

# A COACH'S FIRE-STARTER GUIDE



Companion for:

## Gifts from the Mountain: Simple Truths for Life's Complexities

Fuel-starter Questions for Generating Ideas, Holding Deeper  
Conversations, and Getting Back to What Matters Most

By Marian Baker, MCC, CPCC

Edited by Eileen McDargh, CSP, CPAE

Illustrations by Roderick MacIver

# A Coach's Fire-Starter Guide

---

## Fuel-starter Questions for Generating Ideas, Holding Deeper Conversations, and Getting Back to What Matters Most

---

In *Gifts from the Mountain*, one of my lessons was “Look for help when you need it.” To craft the best Coach's Fire Starter Guide, I wanted to bring in one of the best coaches I know: master certified coach, Marian Baker. She's been named one of 50 top coaches in the United States. Her wonderful book, *Wake Up Inspired – Fuel Healthier Success and Love the Life You're Meant to Lead*, has earned a national Book of The Year Award from ForeWord Magazine and a national IPPY Award (Independent Publisher Book Awards). Marian has coached and led workshops with hundreds of clients from business and personal growth communities since 1996.

She has taken *Gifts from the Mountain*, *Simple Truths for Life's Complexities* and put her own special blend of coaching insights into the mix. Yes, there's contact information for Marian at the end of this Guide. But for now, just read and savor.

Ladies and Gentlemen, here's Marian Baker!

## Your Mission, Should You Choose to Accept It:

As coaches, our mission is to serve our clients' awakenings. At its best, coaching should equip them to be inspired, conscious citizens in their roles as leaders, managers, colleagues, beloved partners and human beings. Sure, our work is about fueling positive growth and tangible progress for the client's desired external success. However, underneath it all, our job is to help clients deeply *know* themselves. From that knowledge, they are better able to discern, to make conscious choices and navigate their walks through life's curves and hills.

No one achieves real joy, prosperity or greatness just from a smart tactical plan and accountability deadlines. The level of living, working and leading that most clients hire us to support must be inspired by an inner journey. It requires engaging soul more than just strategy. If the coaching is to have real value, we often serve as a client's trail guide for inner work, whether or not we name it as such out loud.

Our culture and our planet are at a crossroads, and we are seriously at risk for losing our way. The world needs more awake, intentional, inspired energy if we are going to thrive. The people who hire coaches are among the ones who will be awake enough to contribute to the positive future we all hope for.

If you've ever hiked in nature, you know the potential insights of that experience. I joke with clients that we should plop them into the woods for several days of hiking without any workbook or agenda, and that could serve them better than more books, courses or talking. I also have profound respect for the value of powerful questions and inspirational material.

Eileen McDargh's beautiful book is a perfect combo platter of those two ideas. One of my favorite lines about coaching comes from Thomas Leonard who said, "I'm not in the action tracking business. I'm in the provocative conversation business."

As a coach, you know there are illuminating distinctions between thinking and reflection, doing and being. Use *Gifts from the Mountain* to help your clients appreciate the importance of authentic reflection. Use it to challenge a perspective or pattern. Use it to nourish and support them. Use it to put a fire under their butts. (Check what you need in order for you to be that coach for them.)

We could say that, in bite size ways, using this book (and guide) as a fire-starter for provocative conversations with your clients will change not only change their future but can also make the future of our world better.

## Ways to use this book and guide with your coaching clients:

- Encourage the client to read the book and select three passages that resonate most for discussion at your next session.
- Read a passage to your client that will help illuminate something brewing in his work or life.
- Give the book as a welcome gift at the start of your work together.
- Give the book as a graduation/coaching completion gift.
- Encourage the client to use the book to facilitate conversations with his work reports for professional development.
- Encourage the client to use the book for teambuilding work.
- Use the book to spark exercises and discussion as part of a group workshop or coaching group.
- Of course, see what this inspires in you and your clients for other ideas.

