

Bestselling author of
The Coaching Habit

Michael
Bungay
Stanier

The Advice Trap

Be Humble, Stay
Curious & Change
the Way You
Lead Forever

This book is NOT about turning you into a coach

Just like its companion, *The Coaching Habit*, this book is about making you a leader, a manager, a human who's more coach-like. That means building the simple but difficult habit of taming your Advice Monster so you can stay curious a little longer, and rush to action and advice-giving a little more slowly. It's a fast and practical read, and I think you'll enjoy it.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

TheAdviceTrap.com [#TameYourAdviceMonster](https://twitter.com/TameYourAdviceMonster)

Advance Praise for **The Advice Trap**

Being a coach-like manager and being coached is a core part of our culture at Microsoft—it's how talented people thrive and grow. Michael Bungay Stanier has helped evolve how we think about coaching and how it can bring our growth mindset to life.

JEAN-PHILIPPE COURTOIS , President, Microsoft Global Sales; Marketing and Operations E V P , Microsoft Corporation

This book speaks truth: when the best leaders do less themselves, they get more from others. But learning to do less can be painfully hard. Fortunately, Michael Bungay Stanier applies his signature wit and clarity to the challenge, which means making Hard Change just got a whole lot easier.

LIZ WISEMAN , author of *Multipliers* and *Rookie Smarts*

Concise, powerful, and true. Once again, MBS delivers a wake-up call with real value.

SETH GODIN , author of *This Is Marketing*

The Advice Trap is the antidote for bureaucratic inertia. You cannot be a leader if you do not own this book.

JENNIFER PAYLOR , People Engineer, Executive Leadership Development, and Coaching Leader for Enterprise Operations & Services, IBM

Readers' Praise for **The Coaching Habit**

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ Absolutely brilliant

An extremely practical book and one of the few I have read twice (and will read it again).

GORAN SECUISKI

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ No fluff, just great

Every chapter is worth your time. That's the highest praise I can give a book. It's not rocket science stuff, but it sure is useful and practical and clearly explained.

L. RAMEY

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ Refreshing guide

Very interesting concepts in this book and loved the presentation. The book had me sucked in and I ended up reading it in two nights, taking notes all the while.

BRYAN CALLAHAN

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ Concise and on point

I have plodded through many books that wish they could be this book. I enjoyed the author's presentation style and illustrative personal anecdotes.

KINDLE CUSTOMER

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ Brilliant! So helpful

Written in a witty, breezy, conversational style, you'll laugh while learning. Please. For the sake of the crappy work cultures out there. And for your own sake of avoiding another miserable coaching session: BUY THIS BOOK .

STEPHEN M.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ Lead with “what” instead of “why”

This is one of the most important business books I've read in a very long while—and—it'll likely be one of the most important ones you'll read during your career. I only wish that I had stumbled onto this book earlier—what a difference it would have made for the people I've managed on the teams I've run.

STEPHEN HOWELL

★ The worst book ever written

The worst book ever written!

SUNNY DAVIS

Go to TheAdviceTrap.com to download resources, place bulk orders, book Michael Bungay Stanier for keynote speeches, and learn more about Box of Crayons' training programs.

Want to buy a lot of these books? Fantastic. We can help. We can also customize and co-brand The Advice Trap for your organization.

Please contact us at inquiries@mbs.works for more information.

The Advice

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The Advice Trap



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This book is dedicated to Peter Block. More than ten years ago, he was kind enough to write a blurb for my first book, *Get Unstuck & Get Going* . Most blurbs tend to be a little shallow, and fair enough: they're meant to help sell a book with some razzle-dazzle. Peter's was different. He wrote, "There is a quiet political message... that coaching is available to all of us and is not a profession, but a way of being with each other."

That observation has become the *raison d'être* for the work I do, and the work we do at Box of Crayons. We want to democratize coaching, because the capacity to stay curious longer can lift us all. Peter first pointed out this calling to me, and for that I'm grateful.

The Advice Trap gives you the tools to make curiosity an everyday leadership behaviour.

And will convince you exactly why saying less and asking more matters.

Introduction: You Need to Escape the Advice Trap

Part 1: Tame Your Advice Monster

Easy Change vs. Hard Change

How to Tame Your Advice Monster

Part 2: Stay Curious Longer

Coaching Is Simple

How to Practise Masterclass 1

Uncover the Real Challenge

How to Practise Masterclass 2

Seal the Exits

How to Practise Masterclass 3

Seek Saturation

How to Practise Masterclass 4

Move Away from Old Fears

How to Practise Masterclass 5

Part 3: Master Your Coaching Habit

Be Generous

Be Vulnerable

Be a Student

Be an Advice-Giver

Conclusion: Naked Onstage

A Bonus Bonanza of Extra Goodness

Gratitude

YOU CAN TELL WHETHER A
MAN IS CLEVER BY HIS
ANSWERS. YOU CAN TELL
WHETHER A MAN IS WISE BY
HIS QUESTIONS.

