

Introduction (00:03):

Welcome to the Same Side Selling podcast, dedicated to modern sales and marketing, innovation and leadership. Here's your host, Ian Altman.

Ian Altman (00:15):

Hey, it's Ian Altman. Our guest this week is Michael Bungay Stanier, the Wall Street Journal bestselling author of The Coaching Habit. He sold about three quarters of a million copies and it's one of a few business books that actually makes you laugh. We're talking about his new book, The Advice Trap. We'll discuss the biggest misconception about advice, easy versus hard change, the three variations of the advice monster, the neuroscience behind advice and trust and how you can tame your inner advice monster. It's always a fun and fascinating conversation with my friend Michael Bungay Stanier. Michael, welcome back to the show

Michael Bungay Stanier (00:58):

Ian, I can't believe your memory is so bad that you've forgotten what I was like last time and you've invited me back again. So thank you.

Ian Altman (01:05):

So, so not true. In fact, in fact, your, your episode is one of those things that people often say, Ooh. And that thing about, about the coaching and, and being more coach-like and yeah. You know, I use that all the time and I say, I have no idea what you're talking about. I don't know who it is.

Michael Bungay Stanier (01:24):

Touche touche. No, that was great. That was like almost three or four years ago. And, uh, it's nice to be back. So thank you for having me.

Ian Altman (01:32):

Oh, you betcha. You betcha. I'm looking forward to, to talking about the new book and that, that is, uh, exciting to me and I've, I've enjoyed reading it and it's also been a little bit troubling because some of the things that you point out about the advice monster, um, I say, wait a minute. I know someone like that. It looks an awful lot like the guy in the mirror.

Michael Bungay Stanier (01:52):

Uh, you know what, when I'm writing it, I'm like, I know a lot about, I know somebody who resembles that remark and I'm like, you know, they say you, you, you teach what you most need to learn. And, uh, part of this exploration into, uh, we all have an advice monster, but I also have an advice monster. I've, I've, I've, you know, the whole theme of the book. If there's a hashtag for this book, it's tame your advice monster. Certainly figured out some of the basics of taming my own advice monster. But the thing is, the more you, the better you get at it, the trickier the monster gets. So it's a slippery in different ways.

Ian Altman (02:28):

Sure. And so, so what's the greatest misconception that people have when it comes to advice?

Michael Bungay Stanier (02:37):

Well, there's probably three. The first is that you, the other person actually wants your advice. Often they don't and you know that if you're in the, if you're on the receiving end, you're like, I don't know why this person is telling me this thing. Secondly, that you're, you're actually solving the real problem. Thirdly, that your advice is actually any good. I think. And just, I mean, just to be clear, I'm not anti advice. I mean there's a really important place for advice and you know, you and I are both teachers and writers, what does that, if not a transmission of expertise and wisdom and advice, but it is an overused response. And what I'm kind of taking a stand against is this default response that as soon as somebody starts talking to you, even though you don't really know what they're going on about, even though you don't really know who's involved, even though you don't really have the context in that, you don't really have the technical specifications. Nevertheless, after about 10 seconds you're like, Oh I've got some ideas on how to solve this. And that's what we're trying to kind of acknowledge and then go, how do you shift your behavior just a little bit?

Ian Altman (03:46):

Yeah. Well, and, and what I love is as I was reading the book, I'm thinking of myself. Okay. So, so Michael's speaks and writes and teaches about this stuff, which in essence is advice and, and I knew that and I'm just glad that he wrote a book that speaks to everyone else. Cause it's certainly not us. And as you read it, you realize, Oh that's so true. And nowhere is it truer than in our personal lives where you know, there's times where Deborah will say, Oh this is going on. And I of course say well here's the way to solve it and it's taken me years and we've been married, you know, 20 some odd years for her to, for me to finally understand that there's some times where there are some times where she doesn't want my advice. And those sometimes are all the time.

