistant, looks obviously happier and is therefore attracting more clients.

### **The key to Success:**

Without a coach the path of least resistance is to keep your life the same. Impulses for change often do not last long enough to act upon. With a coach the path of least resistance is to achieve your goals! Impulses for change are converted to momentum.



**Ten3 Coach**

## Coaching in the Workplace

### List of Activities

1. Set the Context	2. Provide Ongoing Guidance	3. Conclude Effectively
 <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ Diagnose the capabilities and attitude of the player</li><li>➤ Agree the approach to coaching</li><li>➤ Build trust</li><li>➤ Motivate</li></ul>	 <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ Use coaching sessions</li><li>➤ Provide feedback</li><li>➤ Give praise</li><li>➤ Illustrate by demonstration or collaboration</li></ul>	 <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ Ask the player to review and reflect on what he/she learned</li><li>➤ Elicit feedback on your coaching approach</li><li>➤ Agree next steps</li></ul>

Adapted from: "The Tao of Coaching", by Max Landsberg [1000ventures.com](http://1000ventures.com)

Centuries ago, people didn't think the world was changing at all. Their grandparents had the same lives that they did, and they expected their children and grandchildren would do the same- and that expectation was largely fulfilled. What is not fully understood is that the pace of change is itself accelerating, and the last 20 years are not a good guide of the next 20 years. We're doubling the paradigm shift rate, the rate of progress, every decade.[1]

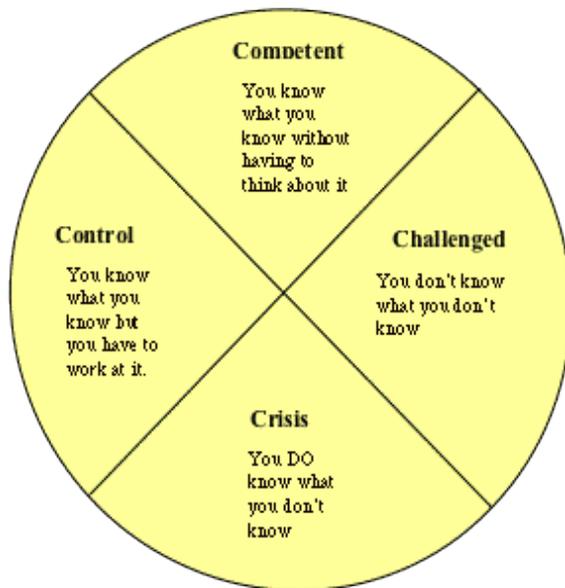
Especially in the emerging **GLOBAL COMMUNITY** change is a natural part of life, but what is the nature of change? Why is it that so many people, sane stable people under normal circumstances, seem to crack under the pressure of it? You've seen it happen to your employees, your staff, perhaps even to yourself. When things change, people get stressed and stress costs your company **MORE** than you think.[2]

Change in our personal and professional environment is widely acknowledged to be the number one cause of adult on-set stress. Euphemistically called “Life Events”, personal life changes (moving, death, birth, JOBS) are such stress based motivators that large and successful financial institutions bank their future on selling you relief in the form of a financial plan. Change causes stress and stress drives everything from a species to a company to an individual to make adaptive and evolutionary change.

In the workplace change is no less difficult. Fraught with uncertainty and anxiety workplace change can QUICKEN the pulse of even the most stout at heart. Stanford University Help Center lists organizational change as the cause of anxiety connected with the loss of: a sense of security, a sense of competence, relationships, a sense of direction and control, territory and job. Employees can develop feelings of helplessness and vulnerability. There is usually an active rumor mill, low morale and decreased productivity all leading to stress-related physical impact and burnout.[3]

Yet change is the only real CONSTANT in life. So why is change so hard for us? Perhaps a dispassionate look at what happens on the personal level is in order. Although our graphic shows a circle, it is useful to imagine change as a spiral or a dynamic system that winds and arcs from its start to deal with increasing complexity.

In the beginning, we all start out competent at least enough so to do the JOB, but then things change...



**Competent:** When you've mastered a skill, you know it almost at the level of subconscious or "muscle" memory. You can perform your duties without much conscious effort.

**Challenged:** When you are faced with change, you realize that you don't even know what you don't know yet. Some people will respond with excitement and some people will respond with fear. Response to change is not a good predictor of suitability for the NEW ORGANIZATION.