## Selected Passages and Thoughts for Coaching Conversations:

Eileen mentions in her preface that she was inspired by *Gifts from the Sea*. I too remember feeling quite compelled by that classic, as a young woman, listening to an audio version read by Claudette Colbert. Here's my favorite Anne Morrow Lindbergh quote that you can use to stir up provocative conversation with clients:

**Only in growth, reform, and change,  
paradoxically enough,  
is true security  
to be found.**

*-Anne Morrow Lindbergh*

As you know by now, our clients often absorb learning better through metaphors and stories. That's the potential power of the book. Each passage in *Gifts from the Mountain* is a little story and a metaphor to illuminate something for the client's growth. I'm sure you'll find it easy to use these to stir up powerful questions unique to your client. Here are some examples to get your thoughts cooking.

You can also find plenty of useful questions in the Leader's Fire Starter Guide and the Companion's Fire Starter Guide which can be downloaded at <http://www.eileenmcdargh.com/giftsfromthemountain.html>

## QUESTIONS FOR COACHING:

### Easy does it in the beginning.

Use this to help clients understand how to set goals and then see what happens in “real life”. Encourage them to constantly assess and adjust so that they truly set themselves up to succeed.



If a client doesn't complete her coaching homework or fails at something, encourage her to come from a place of “no shame, no blame.” Encourage her to become fascinated with why this happened and what she can learn from it. Might it be time to make an adjustment? Make a new choice?

### *Coaching Questions:*

- Where are “small pains” popping up and it would be smart to not ignore them?
- What are red flag warnings that you already know to anticipate?
- What are your best ways to “pay attention”?
- Where would “easy does it” help you to move forward
- What internal voices might keep you from “easy”? Internal critic? Work ethic?
- What does this cost you?



### Switchbacks are necessary to reach the top.

This is a great passage to encourage your client to not expect linear, constant steady progress—in the coaching or in life and work.

### *Coaching Questions:*

- What are your expectations/ assumptions about what progress will look like?
- What are the realities (or past evidence) of how progress really happens?
- What is compassionate, smart energy toward yourself while ascending your climb toward success?
- What are the pros and cons of shortcuts?
- What are the benefits of effort and “earning” results?



### **Pack out your garbage.**

Use this for an awareness-tracking/observing oneself during the week assignment. (I call this “Spy on Yourself” and often assign it like a game, about lots of different subjects. Awareness-tracking in actual time is often much more illuminating than what a client can recall during a session.)

*Coaching Questions (Tell the client to observe himself):*

- What garbage are you carrying around with you? (inner saboteurs included)
- How well are you picking up after yourself? Where might you be (accidentally, unconsciously) leaving behind some trash, e.g. in a meeting, conversation, email, etc.
- What needs cleaning up? What’s an effective way to do that? (great discussion to have in coaching)
- Try a daily clean up check for a while... see what you notice.

### **Alpine flowers bloom where you least expect them.**

As coach, you must be willing to go to the darker, less perky-positive places. Together with your clients, build up the capacity to be with all of what real life brings. Refrain from jumping in to make it all better in a hurry. I call this “Premature Positivity,” like candy-coating manure and pretending it’s not there. Ultimately, equip your clients to have stamina of the soul, and how ultimately, life will bloom again.



*Coaching Questions (Tell the client to observe himself):*

- What is it to move toward your pain/fear, et al?
- If you were observing someone else going through this—what would your heart want for her?
- How does suffering touch beauty?
- What is the possible gift or wisdom to be gained from this challenge/pain?
- Where have you ever experienced something blooming out of a difficult time?
- How does tenacity come into play? What’s your growth edge with that perhaps?

## Turn around. Celebrate how far you've come.

This is a hugely important life and leadership skill that is not taught hardly anywhere else but within coaching relationships. I teach my clients to pick up the habit of celebrating. Not party hats fluff. Pausing to take note of the good stuff, gains in awareness, effort to be acknowledged, etc. I'll often say things like "Be the observer of you, and what could he/she take a bow for?" We begin most sessions with "What do you want to celebrate this week?" We do Celebration Inventory exercises at year end or when it feels relevant.



### *Coaching Questions:*

- What's the potential value of acknowledging and celebrating?
- What's the cost of skipping over this?
- What gets in the way of cultivating this as a habit?
- What do you want to acknowledge /celebrate about yourself?
- Where do you want to apply acknowledging and celebrating with others?
- What's possible with more celebration energy in your work and life?
- How does this relate to the Law of Attraction?

