

TOOL

The Coaching Lenses



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The Coaching Lenses

Purpose:

The Coaching Lenses are an analytical framework that enable root-cause analysis of a complex situation. They are discussed in Chapter 4 of *The Art of Coaching*. They are invaluable to the work of coaches and organizational leaders.

When to Use:

Use this tool when you are preparing for a coaching conversation, reflecting on a situation, or feeling stuck in your interpretation of what's happening. It is especially useful when a situation feels complex or when your initial perspective may be incomplete.

How to Use:

The Lenses can be used individually or by teams or groups (when using a Consultancy Protocol, for example). When considering a complex situation, first read the Assumptions to anchor in the key concepts for that lens. Then, read and reflect on the Questions as they apply to the situation. Although it might seem that one lens may be most relevant to a situation, be sure to use all the lenses—often a lens reveals our own unseen gap areas in understanding the situation. Internalizing the Lenses and applying them during a conversation takes time and practice. The more they are used when planning and reflecting, the more deeply they'll be internalized and readily available to engage during a conversation.

While the Lenses in their entirety are invaluable, there are a handful that are key and yield insight in almost any situation. These have been compiled into a handy one-pager on the final page of this document.

Attributions:

The Lens of Inquiry, Adult Learning, Change Management, Systems Thinking and Systemic Oppression are based on those created by the National Equity Project and are reprinted with their permission. Lens of Emotional Intelligence and the Lens of Compassion were created by Elena Aguilar.

The Coaching Lenses

Adult Learning

ASSUMPTIONS	QUESTIONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Problems of change are problems of learning. • Adults (and children) must feel safe to learn. • Adults want to be the origin of our own learning; we want to control aspects of it. • People can only be where they are; we can only meet adult learners where they are. • Life experiences impact how we learn. • Adults come to learning with a wide range of previous experiences, knowledge, interests, and competencies. • Every human being is on a path from somewhere to somewhere; we must discover where people have been and where they're going. • We all enter the work of equity and justice from very different starting points. • If you don't acknowledge progress, you lose trust. • Adults want and need feedback. • The values that we hold around learning and education influence how we guide adult learners; we need clarity on what those values are. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the gap between reality and the goal? • What is the goal or objective? What does exemplary performance in this role look like? How has that been communicated? • What progress has been made towards this goal? • What is going well? Which strengths can be built on? • What are the gaps in ability? Skill? Knowledge? Will? Capacity? Emotional Intelligence? Cultural competency? • Is there evidence of prior learning? • Does the will for learning exist? How do I know if it does/doesn't? • Is this a safe space for learning? • How is this person owning their learning? How can they own it more fully? • What do I know about where this person is in their learning? • What do I know about where this person is coming from? How can I more deeply understand their path?

Change Management

ASSUMPTIONS	QUESTIONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beneficial change is possible in any situation. • Building on strengths can lead to positive change. • Change can be studied, understood, and influenced. • These conditions need to be present for successful change: leadership, vision, skills, incentives, resources, and a clear plan of action. • People need will, skill, knowledge and capacity to change. • An organizational identity conflict can be a step toward organizational change. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the conditions for change in this situation? • What's working in this situation? • Which strengths can be built on? • Where are the opportunities for leveraging change? What threats to change are present? • What is the vision that people are working toward? • Which skills do people need to achieve the vision? What knowledge is necessary? • Do people have the skills and knowledge necessary to implement change? • Does the will for change exist here? Where? • What incentives are in place for people to change? • What resources are available to support change?

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Inquiry

ASSUMPTIONS	QUESTIONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The way we pose the question determines the nature of the answer. • The way we define the problem dictates how we define the solution. • The questions we ask are as important as the answers we find. • People can create their own knowledge and solutions. • Seemingly intractable problems can be addressed. • When you own the question, you take responsibility for the answer. • Evidence and data are critical to making informed decisions. • Multiple forms of data, including authentic and qualitative measures produced by multiple constituencies, are necessary for effective decision-making. • Knowledge is socially constructed. • We never know everything we need to know, but we need to act anyway. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do I think is the problem? What do others think is the problem? • Who is defining the problem? Whose question is this? • What data do we have on this problem? Which problems does that data say we should address? • Is this a question I really care about? Who else cares about this question? • From which perspectives am I seeing this situation? • What other perspectives would help me understand this situation? • How is this situation connected to other things?

