

# Coaching an 'I Can't' into a Can Do.

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## I can't

I can't is a statement I hear almost every day while working with patients, can't short for 'cannot' it implies that the person saying it thinks that they are unable to do a particular activity or reach a specific goal, I heard these three examples today whilst consulting just this week;

*I can't go back to work.*

*I can't lose weight.*

*I can't cope.*

So I have written this article for coaches, mentors, teachers, parents and managers to give you a varied set of coaching responses to help you challenge that 'I can't' statement and to push that person towards a Can Do mindset instead.

Almost any approach to questioning an 'I can't' statement is better than what I call the Pantomime approach, that a lot of managers, bosses use to challenge an 'I can't'.

i.e. The pantomime approach gets you caught in a loop of;

*'I can't.'*

*'Oh, yes, you can.'*

*'Oh no I can't'..... etc.*

In this example, you can see how an un-trained approach leads to confrontation, and confrontation leads to further polarisation of that view, meaning a solution will be much further away.

This paper gives you a coaching approach when you hear this type of absolute statement, each approach with a set of questions that you could ask when you hear a can't statement.

The main objective of all these approaches is to can push that person from a place of lack of belief in themselves towards a much more favourable solution-based mindset instead.

## 1. Dispute their world.

This approach questions the reason and belief for the 'I can't' statement.

*How do you know that?*

*What do you need to know to know that's not true?*

*What are you not telling yourself?*

I often just repeat back to them their own 'I can't' statement and add a *because...* at the end of it to look for the reason which can then be explored.

Questioning the reason behind their lack of self-belief is sometimes all that is needed to allow belief and confidence to develop.

## 2. Explore the reverse of their statement.

This approach explores the opposite of their statement and looks at would happen if they could.

*So, what's the most likely thing that would happen if you could?*

*What are we not thinking of that would fix that?*

*So, what haven't you tried yet?*

*What would happen if you could?*

*Imagine if you could, how can you? or how would you do it ...?*

Even just imagining the reverse helps to set a positive mental image which is just a few steps away from a well-formed goal.

## 3. Give back control.

One method is to simply to replace the 'I can't' with a 'won't' so that the presupposition is that that the person has control and is making their own decision to do, or not to do.

*I can't...*

*So why won't you...?*

*But if that response doesn't seem appropriate for the conversation, you can then explore their choice further using some of the following questions.*

*Who's made that decision? (and before you made that decision what other options did you have?)*

*Who's stopping you now?*

*Why haven't you decided not to do this before?*

*(Notice here I also play around with a double negative model operator)*

*What would other people think if you did?*

Exploring the won't or the reason why someone thinks they can't do something is very important, not only does it help give control back to a person, it helps them to look at what or who's preventing them from doing that thing too.

## 4. Blow out their 'I Can't' statement.

This approach works by making what they have said to you not an absolute, and not a general rule, and you can then build mental pressure on their false belief until it explodes.

*Are you saying that it's totally impossible to...?*

*That there's no way to...?*

*I always believed you could...?*

*Has anyone else ever done this...?*

*And you can't do that one thing today to help...?*

*and there's not absolutely nothing, you can't do to...?*

Most people will instantly then push back when you do this, yet this push back can be then used this to help build their belief even more.

*What else could you do?*

*What could you do to fix that...?*

*Can you think of anything else that's impossible that you can do now?*

*What other things can you do? and... and...*

The trick here is to ridicule their initial 'I can't' statement until it blows out and get that person to push back with their own I can statement, then build on it.

## 5. Explore their past.

This works by identifying past success and brings resources from the past back to the present.

*Have you ever managed to do this before?*

*Look back, what helped you in the past?*

*What was different back then?*

*What's missing now?*

*So, what is it you need to do?*

Then explore that solution some more and work out a way to make that thing happen again.

## 6. Explore their future.

This approach helps someone look a future goal rather than being stuck in a negative mindset with a lack of self-belief. This is a powerful thing to do because even imagined goals will take a person out of that 'I can't' mindset.

*So, imagine what would happen if you did?*

*How would that look to you if you could?*

*How do you feel about that?*

*So, what do you need to do now to make that happen?*

*Imagine you did it, what advice would you give yourself now?*

## 7. Explore their present for resistance.

In previous examples, we have seen how you can look for resources in a person's past and their future. Yet all solutions also need to be brought back into the present for things to happen. The problem can sometimes be down to resistance in what is happening to that person now.

*I can't...*

*So, what is it you are not doing now that could help?*

*What are you not telling yourself?*

*What can you do (or must do) now about that?*

*What would you need to do now to make that happen?*

*What do you need to learn?*

Exploring the present is an essential place to look for obstacles, as well as it practically being the only real place you can make things happen.

## 8. Build some drive.

As well as visualising a definite goal you also need to work out the 'why' you want to reach it, this will help you to build drive and motivation.

*I can't...*

*What would happen (and how would you feel) if you did?*

*So, why's that important?*

*What would happen (how would you feel) if you didn't?*

*Can you think of what wouldn't happen if you did?*

*What wouldn't happen if you didn't?*

*Why do you want to make this happen?*

As the phrase goes, he who has a why can bear almost any how.

## 9. Make the solution smaller.

This works by breaking up a solution into small achievable steps because absolutely anything can be achieved if the steps are small enough.

*So, what's the next step?*

*Can you think of that next step...? If you could, what would it be?*

*What's the simplest thing you can do now?*

*So, what can you do that every day to make it happen?*

*What'll make it easier for you?*

*What is it you are not doing now?*

## In Summary.

'Can't' and other similar statements can be approached using some of these methods, they are a great way to help a person think through their problem and hopefully build some self-belief.

I use some of these approaches every day, and the more you practice them, the more they flow into what normal conversation. You can also stack or chain one approach on the back of another if you feel you need to push that little bit further.

I'm sure I've missed a few tricks, so feel free to get in touch if you have any other approaches that you use too.

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