Hi there and welcome to the October Life-Changing Leadership Blast! Today I want to talk about the language of potentiality and, in particular, why language of potentiality can be really important inside of our questions and, in particular, when we start to talk about coaching with other individuals in the workplace.

One of the things to take into consideration here is just that, depending on the relationship that we have with individuals in the workplace and depending on the level of trust and even the tone in which we present ourselves or present our questions, can often be really important to consider when we ask certain questions at work. So for example, I have a question like, “why did you do that?” Simply here we're just trying to understand why someone did something. However, sometimes we're asking this question when there's conflict; when maybe something's gone wrong or maybe we've uncovered an error and so if someone's being asked a question like, “why did you do that?” and we're using it in the context of something's gone wrong or there's conflict, it can often create a very defensive response, which might actually close the channels of communication and close off some of that honesty and that desire to really discuss why, in fact, someone engaged in a certain activity.

So when we look at, “why did you do that?” and we want to soften a question like this, I might say something along the lines of, “would you be able to share your thought process with me?” Another way to word that could be, “could you walk me through your perspective?” Again, I'm still getting to what it is or why it is that someone did something, but I'm actually softening the question. I'm using some different language, some language of potentiality to make that question a little bit easier for someone to start processing their own response to.

Another question I have here is, “why wasn't this completed?” Again, if we start to think about things potentially being forgotten or maybe again, we're inside a project that's started to stifle or not move forward as much as we would like, this can be a pretty prickly question. So we might want to substitute a question like, “why wasn't this completed?” with something along the lines of, “might something have gotten in the way?” We could also say, “do you know if something else came up?” We're still getting to the heart of why something might not have been completed but the way in which we're asking the question or the way in which our tone or the way in which we’re presenting this information, it could be perceived very differently and actually cause less defensive behaviour.

Last question I have here is, “why were you late?” Often times when we think about someone being late, they're probably already going to be experiencing a little bit of stress or they might be not in a very good place themselves. Technically if we're asking, “why are you late?” this could already be someone who's struggling and so this can again create some of that defensive behaviour. So still a question we might soften that with could say, “did something unexpected come up?” We could also say, “did something prevent you from coming in on time?” Again, when I say something prevented you, I'm acknowledging that you might potentially have been late because of forces outside of your control and if I present the question in this context, then it might be easier for the individual to respond and actually open up channels of communication and honesty.

Really again this is just a process that while on the surface it could seem a little bit silly or a little bit redundant, it can actually go a very long way to allowing us to have greater communication, in particular, when we're dealing with conflict or stress or we're trying to really understand certain pieces of information in the workplace or on projects or teams.

Thanks so much for your time and I really look forward to it seeing you in November! Take care!