Michael Bungay Stanier (04:34):

Exactly, and, and even if you know, I talk about the definition of coaching, cause often this stuff comes up in the context of being more coach-like. Yup. And I'm like, let me give you a simple definition of what being more coach-like is. It's can you stay curious a little bit longer? Can you rush to action and advice, giving it a little bit more slowly. And you'll notice there, I'm not saying never give advice cause there's, there might be a time when Deborah's like now's the time for you to tell me your idea. But after you've asked me some questions and after you've heard my ideas and after, after I've actually gone, Ian, what would you do? What's your suggestion here. Then's the time to step in, not in that sort of ah, look, we've been married 20 some years. I know you better than you know yourself. Let me just tell you what you need. Let me do a little mansplaining here, that's what we want to move away from.

Ian Altman (05:27):

Yeah, well I the, I've figured out that that is not a good course for me, and I think most of us in business haven't. And I know that you talk about this notion of easy versus hard change also. So can you talk a little bit about that?

Michael Bungay Stanier (05:42):

Sure, yeah. It's actually the, the reason I wrote this book, so the coaching habit was this kind of amazingly successful book. If I say so myself, you know, it's sold three quarters of a million copies now, and as anybody who's ever written a book before, if you can sell more than 10,000 copies of a book, you're doing pretty well. So this number, you've got this kind of little sprinkle of angel dust or something coming down. And I get lots of emails from people going, look, in this coaching habit you give me seven questions, they're brilliant. I love them. I'm using them. It's changing the way I lead is changing the way I relate to the people in my life, whether they'd be at work or outside work. That's great. And there's a bunch of people often quieter who go, I've read the book, I like the seven questions and I'm still telling people what to do.

Michael Bungay Stanier (06:31):

I, it isn't enough to know this, to transform my behavior. So I went back and I went, so why is it so hard for some people to change? And I was inspired by an academic guy called Ron Heifetz. Um, and he came up with, I'll give you the jargon. He goes, technical change or adaptive change, which I rechristened easy change and hard change. Easy change we're all good at. That's why it's easy change. It's when you're like, I need to learn this thing. So you pick it up, you fiddle with it a bit, you maybe watch a video or two, maybe you read a book, you get, you go from being bad to being good, to being pretty good, to being good enough and then you're like, I'm done. So you know when you get a new phone or you like whatever it might be, we know how to do that easy.

Michael Bungay Stanier (07:18):

Then there's hard change. And you and I are recording this early in the new year and hard change. If you ever made a new year's resolution and broken it and it was the same new year's resolution you made last year and the year before that and the year before that. This is hard change. That stuff where you're like, why can't I crack this? You know, I, I, I know how to do this technically, but for some reason I can't get my head around actually doing it. You know, an example in my life was some years ago building a building a team. Now did I know in theory how to build a team. I, I, I've read all the books, I've got hundreds of them on my bookshelf and actually designed and run training programs on how to run an effective team. Could I build a team myself for some reason? No. And this is hard change, you know, as a metaphor, easy changes like I need to download an app on my phone, hard changes I need to, and you need a new operating system. One is adding to who you already are. Hard change is about who's future you? What's the new you that needs to be, that enables you to do that. And this book gets into what

hard change is and how the secret of dealing with hard change is to get really clear on what you get from your current behavior, the benefits from your current behavior. I think the punishments outweigh the prizes. Here's how I'm now going to practice shifting my behavior to step into this future you state that you're striving for.

Ian Altman (08:55):

Yeah. And so, so one of the things that I, that I, that I think about is, is this, this whole notion of as people are trying to change, I imagine that one of the, one of those hardest changes is that notion of the advice. Because someone comes to you and says, Hey, I'm struggling with this situation and we know that from the coaching habit, we don't want to immediately jump to suggestions. And so people say, okay, so what I do is I ask, well, what's the first idea and how you, how you have to solve this. And then you know, and what else? And all these great things give us in that. And my guess is then people say, okay, I did that for 20 seconds, now let me tell you what I think.

