Five Levels Of Intention

We all like to help others. But helping can come in different forms. Sometimes we think we're helping but actually all we're doing is making more work for ourselves down the line, and we may not necessarily be helping the other person in the long run either.

Your intent determines your impact.

The model shown here maps out five levels of intention. While each level serves a purpose, each subsequent level is more sophisticated and powerful than the one preceding it.
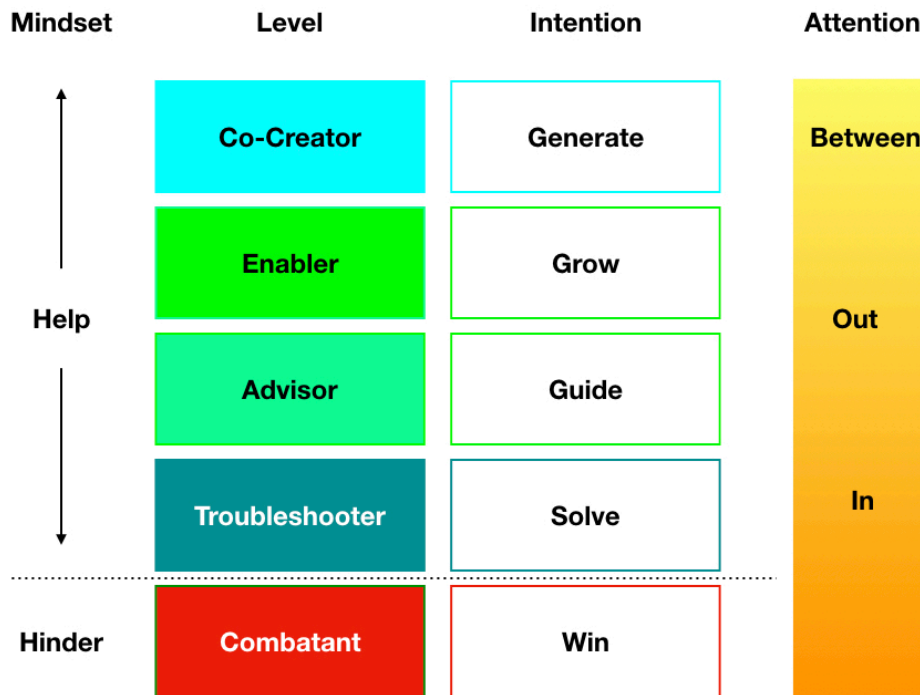
The model suggests that the types of questions you ask in a helping conversation are determined by your level of intention. The more mature your intent, the more likely you'll be able to ask more powerful questions, and make a bigger, longer-term impact.

There's a saying "catch a man a fish, you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish, you feed him for a lifetime." As leaders and colleagues, we should aim to teach fishing more than we catch fish.

See over for more…

Five Levels of Intention

This model shows the least powerful approach at the bottom and works its way upwards:

Mindset	Level	Intention	Attention
Help ↑↓	Co-Creator	Generate	Between
	Enabler	Grow	Out
	Advisor	Guide	
	Troubleshooter	Solve	In
Hinder	Combatant	Win	

Level Four: **Co-Creator** *"I wonder…"*	• Your focus is on generating new possibilities and on the interaction between you and the other. • You ask questions that explore multiple perspectives, tap deep wisdom and generate new possibilities	*Exploring new and novel ways of sourcing fresh food*
Level Three: **Enabler** *"How might you…?"*	• Your focus is on enabling the other person to deepen their insight into their behaviour and beliefs, and to guide them find their own solutions. • You ask questions that raise self-awareness and generate responsibility in the other person, without necessarily needing to have the answers yourself.	*Helping them catch their own fish*
Level Two: **Advisor** *"One option is to…"*	• Your focus is on giving advice to someone to help them to "fix their problem" or make changes. • You ask questions to get a better understanding of their specific situation, so you can give the best advice possible.	*Offering fishing techniques*
Level One: **Troubleshooter** *"You should…"*	• Your focus is on "fixing a problem" for another person. • You ask questions with the intention of eliciting information to help you fix the problem.	*Catching their fish*
Level Zero: **Combatant** *"Here's where you're wrong"*	• Your focus is on maintaining your ego and shoring up your own position while weakening theirs • You ask questions with the intention to pick holes, undermine and make the other person wrong	*Tangling their line*

A Little More Detail…

Combatant: this isn't really a helping mode at all! When you're operating out of the *Combatant* level, your focus is on winning. It's on picking holes in people's arguments. It's trying to make them look bad, and you look good. Your focus is on your own ego, as opposed to helping another. This mode hinders more than it helps. You really don't want to be here.

Troubleshooter: When you're asking questions from a *Troubleshooter* mindset, you're asking questions that are designed to help you get the information you need so you can solve the other person's problem. You're asking questions so you can reply with, Here's the answer." That might save you both time, make you look good and solve their problem, but you're not helping them to solve their own problems. You're 'catching the fish'. It's useful in some situations, but not necessarily that powerful.

Advisor: The *Advisor* mindset is about asking questions to help you understand where the other person's thinking is at so you can give them some guidance about possible courses of action. You're listening for what they know, what they don't know, or perhaps where the holes might be in their logic. Then you can give them some advice or guidance to help them choose what to do next. You're still in a 'telling' mode, but you're not quite as much of a 'giving the right answer' focus as Troubleshooter. It's more powerful as a helping role, but it's still not really getting them to think so much for themselves. Still catching fish.

Enabler: At the the *Enabler* level is where you're asking questions to help someone think for themselves. This is where it starts to get powerful. You're aiming to grow someone's capability to solve their own problems - and you're teaching them to fish. The Enabler asks questions to get the other person to think. You don't necessarily know the answers to their questions. You might have some ideas, you might have some answers, but that's not your primary focus. Your focus is on helping them think for themselves and enabling them and growing them, and that's a very helpful role to play.

Co-creator: At the *Co-Creator* level, you're not even pretending that you have any brilliant answers. Your questions come from a place of true 'wonderance' where you're trying to frame the problem and possible solutions in collaboration with each other. This level is essential in complex situations where old thinking won't give you a solution. The challenge might not even be about catching fish at all! Your energy is focused on collaborating to generate new ways of seeing, new ways of operating, and new ways of doing things. The Co-Creator level is extremely powerful because previously unseen mental models and possibilities can emerge and provide completely novel approaches.

digby scott

Three Levels of Attention

On the right hand side of the model, there are three levels of Attention. 'Attention' is another lens to help you discern and improve how you ask questions.

The first level is **'Attention In'**, which applies primarily to the first couple of levels in the ladder. Attention In is when you're focused on yourself. It's about feeding your own ego and your need to be right, to solve, and to help by giving answers. It's all about you and your own thinking, and it's less about the other person.

Attention Out is where it starts to get more useful. When you're got your Attention Out, you're focused primarily on 'the other', rather than you. You're focused on helping them think more for themselves, as opposed to focusing on you solving the problem or giving advice. Paradoxically, your job become easier when you have Attention Out because you're asking them to do the thinking. They actually appreciate it more, and they feel like they're getting some attention.

The last level of attention is **Attention Between**. At this level you're noticing not just them, but the dynamics at play in the conversation. What is the rapport like? What is the quality of connection like? What's the communication like? What's emerging in the conversation that could be paid attention to? What themes are at play here? What patterns? What possibilities are there that could be named and explored? It's an ego-free, sophisticated way of operating which is extremely powerful.