Systems Thinking

ASSUMPTIONS	QUESTIONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Everything we observe is the result of a complex set of interactions. • Whatever is happening in a moment is exactly what is supposed to happen in the system as it is. If we understand these interactions, we can intervene effectively to change them. • If we understand a system's structure, we can identify possible leverage points to change it. • Conflict and tension in a system are necessary and natural. • To change systems, we must understand the big picture, consider an issue fully and resist the urge to come to a quick conclusion. • We must consider the short- and long-term consequences of an action. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How is the current system designed to produce the results we're seeing? • How did this system generate the behavior we're seeing? • What are the relationships between things here? • Where is the energy in this situation? Where are the stuck points? • If I do this here, what would happen over here? • If I do this now, what will happen immediately? What will happen in the long term? • What are the unintended consequences of a particular action? • If we shift our perspective, what might we understand about this situation?

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Emotional Intelligence	
ASSUMPTIONS	QUESTIONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We are all born with emotional intelligence and can further develop these skills and capacities. • There are four areas of emotional intelligence: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness and relationship management. • An effective educator speaks about their emotions, welcomes feedback, and is aware of when they need help. • An effective educator navigates their emotions with self-regulation. • Adaptability and flexibility are indicators of high emotional intelligence. • Emotional resilience is a reflection of high emotional intelligence. • Empathy reflects social awareness. • An emotionally intelligent educator understands power dynamics in an organization and how to navigate those while preserving and strengthening relationships. • Emotionally intelligent educators build relationships between individuals and groups. 	<p><i>These questions can be asked of the inquirer themselves (of the coach or leader) or they can be asked about the person who is being observed or considered—the teacher. Here they are phrased as questions to ask about someone else.</i></p> <p><i>Self-Awareness</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do they recognize when they are experiencing emotions? Do they recognize how their feelings are affecting them at work and how their feelings affect others? • How do they speak about their feelings? Do they have the vocabulary to describe her feelings? • Can they recognize their strengths, areas for growth and limitations? • How do they invite or welcome feedback? • Are they aware of when they need help? <p><i>Self-Management</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do they respond to strong emotions? • How do they manage feeling stressed and triggered? • Are they transparent about their feelings, beliefs and actions? Can they admit mistakes or faults? • How do they deal with change and new challenges? <p><i>Social Awareness</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can they sense unspoken emotions in a person or group? • Can they detect key power relationships? • How do they cultivate an emotional climate that ensures that people are getting what they need? • How do they monitor the satisfaction of those they serve? <p><i>Relationship Management</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do they respond to the emotions of others? • How do they create resonance and move people toward a compelling vision or goal? • How do they model what they want from others? • How do they learn about other people’s goals, strengths, and areas for growth? • When there’s a conflict, how do they understand different perspectives? How do they surface conflicts, acknowledge all perspectives, and redirect the energy toward a shared goal? • How do they model respect, concern, and collaboration? How do they build relationships and spirit?

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Systemic Oppression/Equity	
ASSUMPTIONS	QUESTIONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inequities based on race, class, and gender are prevalent in our world and education system. • Oppression and injustice are human creations and therefore, can be undone. • Systemic oppression negatively affects the educational process in countless ways. • Oppression and systematic mistreatment (such as white supremacy, racism, classism, sexism, and homophobia) is more than the sum of individual prejudices. • Systemic oppression has historical antecedents: it is an intentional disempowering of groups of people based on their identity in order to maintain an unequal power structure that subjugates one group under another. • Systemic oppression manifests in economic, political, social and cultural systems and in interpersonal relationships. • Systemic oppression and its effects can be undone through recognition of inequitable patterns and intentional action to interrupt inequity. • Discussing and addressing oppression and bias will be accompanied by strong emotions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How are oppression, internalized oppression and transferred oppression playing out right here, right now? (In this relationship, classroom, school, group, organization, and district?) • Who has power here? What is that power based on? • How are power relations affecting the truth that is told and constructed at any given moment? How do power relations reflect dominant systems of oppression? • Who is at the table? Who isn't? How does this reflect dominant systems of oppression? • How safe is it here for different people to share their truth? How safe is it for people from marginalized communities to share their truths? • Whose safety is prioritized when there's space to share truths? • How do I understand my practice as an educator committed to justice and liberation, given how I am different or the same as my colleagues? As the people I am serving? • How can I build my practice as a leader for equity starting with who I am and what I bring because of who I am?