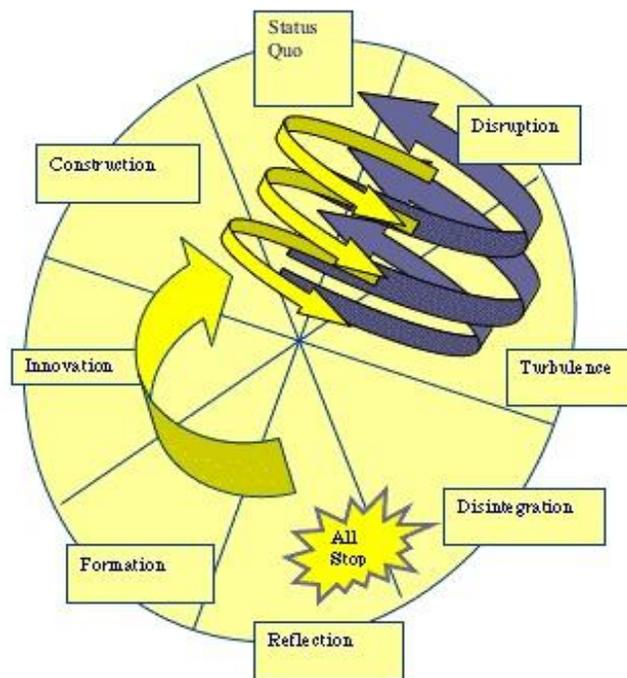
**Crisis:** Once you start down the path of change, you begin to discover what you didn't know when you started. This is usually an ought-oh moment. Stress reaches all time high as you realize that you need to scramble to catch up.

**Control:** Finally, after a lot of concentration and significant learning, at last you know what you need to know, but you must continue to tightly control it in order to do it right.

When you've controlled it well enough for long enough, you'll move back into your nice comfortable groove. You've again become competent, until significant new change occurs.

Change then, by its very nature, challenges us to step outside of our comfort zone and into a world where we have to try harder. In an organization, as each person's anxiety goes up, emotional intensity of the group goes up and misunderstandings go up in occurrence exponentially. It is difficult to speak clearly and to hear accurately if emotional intensity is raised, or if people feel rushed.[4]

Of course organizations are comprised of people who work together in a system, making it useful to look at all of the disruption that is taking place at the systemic level.



All change starts with the Status Quo. This part of the cycle is earmarked by predictability. There are only minor variations, day to day.

Generally, organizations move into Status Quo after a period of growth. Everyone settles down and even disruption occurs only within the narrow band for the expected.

Change begins when forces, either internal or external, drive toward a new goal or when situations around or within them can no longer be sustained. Natural forces resist those drivers and disruption outside of the normal band begins to occur.

At this stage everyone experiences discomfort: those who are pushing harder for change because of perceived opposition, and those who oppose change because of the unexpected disruption.

Turbulence is the result, as pressure mounts both for and against change. Turbulence reaches maximum force levels and stress hits an all time high. It is precisely at this moment, just before disintegration of the old status quo, that everyone in the organization needs the personal resource to embrace change. Unfortunately it is precisely at this moment when those in the throes of change are most likely to be the least resourceful. You'll recognize this as loud but petty arguments, disrupted meetings, higher than normal complaints, both formal and informal grumbling.

Cooperation goes down, territorial behavior goes up as does tattling, sabotage and self-MARKETING.[5]

There are useful ways to encourage yourself and others of the staff to behave resourcefully and we'll cover those later but for now just think of positive resources as possessing qualities such as humor, introspection, patience and vision to name a few.

Continuing through the system's cycle, assuming the forces of change including momentum are sufficient, the organization will move from turbulence to disintegration of the old status quo. There is never one precise moment, but rather a general knowing that, even if you wanted, there is no going back. The only way out now is through. For a brief period, turbulence in fact motion in general comes to a halt, almost as if the organization is holding its collective breath.

Quietly a time of reflection is entered. This is the stage at which most people in the organization will begin to self-select. Either they will elect to be a part of the new way or they will resign themselves to moving on.

Reflection moves into formation, where teams begin to gel. Innovation takes root and after a rehash of plans, construction starts. After sufficient construction, the organization moves into the new status quo.

The graphic clearly reveals that less than half the organizational cycle of change is focused on pro-active behavior. The remainder is force, both for and against, in opposition to each other followed by finality. Taken in conjunction with WHAT IS HAPPENING at the personal level, it's pretty easy to see where the sweaty palms and sleepless nights come from.

So what can be done? There are any number of great change management texts and professional guidance organizations. Go to any bookstore or open any business directory. Also, hiring a Personal/Professional Coach is highly recommended. In the meantime here are a few options to think about when you think about planning change in your environment.

## **Change is Your Ally**

A remark attributed to Dwight D. Eisenhower, "Plans are nothing, planning is everything." We all know the power of inviting your staff into your plans for change. The importance of the product is not the plan itself, but the ongoing process. By inviting others to help the system to change, you gain the opportunity to co-opt those who are important to your organization. By giving them a piece of the future to design, you help them to see change as something of their own crafting.

