



# Positive Provocation

25 QUESTIONS  
TO ELEVATE  
YOUR COACHING  
PRACTICE

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# Positive Provocation Book Club

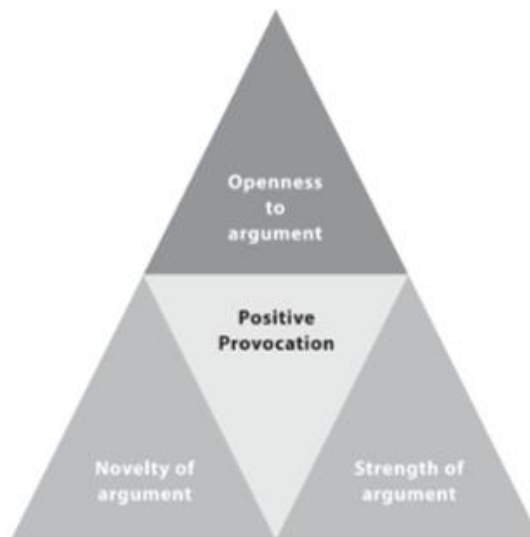
**Thank you for your interest in *Positive Provocation: 25 Questions to Elevate Your Coaching*. Whether you are reading this book alone, are part of a small book club, or involved with an organizational learning initiative, I hope you find this book useful and engaging. Each chapter (called “provocation”) has a short list of reflections and experiments that might serve as useful points of discussion. In addition, here are several prompts designed to stoke fruitful conversations between readers of this book. They are organized by section of the book.**

## Introduction

1. What was your initial reaction to the title of the book? Many people have a strong reaction to the word “provocation.” What feelings or thoughts did it stir in you?
2. The author argues that strong agreement and disagreement do little to spur growth and learning. To what extent do you agree with this sentiment?
3. In the introduction, the author presents a framework for positive provocation that includes novelty of information presented, strength of information presented, and openness to information presented. What do you think of the framework and its parts? Would you add, modify, or remove anything?
4. The author suggests that “shocking” should not be used as a metric for how provocative the book is. If provocation is not “to shock,” then what, in your opinion, is it? You might consider relating this to the author’s idea that newer coaches might wrestle with the material more than experienced coaches. What do you think?
5. The author makes the case that coaching works, in part, by challenging clients to think in new ways. Similarly, he suggests that coaches could grow by questioning their own assumptions about coaching. To what extent do you believe that coaches continuously question their fundamental assumptions or practices? How has reading this book reinforced or challenged your point of view on this matter?

## **Part One: Philosophies of Coaching**

1. This section introduces a wide range of topics: coaching greatness, being non-directive, coaches having agendas, solving coaching problems, ethics, and learning theory. Which of these provocations did you find most useful or engaging? Why?
2. Some of the provocations in this section, such as the idea that coaching is mildly directive, fly in the face of much common wisdom in coach training. Do you think the provocations in this section suggest that we should change the way we train coaches? Provide your rationale.
3. It is surprising how often coaches address negatives: focusing on problems, identifying obstacles, asking about self-limiting beliefs, and exploring the causes of problems. The author suggests that an improvement mindset, as opposed to a problem-solving mindset, leads to a distinct approach to coaching. To what extent do you agree? What, if any, changes have you made to your own practice as a result of this provocation?
4. In the provocation on ethics, the author calls for more transparency and reporting from professional bodies regarding the frequency, content, and disposition of ethical violations. What do you think of this? What do you think would be helpful?
5. The author suggests that knowing about learning theory might be helpful to coaches. What major topics or frameworks do you believe would help coaches be more effective, regardless of their specific coaching approach or the industry in which they work?



**FIGURE 1.1.** The positive provocation model

## **Part Two: Communicating with Clients**

1. The first three provocations in this section take aim at widely-accepted wisdom in coaching: that coaches should not ask "why" questions, that coaches should not interrupt, and that coaches should use client (rather than coach) language. To what extent had you heard these sentiments in your own training or conversations with other coaches? How did these three provocations affect your views of these topics?
2. The provocation on symmetries and asymmetries in coaching questions is not based on a widely-taught framework for inquiry. Instead, it is something that the author developed to engage coaches to consider the nature of coaching questions. What do you think are the benefits and perils of coaches coming up with their own frameworks?
3. How much small talk do you use in your own coaching? What have you noticed about it? How do your practices differ from the other coaches in your group?
4. What do you think is the minimum a coach could say or do in a session and still have it count as coaching?
5. The author suggested that readers did not have to move through the book in order. Did you? How did you choose your approach for engaging with this book?

## **Part Three: Common Coaching Concepts**

1. Arguably, this section of the book contains 3 of the most provocative chapters, if provocative is designed as shocking or as running counter to common wisdom. They relate to not immediately trusting aha moments in clients, using less empathy with clients, and the idea that making assumptions about people is highly beneficial. What was your reaction to these three provocations? What did you learn if you experimented with them in your coaching practice?
2. Since the book's publication, the author received a surprising number of comments and questions about being a better observer of coaching. How often do you observe coaching sessions? Where do you do so? How do you think being a better observer could relate to improving as a coach? Can you think of other skills in which being a great observer can lead to improved performance?
3. What did you think about the various curiosity types? Which are you? Do you feel there are types missing from this framework or revisions that might be useful?
4. What are your views on coach self-disclosure? How much do you do? How have your views changed, if at all, after reading this provocation?

## **Part Four: Coaching Interventions**

1. Many people are surprised by the idea of "meta-interventions." These are engineered contexts that support specific interventions in being more effective. To what extent is coaching itself a meta-intervention?
2. To some degree, bravery is required in making changes to one's coaching practice. For example, shifting from homework to experiments, distinguishing between clinical and non-clinical emotional experiences, and using surprise as an attentional intervention all require coaches to take risks. How do you balance ethical safety and responsibility, on the one hand, with coaching innovation, on the other?
3. Many readers report that the provocation about sending clients into battle is among the most provocative in the entire book. How did you react to it? At the extreme end of the scale, the author suggests that coaches do not need to engage clients in addressing self-limiting beliefs or other thinking problems. What do you think of this? What have you noticed or learned if you experimented with alternative approaches?
4. The author introduced crux-focused coaching based on his own love of rock climbing as a pastime. Can you think of ways that your own hobbies might offer metaphors to help you think about the coaching process? Share your ideas.

## **Part Five: Bonus Provocation**

1. There is only a single provocation in this section: the idea that coaching should be informed by science. What is your reaction to this? If you disagree, what is your rationale? If you agree, how do you think science could benefit coaching?
2. Final Question: How has your coaching changed as a result of reading this book?

**Thank you for your interest in Positive Provocation. It is our mission to elevate ethical and effective coaching practice. Please share this book with others, leave an honest online review, or consider giving it as a gift.**

**To find out more about our coach training, coaching, and writing, please visit Positive Acorn at [www.positiveacorn.com](http://www.positiveacorn.com)**