At the end of most days, I will attempt to clink glasses (or water bottles) with my husband and ask, "What are we celebrating today?" Try this with your work team, friends or partner. It's certainly better than the gripe fest we can too easily fall into. What we focus on expands. What we give our attention to is what we get to experience in greater supply.



## The flexible survive. The yielding win the day.

Having provocative conversations about "what is true strength" and how to navigate effectively in the real world are essential ingredients in coaching.

### *Coaching Questions:*

- What are your inherited beliefs about what is strength?
- Where have you seen or experienced inflexibility?
- Where can you practice going with the flow more than being rigid or getting frustrated?
- How does "fluidity" help you thrive?
- Where do you want to experiment with "yielding"?

## Observe nature's patterns. Different trees grow at different elevations.



As coaches, we must help our clients fully grasp and appreciate his or her own true nature. (And to value the true nature of others.) This includes core values, natural strengths and styles, many nuances and idiosyncrasies. It's amazing how we don't know ourselves very well and then get easily self-critical or disappointed. Also watch out for twisting "play a bigger game" beyond healthy *you can do anything* encouragement. If an Aspen keeps trying to be a Redwood, what might come of that?

### Coaching Questions:

- How will you gain deeper understanding and appreciation of your true nature?
- How might you be imposing unrealistic expectations on yourself or others?
- A cat thinks the ugly duckling is useless because he doesn't catch mice. How are you possibly with cats who want you to catch mice, when you're actually a swan?
- What are ways for us to discover your true gifts?
- How can you nurture your nature more?
- How can you apply this to your developing/ mentoring of others?

## Expect the unexpected and deal with it.

Through 11 years of coaching I have learned that "having a plan (or a map) is not the answer." Real life has plenty of curves and rain must fall into every career (or work week) at some point. My clients and I use the following the



line like an anthem: "I fear not storms, for I have learned how to steer my ship." (Louisa May Alcott) We coach to equip them to be savvy captains, in an ongoing adventure of awareness-responsibility-choice.

### Coaching Questions:

- What has real life taught you so far about "expect the unexpected"?
- In what ways might you still fall into victim mode or still trying to simply execute plans vs. heroic captain of your ship?
- How do we help you learn how to steer?
- What do you want to inspire your steering?
- What do you not want to drive your navigating/ choices?
- Observe yourself "live" for a while—keep a captain's log of day to day conditions. Record insights about how you can improve steering your ship

## Hungry for More? A Word from Eileen

You'll also find plenty of useful questions in the Leader's Fire Starter Guide and the Companion's Fire Starter Guide @ <http://www.eileenmcdargh.com/giftsfromthemountain.html>

I trust you'll find yourself stimulated and thinking of what other coaching questions might spring from using the metaphors from my mountain. This fire starter guide is intended to set your own coaching voice into action.

Please let me know the results and what other questions you have created from *Gifts from the Mountain*. Write me at [eileen@eileenmcdargh.com](mailto:eileen@eileenmcdargh.com). Who knows, we might create a sequel from your contributions.



## About Marian Baker

My own life-changing awakening began with a hike up a mountain. Back in the early 90's I had booked a seminar to get happy and healthy in 7 days. Being Miz Buzy Executive at the time, it sounded efficient. After traveling all day to "the middle of nowhere" I discovered the seminar had been cancelled. There I was, alone in a tiny town where the mountains met the sea, with no agenda. Walking became hiking. Hiking gave way to an unplanned vision quest. This became an amazing gift, and just the right amount of energy to help me wake up to the outwardly successful, but soul-numbing, over-worked life I'd been tolerating. I returned to Chicago and left a 14-year career that others would die for. I wanted to live. Out there on the mountain, I met myself. I found the soul that had been longing for me to find her.

Today I am so grateful for what my life has become. My mission is to equip achieving and seeking professionals like you to create the meaningful, prosperous lives and careers you are meant to lead. I am committed to the study and practice of what it really takes to create inspired living, including work you love, whole health, energizing relationships, inspired leadership and true prosperity toward a world that works for all. It's time for a new story of healthy success. Are you in?

You're cordially invited to visit the growing community at [WakeUpInspired.com](http://WakeUpInspired.com)

---

Please stop by [www.wakeupinspired.com](http://www.wakeupinspired.com), and our new b.inspired Café, for encouragement, like-minded connections, free resources, book shelf, movies to inspire your success and more.