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Compassion	
ASSUMPTIONS	QUESTIONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compassion is the ability to suspend judgment of ourselves and others, appreciating that each of us makes choices based on the information and skills that we have at any given time. • Compassion is the ability to act on a feeling of empathy for another living being. • Compassion is our natural state. Sometimes conditions block us from feeling compassion, but we can find our way back. • Compassion for another starts with compassion toward one's self. • Cultivating compassion requires us to keep our eyes and hearts open even though what we see and hear might break our hearts. • Gratitude, gentleness, and listening foster the development of compassion. • It is an act of compassion to hold a calm and grounded presence in the face of another's suffering. • If we pause and choose a response to a situation, we are more likely to feel compassionate. • We can use compassion to dismantle destructive beliefs and behaviors. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How are others experiencing this situation? What are things like from their perspective? • How can we uncover the goodness and humanity in others despite their grief, anger and exhaustion, or despite our own? • How do we support others to discover their best qualities? (And are we remembering to do so?) • How do we create space for all voices to be truly heard? Whose voices are not heard? • How do we help others explore the consequences of their actions and learn from them? • How do we foster listening that leads to greater compassion and empathy in our communities? • Where do we see people treating each other with kindness? How can we create more spaces where people treat each other with kindness? • How can we return to a state of compassion when we notice we are triggered? How can we help others do this? • How can compassion help us to dismantle systems of oppression?

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Lens	Key Assumptions	Key Questions
Adult Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Problems of change are problems of learning. • Adults must feel safe to learn. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is going well? Which strengths can be built on? • What are the gaps in ability? Skill? Knowledge? Will? Capacity? Emotional Intelligence? Cultural competency?
Change Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • These conditions need to be present for successful change: leadership, vision, skills, incentives, resources, and a clear plan of action. • People need will, skill, knowledge and capacity to change. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the conditions for change in this situation? • Do people have the skills and knowledge necessary to implement change?
Inquiry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The way we pose the question determines the nature of the answer. • The way we define the problem dictates how we define the solution. • The questions we ask are as important as the answers we find. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do I think is the problem? What do others think is the problem? • Who is defining the problem? From which perspectives am I seeing this situation? • Which other perspectives would help me understand this situation?
Systems Thinking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whatever is happening in a moment is exactly what is supposed to happen in the system as it is. If we understand these interactions, we can intervene effectively to change them. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the relationships between things here? • Where is the energy in this situation? Where are the stuck points?
Emotional Intelligence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An effective educator speaks about their emotions, welcomes feedback, and is aware of when they need help. • An effective educator navigates their emotions with self-regulation. • Emotional resilience is a reflection of high emotional intelligence. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do they recognize when they are experiencing emotions? Do they recognize how their feelings are affecting them and others? • How do they manage feeling stressed and emotionally activated? • How do they cultivate an emotional climate that ensures that people are getting what they need?
Systemic Oppression/ Equity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Systemic oppression negatively affects the educational process in countless ways. • Inequities based on race, class, gender are prevalent in our world and education system. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How are oppression, internalized oppression and transferred oppression playing out right here, right now? • Who has power here? What is that power based on?
Compassion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compassion is the ability to act on a feeling of empathy for another living being. • Compassion for another starts with compassion toward one's self. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How are others experiencing this situation • What are things like from their perspective?

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