

Application

Questions for exploring internal and external barriers to progress.

Identifying Obstacles

Obstacles are what make simple things hard to do. When a client approaches you to make a practical change, often the real need is addressing the hidden obstacles that thwart progress. For example, if the goal is getting control of one's schedule, the real issue may be standing up to others' demands and saying, "no!"; or completing what seem to be a boring responsibility instead of chasing the excitement of a new dream; or admitting that you are addicted to work. Change is rarely as simple as it looks on the surface. It is helpful to remember: "If it was easy, you'd have done it already."

Obstacles can be practical, external factors, like time and money; or internal barriers such as fears, beliefs or needs. Below are questions for surfacing these different types of obstacles:

Identifying External Obstacles

- "What is stopping you?"
- "What makes this hard to get done?"
- "What do you need that you don't have to reach your objective?"
- "What external factors will your plan have to account for if it is going to work?"
- "When you've tried to make changes like this in the past, what got in the way?"
- "Is there one key obstacle here—that if you conquered that one thing it would make a decisive difference in reaching this goal?"
- "What one resource or tool would make all the difference if you had it?"

Identifying Internal Obstacles

- "What goes on inside you when you think of launching into this? Feel free to name an emotion, a physical sensation, a memory, anything."
- "Relax for a minute, and pay attention to what's going on in you. Where do you feel pressure or strain or stress around this idea/situation?"
- "You've found it hard to make this change. What do you gain from not changing?"
- "What would you lose that's important to you if you did change?"
- "What's your worst-case scenario here? What's the fear behind that?"
- "What's driving your responses?"
- "What belief is behind your responses? How well is that belief serving you?"
- "What's the critical voice in you saying about this situation?"

For More

Overcoming Obstacles.....	47
Reframing.....	78
Challenge.....	74
Cross-Cultural Coaching.....	96
Transformational Coaching.....	94

Identifying Obstacles Exercise

Ask a friend or your peer coach to allow you to coach him/her for 15 to 20 minutes on a place in life s/he is stuck or stymied. What's something your friend has been thinking about for some time but hasn't acted on, or can't figure out what to do with? (Areas s/he is tolerating, conflict situations or difficult changes can be fruitful areas to look.) Now, coach the person toward an action step in this area, using some of the questions above. What obstacles came to the surface? How did you discover them? What did your friend learn about him/herself through this process?

To follow up, try the exercise under "Overcoming Obstacles" (pg. 48).