

October 2009 Vitality, national version - one-page article

Be Your Own Success Coach

To achieve the goals of your dreams, ask yourself four questions a business coach might ask you.

Imagine a partner by your side whose only intent is to help you maximize your potential. Someone knowledgeable and objective, a great listener, who helps you move forward toward achieving the goals of your dreams.

There may be no personal coach at your beck and call right now. But you can still make real headway in your career by asking yourself the kinds of questions a business coach might ask of you. These questions are courtesy of Kay Cannon, an internationally recognized executive coach and leadership expert:

1. “What is it I truly want to accomplish?” Do you want to earn more money? Reduce your stress? Make better use of your talents? Be more confident about completing work projects?

“Asking yourself this first question helps you to make the connection between that pile of work in front of you and the end purpose it’s going to serve your employer and yourself,” Cannon explains. It’s so easy to get caught up in the small details each day, she adds. “You need to think bigger than that, and then link what’s immediately in front of you to that bigger goal.”

2. “What’s standing in my way?” Once you’ve identified where you want to go, your next, great task is to identify any perceived obstacles to your getting there. Your first inclination might be to list all the external things in your way—your co-workers’ attitudes, the boss’s demands, your never-ending to-do list. But realize you have little control over most of these external obstacles. Instead, focus on what you *can* control, which is who you are, and how you perceive and react to external challenges.

“Lots of times the challenges we face are rooted in the nooks and crannies of who we are as people,” Cannon explains. “Look inward at what you are doing or thinking that’s standing in your way, and at how you are investing your time as a result.”

In particular, she suggests, try to notice an unconscious mindset that may be contributing to your habitual behaviors. For example, one common mindset is the desire to feel like something—anything—has been accomplished by day’s end. This desire leads many people to tackle their easiest tasks first.

“Unfortunately, they don’t get to those really big, hairy things on their to-do list that will require a lot of time and attention”—important things that could impress their employer and bring job satisfaction.

3. “What is one action I can take that will help remove that obstacle?” Let’s say your most meaningful goal right now is to finish an important project; and a major obstacle is your tendency to focus on those easy, less important tasks. It could be that for now, the one action that will bring the greatest value in removing this obstacle is simply to close your door for two hours so you can focus on the project.

4. “What benchmarks will I look for that will indicate I’ve succeeded in overcoming the obstacle?” Turning that big project in to your boss might be your

benchmark. Or, not adding any more unimportant tasks to your to-do list could be the benchmark.

“The idea is to create a framework for yourself on where you want to go, what’s standing in your way, and what’s the biggest action you can take to overcome the obstacle. This fourth question gives you feedback on whether you’ve been successful.”

If you have the opportunity to work with an actual coach, do so, Cannon stresses—often, only an objective expert can point out where you are sabotaging your own best efforts.

Importantly, don’t feel you have to struggle with these questions alone. “If you can’t access a coach, I strongly encourage you to have this conversation with a trusted colleague or co-worker, someone who knows you very well and will be very honest with you.”

Polly Turner spoke with executive coach Kay Cannon, M.C.C., president of Kay Cannon Inc. and past president of the International Coach Federation. For free referral to a credentialed coach, visit www.coachfederation.org.