Michael Bungay Stanier (09:35):

Right? Exactly. So it turns out for lots of us, me included, there are a number of reasons we cling to the comfort of giving advice. And we talk about the advice monster in the book and the advice monster has three personas and here are the three personas. The three reasons why giving advice feels so good. The first is you get to be the smart person in the room. We call this the teller advice monster, which is like, I'm the smart one. I'm the answer this look, look at me adding value. I am so adding value here. I spend my whole life practicing for this moment so I can tell you what to do. The second advice monster is save it. So save it as a sense of, you know what? My job is to keep everybody safe, to rescue everybody, to be responsible for everything. I feel really brilliant because I'm being responsible for everything. Of course, I also feel exhausted and worn out and frustrated and incompetent there's that sense of my job is to be the rescuer, to save everybody.

Ian Altman (10:39):

Yeah. I rode my white horse and here I am.

Michael Bungay Stanier (10:41):

Exactly. The sort of the burning martyr. Right? And then the third advice monster is control it. And that's a kind of a sense of, you know what? When I'm giving advice, I'm in control and I like staying in control. I like having the reins. I like knowing and defining the parameters. I don't want to give that up because otherwise I feel unsafe. Otherwise, I think we were all fail if I give up control. So tell it, save it and control it are the three personas of the advice monster and they all explain something that we get kind of below the surface a little bit. It's kind of a subconscious benefit, which is why giving advice is actually hard for lots of us to give up.

Ian Altman (11:21):

Sure. And, and I think that one of the traps that we fall into that

I'd love for you to touch on is, so we've been told both. So you don't want to give advice, you want to ask questions and then we ask a question that in essence is giving the advice. But it's in the form of a question. It's like playing jeopardy where you get the answer, but it's only in the form of a question.

Michael Bungay Stanier (11:40):

Yeah, exactly. And it's a kind of reverse jeopardy? You're just like, yes. So I call that, um, that like there's fake fake questions and fake listening, which is often what happens in organizations. So, first of all, you've got the fake questions, you know, have you thought of, did you try, have you considered, what about? Those aren't questions. That's advice with the question marks slapped on the end, and then there's the fake listening because lots of people have somehow done some training that's taught them about active listening and they're like, okay, I remember kind of remember what active listening looks like. You tip your head on the side, you look concerned, yet interested, yet engaged. You nod your head, you make small grunting noises of encouragement. Inside your head you're like, you've stopped listening some time ago it's just like, can we wrap this up please? I know what I want to tell you. Just just stop talking so I can actually get on with the interesting part of this conversation and part of the behavior change is to go look, this is what it shows up to, to be present and to listen to people, to have the humility and empathy and vulnerability to do that is a really powerful leadership stance.

Ian Altman (12:49):

Well and one of the, one of the things that you write about in the book that I think is fascinating cause it definitely connects to some concepts that I teach on the, on the sales and business growth side is this notion of when someone asks you a question that that's what they're initially asking is usually not what's really going on. And you usually don't have enough information right, to give a good answer, which never stops us from doing it anyhow.

Michael Bungay Stanier (13:19):

Right, right. Well you know that's, I mean I wrote write for people who lead teams and work with people in organizations. Um, but I know that the work that I do just gets sucked up in the world of sales a lot because I'm teaching what is in essence just such a foundational sales principle, which is curiosity wins. If you can stay curious longer, you can gain the empathy and gain the connection and gain the insight with the person that you're, you're, you're selling to so that when you make the sale it is the right sale. Cause you have the right solution to the right problem with somebody who feels you are on their side. Same side selling. It's just like you make your transition from one side of the desk to the other side of the desk. And the bridge is your empathy and your curiosity.

Ian Altman (14:14):

And, and I know that, I know that you also talk about the neuroscience that goes behind this. So when, when, when an individual walks in and says, Hey, here's my situation,

Michael Bungay Stanier (14:26):  
Right

Ian Altman (14:27):

And the other person jumps to advice. Yes. What's going on in the neuroscience that makes that not work?