Naguib Mahfouz

You Need to Escape the Advice Trap

My previous book, *The Coaching Habit*, was about everyday people coaching everyday people. It taught the seven key questions you need to be more coach-like, and how to ask them so they're most effective. The summary, in case you haven't read it: by saying less and asking more, you can work less hard and have more impact. Building a coaching habit is about staying curious a little longer and rushing to advice-giving a little more slowly.

That book's been a great success: more than half a million copies have been sold, and it's being used in organizations and countries around the world. But it turns out that being more coach-like and staying curious a little longer is harder than most of us thought. No matter our good intentions, we love to give advice. We *love* it. As soon as someone starts talking, our plan to be curious goes out the door and our Advice Monster looms out of our subconscious, rubbing its hands and declaring, "I'm about to add some value to *this* conversation! Yes. I. Am!"

This is the Advice Trap: when giving advice is your default management style. I'm willing to bet you're ensnared in this trap, and that a typical interaction with you looks like this...

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[#TameYourAdviceMonster](#)

Your advice doesn' t work

OK , sure, it works some of the time. You've likely given well-considered and useful advice to someone in the last day or two. But your advice works less

well, and more often than you'd think, for two immediate reasons.

1. You' re solving the wrong problem

More often than not, you're offering up insights and solutions (brilliant or not) to the wrong problem. You've been suckered into believing that the first challenge that's mentioned is the real challenge. It rarely is. But because we're all twitchy-keen to help and primed to get into action, we love to jump in and solve the first thing that shows up—even when it's not the actual thing that needs to be figured out.

At this very moment, throughout your organization, people are working hard on non-critical issues because leaders haven't stayed curious long enough to find out the real challenge. Rushing in to give advice is wasting money and resources, energy and life.

2. You' re proposing a mediocre solution

Let's say you sidestepped that first mistake, and you find yourself working on the right challenge. You've taken a little time to figure out what really needs to be solved, rather than trying to fix the first issue that was mentioned. Well done, you.

Now, unfortunately, you're offering up a range of not-nearly-as-good-as-you-think-they-are solutions. There are reasons why your ideas are often not that great. To start with, you don't have the full picture. You've got a few facts, a delightful collection of baggage, a robust serving of opinion, and an ocean of assumption. You *think* you understand what's happening. Your brain is designed to find patterns and make connections that reassure you that you know what's going on. Trust me, you don't. What you've got is one part truth and about six parts conjecture.

Add to that your own self-serving bias, which is what behavioural scientists call it when you're over-inclined to believe your ideas are excellent.

No wonder you're so willing to offer up opinions: each one is a nugget of gold! (You probably think your driving is above average too.)

To all of this, add the organizational trait of “first-idea-itis,” that practice of going with the first solution that sounds feasible and not too weird. It's a combination of the reasons already outlined plus time pressure, anxiety about offering up implausible suggestions, and the comfort of making the safe choice. Rather than generating additional, better choices, people leap on that first, ho-hum idea, which is almost never the best option.

But we're not done yet. The repercussions of being in the Advice Trap go deeper than the temporary frustrations of not successfully figuring out a problem.

Failed leadership

The real cost of being in the Advice Trap is the dysfunctional patterns of working that repeat themselves between individuals, within teams, and through organizations. Joe Folkman of Zenger Folkman found that leaders who default to giving advice “resist feedback from others, are less likeable and are ineffective at developing others.” In a similar vein, leadership researcher Liz Wiseman found that “intellectual curiosity”—asking questions and being more coach-like—was the characteristic that most distinguished leaders who best created impact (called Multiplier leaders) from those who didn't. When advice is the dominant management mode, the damage is felt in four places.

1. It demotivates the advice- receivers

In *Drive*, Daniel H. Pink is clear on the three drivers that actually motivate people: autonomy, mastery, and purpose. If someone is constantly on the receiving end of advice, with no option to share their own ideas, their

autonomy and mastery certainly decline, and most likely their purpose too. Being told what to do—even with the best of intentions—signals that the advice-receiver is not really here for their ability to think, but only for their ability to implement someone else’s ideas. They certainly do not feel encouraged to bring their best self to work, to bring their creativity and commitment and competency, to assume leadership and try something new. If you lead these people, you now find yourself with an over-dependent team, a group that come to you for everything and seem to have traded in their self-sufficiency and autonomy.

MORE There’s more on Liz Wiseman’s Multiplier leaders and on the benefits of a curiosity-led culture in the [Box of Crayons Lab](#) at the back of the book.

2. It overwhelms the advice- givers

Put aside the fact that you’re likely disempowering and demotivating others with advice they don’t want, and which is not as good as you think it is; your willingness to default to advice-giving means you’re adding unnecessary work and responsibility to your already plenty-busy life. Not only are you doing your own job, you’re doing other people’s jobs for them as well. You no longer have the time and space for the work that makes a difference.

If and when you find yourself in this place of overwhelm, it’s likely that you’ve become a bottleneck for others as well. You hold too much information and control, and it feeds back to the first problem: the Advice Trap demotivates advice-receivers because they are not allowed to assume the responsibility and accountability that should be theirs.

3. It compromises team effectiveness