It's a time-honored approach, so why not take it to the next level? Encourage your staff to communicate, in turn, with their staff, and so on through to the most junior ranks. Ask your staff to send the message openly. This change is the organization's ally. Face it and encourage people to shoot for rapid recovery, perhaps viewing their situation not as a change in the job they once had but as if they'd taken another job entirely and it was different from the last one.[6] By marketing the change as positive opportunity to all levels of the organization and by inviting their feedback you set the tone and pace of recovery for those who will recover and realignment for those who will move on. You may also find that an open approach will deter feudalism, loss of focus and information hoarding and even turn down the volume of the rumor mill.

To quote Mary Ferguson, author and futurist, "It's not so much that we're afraid of change or so in love with the old ways, but it's that place between that we fear... It's like being between trapezes. It's Linus when his blanket is in the dryer. There's nothing to hold on to."

## **Bag of Nickels**

I once had a mentor who was a brilliant man, in the business of change management. When I took my first in a very long line of jobs with him, he handed me a sack full of nickels, just about \$5.00 worth and said, "Gail, things are going to be very difficult around here. We're here to make things change and nothing much has changed in this company for nearly 60 years." I looked at the bag with what must have been considerable confusion on my face. As he stood to go he said, "Every time that you react to fear, anger, panic or doubt with anything less than kindness and fortitude, you spend a nickel. When that bag is empty, you lose your job." Nervously I laughed and counted out my nickels. I haven't worked for Paul in nearly a decade, but I still have that sack and I still have several nickels.

### **Positive Resources**

Understanding the power of emotions in the work place sets the best leaders apart from the rest – not just in tangibles such as better business results and retention of talent but also in the all-important intangibles such as higher morale, motivation and commitment.[7]

This process works best if done one-on-one between leaders and their staff. Specifically for those involved in the change process, ask each of them to write a list of personal positive resources they possess. They do not need to share the list, only to spend the time writing it down. Positive resources are such things as patience, humor, empathy, generosity, kindness, open-mindedness, vision, information sharing, courage, self confidence, a sense of security, fairness and the like.

When each person returns with the list, challenge him or her to remember the list when reviewing the day. We all review

our day, sometimes assigning blame to others or ourselves. This exercise simply invites us to review with the intention of developing more positive resourcefulness when living through periods of high stress. Basically the exercise proceeds as follows:

Whenever you naturally take the time to review the day's events, whether it's on the ride HOME or perhaps after dinner or before going to sleep, notice the times when you might have acted with less than positive behaviors or perhaps reacted with a less than positive response. Don't dwell on those times, simply notice them as if you were an objective observer. Then, recall your list of positive resources. Choose from among the resources on your list selecting the one that, if you had more access to it at that moment in time, would have allowed you to respond differently. Actually see yourself going through that situation again, only this time with the resource you needed ready at hand. Be sure to focus for a moment on handling the situation resourcefully and then let the entire review fade away knowing that if that a similar situation arises again you'll have the resource to deal with it more successfully.

### **Change Your Language, Change Your Results**

An entire book can be written about how your use of language affects your life. In fact dozens of those books exist so we won't go into it in great detail here. Just remember at a time when organizational pressure is high – defuse. Look for the places in your language where you send a signal of stress, uncertainty or pending disaster and change those words. Try changing, “If we don't make these changes we'll be unable to compete in the new market,” to “When we've made this change, no competitor will be able to touch us.” It changes uncertainty (if) to certainty (when)

and fear (unable to compete) to fortitude (untouchable). Even simple changes such as switching from, “The company’s goal is...” to, and “The outcome we see for our organization is...” sends a signal. It says that you have an outcome in your sights and it is for the whole organization, not just for some company that your people may or may not belong to

At the start of many projects we are in a state of natural ignorance, as we don’t yet know what we don’t know. This is especially true when defining a problem or strategy or [eliciting requirements](#). It is extremely valuable to uncover as much relevant information early in a project’s lifecycle, so that we can ensure that the project is set on the right track.

It is important to ask the [right questions](#) early on. This encourages our stakeholders to approach the problem-space in a thoughtful and creative way hopefully working around any presuppositions, prejudices and assumptions. Asking a balance of logical and also deliberately *provocative* **QUESTIONS** can help us to get a better understanding of our stakeholders’ worldviews, and help us to understand what they value as well as ideas or requirements.



*Provocative questions can cause fireworks in thinking!*

Provocative questions are those that encourage a stakeholder to think creatively and laterally. They help to uncover any perceived constraints, and can help to evaluate whether those perceived constraints are real or imaginary. They can help to confirm or uncover the [business driver](#) behind a project/requirement, and they promote a level of creative thinking which might not be obtained through purely straight forward questioning.

These questions help to challenge our stakeholder's preconceptions, and ensure that we understand the business driver behind the project/requirement. By explicitly externalising these ideas and constraints early in a project's lifecycle, it is also an opportunity to spot any conflicts or areas of disconnect between stakeholder groups. This also provides the opportunity to debate and gain consensus on the objective of the project, before moving into discussions over potential solution [options](#).