Michael Bungay Stanier (14:34):

Yeah. Cause this is the thing. You want to make sure you, you want people to hear what you've got to say, whether that's the questions you're asking or whether it's the advice you're offering up. And so often the act of giving advice triggers people to kind of disengage rather than engage. So here's the snapshot on the neuroscience. Starts with this. Five times a second, your brain, my brain, everybody's brain is scanning the environment and going, is it safe here or is it dangerous? Is it safe or is it dangerous? It's happening at an unconscious level, but it's a primitive, literally primitive. It's a kind of lizard, brain survival instinct because that's what the brain's about. It's like rule number one, survive. Yup. There are four drivers that help the brain decide whether it's safe or whether it's dangerous and the drivers spell the acronym, TERA. T. E. R. A. That the drivers are tribe, expectation, rank and autonomy.

Michael Bungay Stanier (15:35):

Tribe, expectation, rank and autonomy. So tribe, the brain is asking, are you with me or are you against me? Are you with me or against me? If you're with me, I feel safe and I'm going to step forward. I'm going to be engaged. You're going to get the best version of me. If you're against me, I'm kind of fight or flight mode. Backing out. Disengaging. Yeah. Expectation. The brain has gone do I know what's about to happen or do I not know? If I know I feel safe. If I don't know, it feels dangerous and I've disengaged. Rank. Are you more or less important than I am? If I feel the same status as you or more important than you, I'm all in. If you are somehow superior to me, I'm backing out a little bit. The fourth one, autonomy, do I get to make some choices here or are you making all the choices for me?

Michael Bungay Stanier (16:23):

If I have some say in the matter, I feel safer. If you're making all the choices for me, I'm opting out. Yup. So that's the basic dynamic that's going on in your brain. What happens? What's the difference between giving advice or asking questions? When you ask a question, you raise the sense of tribiness, cause we're in this together trying to figure this out. You raised a sense of rank. I trust you to figure this out. You raise the sense of autonomy. Hey, it's up to you to have the insight around here. When you are giving somebody an answer, you run the risk of lowering the tribiness because Hey, it's like we're not in this together. I'm just telling you what needs to be done. You may raise the level of expectation, but you probably lower the level of rank for sure because you're like, I got the answer. I'm smart. I'm the superior person. You're not. And

likewise, you lower the sense of autonomy. So ironically, the act of giving advice is often an act that pushes people away, even though your advice is well, meaning you're doing it for all the best reasons, kind of getting this kind of counter intuitive response. Whereas the act of asking a question is often an act that engages people and invites them in and it helps them, offers them competence and confidence and self sufficiency to figure this stuff out by themselves.

Ian Altman (17:48):

So that notion of this idea of TERA is something that when I talk about disarming, right? Um, that I wasn't even conscious of. So the, the, the idea is that if someone comes to us and says, I'm really interested in, in what you did for this other organization. Yeah.

Michael Bungay Stanier (18:04):

I've heard great things about you.

Ian Altman (18:06):

Yeah. What we immediately what, what the stereotypical salesperson says. Oh, you kidding. It was amazing. I can help you too. Let me show you. Yeah. And instead what we want to do is say, gee, I'm really flattered that they said that. And just because we can help them doesn't mean I can help you. Would it be okay if I asked you some questions? Yeah. So that I can determine if I can even help. And you'll see, you'll physically see people's body language change from a defensive posture to an open posture. And I think that you're pointing to the neuroscience of why that happened.

Michael Bungay Stanier (18:37):

Exactly. Cause one of the best ways to raise another person's rank is to lower your own rank. And ironically, of course you only, being in a state of power is the best way to be able to lower your own reign. So as I kind of parallel story, when I'm being introduced before a keynote, I deliberately have in my introductions and Michael was this, that and the other. So I can talk about some of my achievements. But then I go, Michael left university being sued by one of his lecturers for defamation. He was banned for his high school graduation for something known as the balloon incident. And his first piece of published work was a Harlequin romance book called the mail delivery. Now everyone's like laughing and going, what is that about? And the fact that I've written books and I was a road scholar and I was this, I was that that balloon has been pricked and I do that very deliberately because I want my status to be lowered and their status to be to raise. Of course, they also are all laughing, which increases the tribiness in the room. So I'm lifting engagement there as well because I have all the status. Like I'm the speaker, I'm on the stage, I have the microphone, I've got to figure out ways of giving that status away so I can raise their rank and get them engaged. And most keynote speeches, introductions are both intimidating and boring at the same time. And actually on a neurological level distances the audience from them.

