



Breakthrough Coaching

The Reflective Coach

A 6-Step Primer for Transformational Conversations

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Why Problem-solving Isn't Enough

"We don't learn from experience. We learn from reflecting on experience."

- John Dewey

Most coaches start with a question like, *"What's the problem?"*

But real change doesn't begin with a problem. It begins with a moment of reflection, when your client suddenly sees something new about themselves.

We're wired to look for quick fixes. The brain craves certainty, even when that certainty keeps us stuck. That's why *telling* rarely transforms. When we advise or analyze, we activate the short-term cognitive brain, the one that agrees politely, then reverts to habit.

Transformational coaching works differently. It invites clients to pause, notice, and reorganize their thinking.

This process, **reflective inquiry**, is what makes coaching powerful, repeatable, and deeply human.

In the pages ahead, you'll explore **six simple steps** to help clients experience genuine breakthroughs, and remind yourself that you don't have to fix anyone to create change.



To see these ideas in action, the Breakthrough Coaching on-demand course includes full demonstrations and monthly live Office Hours with me, where we explore these practices together.

[Secure your seat today](#)

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Step 1: Pause the Fixing Instinct

Most coaches mean well. We want to help. But the urge to solve often slips in before awareness has a chance to appear.

When you feel that urge, the quickening heartbeat, the sentence forming in your head - **stop**. Take three slow breaths. Let silence do the work.

When you pause, you invite your client's mind to reorganize itself.

That's when new insight emerges, not because you said the right thing, but because you didn't rush to say anything at all.

Try this in your next coaching session:

1

Before speaking, ask yourself:
Why am I talking? Am I trying to rescue, or to reveal?

2

Breathe in through the nose, out through the mouth three times.

3

Let curiosity replace the need to respond.

4

After the session, **note what changed** when you paused.



When silence changes a conversation, it's rarely the words that follow, it's the space that allowed meaning to appear.

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Step 2: Invite Reflection, Not Reaction

Most coaching questions sound helpful, yet they often keep people on the surface. Questions like “What’s wrong?” or “Why did you do that?” spark analysis and defense, not insight.

Reflective questions feel different. They create space instead of pressure. They invite the client to look **at** their thinking, not **through** it.

We reflect to awaken awareness, not to gather information.

From Data to Depth

Typical Question	Reflective Alternative
What happened?	What stands out to you about what happened?
Why did you react that way?	What occurred in the moment that triggered your reaction?
What could you do next?	What possibilities do you see now that you couldn’t see before?

Each shift slows the brain just enough for curiosity to take the lead. That pause, that subtle *mental tilt*, is where awareness begins.

Practice

Choose three questions you often use. Rewrite them to reflect your curiosity about how someone is defining their situation instead of forcing a response or an action to take.

Try one in your next session and see what changes in your client’s tone or energy.

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Step 3: Listen with Non-Reactive Empathy

Presence is more than silence. It's **how you hold the silence.**

When a client speaks, you're not waiting to reply - you're receiving.

That's what I call *alive silence* - stillness that listens with the whole body.

"Silence isn't the absence of something, it's the presence of everything."

- Gordon Hempton

Your calm curiosity tells the client's brain: *You're safe to think here.*

Safety turns off the threat response and opens the learning center.

From there, awareness unfolds naturally.

Spot Your Default Silence

Type of Silence	Description
Noisy Silence	Your inner critic drowns out the speaker.
Baffled Silence	You freeze in confusion or analysis.
Peaceful Silence	You're relaxed but detached.
Alive Silence	You're alert, receptive, fully present with the other.

Move from your default to *alive silence*.

Breathe through your feet, soften your gaze, and stay present.

Notice how your energy shifts when you listen to understand rather than to respond.

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Step 4: Share What You Notice

Reflection is not replication, it's revelation.

When you summarize and share their words and ask about the pauses and shifts in their expressions you noticed, you don't echo words - you reveal what lies beneath.

"You can't see outside the box until you see the box. In coaching, clients can't see what is possible outside of their story until they fully grasp their present interpretation of their situation and themselves."

Example

Client:

"I just can't get my team to listen. I've tried everything."

Coach:

"It sounds like you're frustrated from trying different approaches and they still don't hear you. Are you looking for another way to make them listen or to change the dynamics of your relationship with them?"

Pause. Let them breathe into the recognition. That's when new awareness begins to surface.

Practice

After your client speaks, listen for the emotion beneath the explanation.

Reflect the shifts in their posture and expressions in a short phrase, then ask:

"When you paused and looked away, would you share what came to mind for you?"



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Step 5: Anchor Awareness

Breakthroughs are fleeting unless you help them land.
Insight feels electric, but without pause, it fades.

Your role is to hold the space for awareness to settle into understanding.

"An insight may show up as their eyes light up or they smile or frown. Help them articulate the new awareness out loud so it embeds in their brain."

When you notice your client's energy shifts, a sigh, a laugh, a quiet pause, don't rush in. Instead, resist the urge to fill the space. The pause lets the brain wire the new connection.

Practice - Hold the Moment, Anchor the Shift

1

Resist the urge: Stay silent long enough for insight to surface.

Ask: *"Would you share what you just realized?"*

2

Label the shift: Naming activates memory and ownership.

Ask: *"Can you state what you just learned in one or two sentences?"*



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Link the reflection: Connect the insight to real-life contexts.

3

Ask: “How can you apply what you just realized to the problem you said you wanted to change?”

Leverage the insight: Turn reflection into intention.

4

Ask: “How might you carry this awareness forward this week?”

Share your observations: If the client struggles, reflect what you notice.

5

Ask: “You are sitting up straighter, as if you are lighter than when we started. What has changed for you?”
or “You mentioned that you are seeing your role differently. How will this change your approach to the situation?”

These observations and questions will help them clarify their thoughts and create new neural pathways.



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Step 6: Sustain the Reflective Mindset

Transformation isn't a technique, it's a way of being.

To coach reflectively, you must first **live** reflectively.

Before each session, center yourself in curiosity. **After each session**, reflect on what you learned.

That's how mastery grows over time.



"Be the explorer, not the expert."

Daily Reflective Check-In

Moment	Ask Yourself
Before a session	What am I curious about right now?
During a session	Am I listening or just waiting to respond?
After a session	What did I learn about myself as a coach?

Choose one question and make it your daily anchor for a week.

You'll notice your presence deepen and your curiosity stay alive.

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Your Reflective Map at a Glance

1

Pause the Fixing Instinct

2

Invite Reflection, Not Reaction

3

Listen with Non-Reactive Empathy

4

Share What You Notice

5

Anchor Awareness

6

Sustain the Reflective Mindset

Transformation is a practice of awareness in motion.

Every time you pause, reflect, and stay curious, you strengthen the very muscles that make coaching a breakthrough experience.

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“Marcia's Mastery Course has immediately impacted my coaching style and effectiveness. This short course dives into specific skills and techniques to implement in your coaching sessions from day one! Marcia's warmth, kindness, and compassion are hallmarks of this course and add to the intensity of the teachings. I cannot recommend this course enough. If you are ready to take your coaching and personal growth to a higher level, invest in Marcia's Mastery Course now!”

Arlene Schneider

Certified Professional Life Coach

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with Marcia Reynolds

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- Immediate access to all **six learning modules**.
- **24 coaching tools and resources** you can use directly with clients.
- **Six real coaching demonstrations** showing reflective inquiry in action.
- **Monthly live Office Hours with me**, alternating between practice sessions, group discussions, and guest interviews.
- A **community of coaches** who value growth through reflection.

Enroll today and start your next breakthrough now.

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