Here are some examples of some *provocative* questions you might find useful:

**1. “If there were no constraints (budget/time), what would your ideal solution/outcome look like?”**: This is often seen as a dangerous question, as it opens up [scope](#). It certainly needs to be used alongside clear expectation management, however it can get us closer to the real [business problem](#) or opportunity that is being addressed by the project.

**2. “What is the worst possible project outcome from your perspective, and why?”** : This might sound like an abrasive and counter-intuitive question, so it’s essential that you are sure you have built good rapport with a stakeholder before using it. This question is valuable as it helps to elicit values, constraints and tolerances. For example, if the worst possible outcome is “Late delivery, because the regulator will shut us down”, then you know that *time* is the key constraint.

**3. “Imagine nothing changes. What would happen, and where would the organisation be in 12 months time?”**: This question helps to understand the relative urgency of the project, and is also likely to uncover any environmental factors. It also helps to confirm the business drivers for the project.

**4. “If you had to articulate the project objectives in a single short sentence, what would it be. And how will these objectives help the project to deliver [financial](#) benefit?”**: It can be enlightening to ask stakeholders to succinctly state the purpose of a project, stating how this is of financial benefit. Often, different stakeholders have subtly different worldviews, and therefore perceive projects differently. For

example, an operational stakeholder may focus on efficiencies, a MARKETING stakeholder may focus on increased revenue. Even when a business case has been drafted, stakeholders tend to have slightly different views on what benefits will be realised (and how they will be realised). This is extremely useful to know, as it will uncover any areas of disconnect early so that they can be resolved.

**5. “Imagine if we fast-forward to 2 years after the implementation of this project, what will the organisation look like?”**: This question helps gain an understanding of the future state of the organisation, and what it means for the people and processes that run it. It can be used to get a sense for the size of the change that is envisaged. For example, does it involve significant organisational restructure? Or is this out of scope?

**6. “How do our competitors handle this? Do we want to be the same, or different from them?”**: Often, business stakeholders will look to see how a competitor has solved a particular problem, and will initiate a project to replicate this. In some circumstances, this will be a completely valid approach. However, a better solution might be to *differentiate* from competitors, and SOLVE THE PROBLEM in a new way that increases VALUE TO CUSTOMERS.

**8. “Is there any other way your business objectives could be met? If not, can you explain why this is the case?”**: It is extremely useful to know whether delivering a particular project is genuinely the *only* way to address the business problem/opportunity that has been identified. There might be others, and it's useful to know

whether they have been ruled out. Other options might include:

- Process (rather than IT) changes
- Organisational changes
- Outsourcing work
- Manual workarounds

In summary, using *provocative* questions is a great way to encourage lateral thinking amongst your project stakeholders. This will help to surface ideas, values, issues and perceived constraints. Once these THOUGHTS have been explicitly surfaced, they can be discussed and re-evaluated.

Encouraging lateral thinking helps to uncover imaginary constraints, and helps us challenge the business objectives to ensure they are sound. I hope that the questions above help you engage with your stakeholders and understand what their projects mean for them.

Let me ask you a question!

Why are you reading this article?

I guess you are looking for tips to achieve success.

Rubbish!!!

The beauty of provocative coaching is that it will prepare you to find answers from within, rather than searching in the dark.

Most people seek guidance from others for their problems. But if you provoke a person coated with love, then they will find their own solutions and they will thank you for this.

When something good happens to you, do you ever ask – Why me?

Then why do you ask – Why me? when you are posed with a problem.

This method will teach you to seek answers rather than questioning everything. You will develop a new perspective about life and you will embark on a new journey, which is what I am doing now.

When you empty your heart and brain from perceptions, you will start accepting feedback and people.

Receiving negative feedback with an open heart is the hallmark of great people. Provocative coaching will help you to take negative feedback with an open heart and make adjustments to achieve success in your life.

You will also learn how to give feedback to people and help them towards their journey of excellence.

People are used to giving importance to the big stuff. But they neglect the minor ones.

Simple stuff like saying thank you and sorry can play a huge role in your life.

I also learned to express my love towards my wife, friends and family members. Before this I never used to express my love.

At times you need to let people know that you love them. You will understand the importance of helping your wife in cooking or cleaning the home.

This will teach you to hope for the best and prepare yourself for the worst.

Provocations can tell you that you are capable of achieving everything in life.

At the same time, it will tell you that you are just a negligible piece of atom that can disintegrate at any point of time. Basically, it will help you shed your ego and helps you realize that you need to be more human.

We sincerely thank Hiten for giving us the opportunity to write this article for you.

What do you think of the provocative style of coaching?

Have you ever used this type of communication to help other people?

Have you ever had anyone use this type of communication to help you?

Please share your valuable thoughts, views and experiences in the comments box below.