

EXERCISE

Fill in the Blank: Framing



Time: 2 minutes per person



Setup and materials: Fill in the Blank checklist for your topic



Good For: Individuals, groups

Framing:

I was first exposed to fill-in-the-blank quizzes in primary school, but I'd never thought to use this structure in coaching until Tim Hallbom created this interview technique for a Money Clinic (now titled Wealthy Mind) workshop that I attended in the early 2000s.

Now I use fill-in-the-blank exercises in a variety of ways. You can explore any of the four main categories that often arise (in some form) in coaching. Those are Money, Health, Work and Relationships. You can also use fill-in-the-blank in very specific contexts. With this tool you uncover assumptions, perspectives and beliefs in a lively and almost playful way. The exercise is fast paced and spontaneous.

In one-on-one sessions, if I hear a “loaded” word in a client’s language, a number of prompts will suggest themselves. Taking one minute to collect data in this way can spark other thoughts that the client hadn’t considered. As clients fill-in-the-blank, I encourage them to limit their analysis, to not “overthink” or look for ultimate truth. Just finish the sentence with whatever comes to mind in the moment.

One-on-one example: If an individual is exploring motivation, I can use that word with the beginnings below. Motivation is... Motivated people are... I would be more motivated if... and on down with any of the relevant prompts. Some will fit, others won’t.

With a team or group, you can start or end a session using this tool, or you can dig into the beliefs and perspectives around a specific task or responsibility. The participants do the “interviews” in pairs. I give them one or two minutes per person, at most five minutes total. You collect a lot of information at a quick pace.

Team or Group examples: At the beginning of a session — Learning is... People who continue to learn are... I would learn more if... **In a discussion of feedback** — Feedback is... Constructive feedback is... I would give better feedback if... If I received feedback more easily I would...

You get the idea. Any of the words that describe values work well for a fill-in-the-blank bit; resources work as well. Honesty is... Connection is... Creativity is... Discipline is... I don’t suggest people write their answers down, that just slows the process. At the same time, it can be interesting to capture the answers by recording the “interview” on a phone.