Ian Altman (20:06):

Yeah, it's, it's funny. Mine, my, um, my intro ends with he's got two children, a dog and a wife he doesn't deserve. And it's like, okay, so, and it's because in that intro it usually has stuff that is accolades of, Oh yes, and Ian built a company to a value of over a billion dollars and this and that. And it's like you don't want people to say what a jerk.

Michael Bungay Stanier (20:32):

Right. It's like, well, who cares? Or even simply, well, good for him, but I could never do that. You've lost them.

Ian Altman (20:39):

Yeah. And, and, and I want them to realize that I don't take myself that seriously. Neither should they. If they're going to, if they're, if they're going to discover I'm a jerk I want them to figure it out on their own during my talk.

Michael Bungay Stanier (20:52):

I love that.

Ian Altman (20:53):

So, so what are, what are a couple of things that people can immediately do in addition to getting the book that I think I, you know, I love when you put out a book because it's so easy to read and I just love the, the style of it. And it's just, it's like I pick it up and it's just very fast reading. But aside from just getting the book, what are one or two things that people can do to help team that advice monster?

Michael Bungay Stanier (21:20):

Well, I think the starting point is perhaps just start going when you've just started noticing how fast it is that you want to give advice. Just how quick it is. It will stun you. How often you just launch into an idea, an opinion, some advice, a suggestion. Because, because mindfulness is the first step around this. If you want to go a little deeper, if you go to [theadvicetrap.com](http://theadvicetrap.com) there's actually a questionnaire there. Like 20 questions so it won't take you long, but I actually give you a suggestion about which of the three advice ones is most, most rabid in you. So if you'd like to go a little deeper in that and get some tactics around how to tame that particular advice monster, uh, [theadvicetrap.com](http://theadvicetrap.com) will take you there.

Ian Altman (22:06):

That's, that's absolutely brilliant. So Michael, I can't thank you enough for, for sharing your wisdom and knowledge in this. I'm so glad that you wrote this book because I can only imagine it will strike other people as much as it had with me where I'm like, Oh that's me. What's the, what's, what's the best way for people to connect with you and learn more about what you've got going on?

Michael Bungay Stanier (22:28):

Sure. So if you want to find out more about me and what I'm up to [mbs.works](http://mbs.works) is the website for that and I'm on Instagram for instance



@mbs\_works. Um, if you're, the corporate training company that I founded is called Box of Crayons and that's at [boxofcrayons.com](http://boxofcrayons.com).

Ian Altman (22:46):

Perfect. Well once again, thanks so much and we will put all this information in the show notes and I will recap all this to the best of my ability in just a minute. So thanks again.

Michael Bungay Stanier (22:57):

Thank you my friend

Ian Altman (22:59):

Michael is a wealth of knowledge. Let me give you a quick recap of what you can put to use right away. First, when you give advice too soon recognize that the other person might not actually want advice, you might not be addressing the right issue and your advice might not be quite as good as you think it is. Second, the advice monsters you should be aware of are the tell it monster, the save it monster, and the control it advice monster, and be aware of which one of those you may be falling into. Be aware of those fake questions and fake listening. Guilty as charged on this end. And be sure to visit [theadvicetrap.com](http://theadvicetrap.com) to uncover your advice monster. Remember, this show gets direction from you, the listener. If there's a topic I should cover, a guest I should have on the program, just drop me a note to [ian@ianaltman.com](mailto:ian@ianaltman.com) and be sure to check out the Same Side selling Academy at [samesidesellingacademy.com](http://samesidesellingacademy.com). Have an amazing week. Add value and grow revenue in a way everybody can embrace, especially your customer. Bye now.