

# 1 INSIGHT

with RICH LITVIN



## Episode 8: “What do you do?”

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Rich: Welcome to 1 Insight. My name is Rich Litvin. I grew up in London and I now live in LA, and this is a podcast for extraordinary top performers. You see, I've coached some of the most successful and talented people on the planet. I see what most people cannot see, and I dare to say what most people wouldn't dare to say. What I know about success is that on the other side of it, it can actually be lonely. You can feel like more of an impostor the more successful you become, and when you're the most interesting person in the room, you're actually in the wrong room. I coach around insight. Life looks one way. Something happens. The world looks different, and your entire world changes. It can happen in an instant. This podcast is called 1 Insight, because a single insight can change everything.

Today's a short episode, where I'm going to tell you how to answer the question, what do you do? We get asked it all the time, and the answer should almost never be I'm a coach. I'm going to tell you a story about one of my favorite writers, about how to show up and be your unique self, and this entire episode is the beginning of the next season of this podcast. And the people I coach in this podcast are members of Project Kairos, my community of high level leaders, former executives, former entrepreneurs, who've come into coaching or are on their way into coaching, and members of 4PC, my community of high level leaders who are up to something really big right now, on a big mission, and I let you be a fly on the wall as I coach these people week after week. Enjoy today's session, where I tell this story and I get you out of this story of how to answer the question what do I do?

It's an overwhelming question still to this day. I get frozen sometimes when I ask it, but there are very powerful ways to answer that question. I call this episode What Do You Do? Because it's the most common question you get asked. It's an icebreaker. You're at a social situation, you're at a dinner party, you're out at a conference. Hi. What do you do? Well, the trick to answering that question is to understand that you don't have to answer that question. Be like a politician. When a politician is asked a question, they answer it with the answer to the question they wish they'd been asked. So answer the question you wish you'd been asked. What do you do? People want to put you in a box. They want to put a label on you. They want to say, oh, so you're a coach, and then they can dismiss you or they can move on, so don't play that game. You don't have to play that game.

Here's one of the mistakes that people make. They think that they're a coach, and in this day and age you don't want to be a coach. Anyone and their mother can be a coach. It's very easy online to sign up for an overnight program for, actually, I've seen it for free these days. I was going to put a low amount on it. For absolutely zero dollars, you can sign up online and get some certification and call yourself a coach. Coaching is a tool, not a title. It's a really important distinction. It's a tool, not a title. What do you do? Well, sometimes I'm a coach. Sometimes I'm a consultant, sometimes I'm a trusted advisor. I'm an expert in leadership. I'm an expert in understanding some of the deepest secrets that high level leaders have that they hide away from most people.

Whatever it is that you say, use coaching as a part of it, not the title that you lead with. What do you do? Well, let me tell you a story about someone I was working with this morning. Tell a story. When someone says what do you do, tell a story. What do you do? Well, funny you should ask. Let me tell you a story about someone I was working with this morning. One of my clients in 2007 met a very inspiring man, and she said, "I'm going to quit my job and support this man in his mission." Well, it turned out that man was Senator Barack Obama and when he became President Obama, she went and served with him as his personal aide in the White House for years. She's now a client of mine as she transitions from working in organizations to working for herself as a coach and a consultant to other high level leaders. Tell a story that either has people say wow or get curious. How do you do that?

Here's another way to play with that question, what do you do, well, what I do is what I believe. It's a really powerful way to get people interested in what you do. What do you believe? What I do is what I believe, and what I believe is that success has a dark side. While most of the books that have been written about success or about how to get there, not many people pay attention to the struggles that you have on the other side of success, and in my experience, success can be very lonely. You can have a lot of accomplishments and secretly feel like an impostor or a fraud. These are some of the things that I've seen in my journey as a leader working with high level leaders, and I might lead with that when someone says, what do you do? What I do is what I believe.

Answer with a counterintuitive truth. What do you do? Well, what I do is what I believe, and what I see is that most people think dot, dot, dot, but the truth is dot, dot, dot. It's a really fascinating way to start a conversation. Most people think that leadership is the height of their career. When they finally make it as a leader, then they've got it made. They can relax and life is easy. The truth is, leadership can be the most lonely experience

you've ever had in your life. Most people think that success is a place to get to. The truth is you can have everything you've ever wanted and still feel empty on the inside. Anything that starts an interesting conversation is a great way to answer that question, what do you do?

So let me tell you a story. I'm on a phone call to someone talking about finances with me and my wife and a financial advisor, and we haven't met him in person. And this guy, 10 minutes into asking some questions about the numbers, says, "Oh, by the way, Rich, what do you do?" So I say, "Oh, well, funny you should ask. What I do is what I believe. And what I believe is that leadership is incredibly lonely." And he pauses for a moment, and he says, "Oh, so you're a coach." Now my wife is sitting next to me, cracks up with laughter, because she knows what I'm trying to do, and she thinks this is hilarious. And on the inside I'm really pissed. I'm really upset. Like, oh man, I thought this was a perfect way to explain what I do, not answering the questions saying I'm a coach. And he just says, "Oh, so you're a coach," in a really dismissive way.

It took me two days before I got the insight. Two days later I realized, oh my God, when I answer that question, it's a filter. When I say, well, I work with high level leaders and, in my experience, leadership is incredibly lonely, my people go, "Oh my God, yes, you're so right." If you are not my people, you either go, "Oh, that's interesting," and move on, or you answer like he does, and go, "Oh, so you're a coach," and try and put me in a box. I have a filter, and it worked. When you answer that question, you're creating a filter.

Let me finish with a story from one of my favorite writers. Dave Trott is a former copywriter and creative director at some of London's top advertising agencies. So this is a story about Jack Dee, who tried for years to make it as a comedian. Every night he plugged away on the stand-up circuit. He tried to get the audience to like him. Some nights he'd get laughs, some nights he wouldn't. He kept trying to work out what he should do. He tried to be cheerful. He tried to be thoughtful. He tried to be nerdy. He tried to be cheeky. And some of them, nothing worked, and all the while he had to keep his day job as a waiter. He got paid next to nothing as a stand-up comedian, but there were loads of stand-ups trying to get the audience to like them, just like he was. They were all trying to work out what does the audience want, all trying to change so they'd be liked, all waiting for inspiration to tell them what they ought to be doing.

And every night, just like them, Jack Dee would try something different. And every night, some of it worked and some of it didn't. Every night he got more desperate. He carried on, week in, week out. He got fired from his day job for being too tired. He became a drunk from worrying about it. His girlfriend left him, because he became obsessed and boring. Eventually it was obvious even to him, he was terrible at it. He had to think the unthinkable. He had to think about giving up. He should accept he was never going to make it. And once he accepted that, it was like a weight that came off his shoulders. Now he didn't have to get laughs anymore. He didn't care if the audience liked him or not. He only had one week of bookings left, and he might as well just have fun.

So that night, he walked on stage as himself. He didn't smile. He didn't say anything. He just glowered at the audience. Eventually he said, "Well, you lot look like a right fucking miserable bunch." And they started to laugh. He said, "Shut up. I don't want your pity laughter." And they laughed louder. He said, "Who asked you anyway? I don't give a

fuck. I've only got another week. And then I'm getting a real job." The audience were cracking up, shaking their heads and banging the tables. They'd never seen a comedian like this. He carried on like that all the way through his performance, and at the end he said, "Right, I'm finished. You can all fuck off right now." And he got a standing ovation. He did the same thing every night, and the manager offered him a contract to double the wages, because Jack Dee was doing what was true for him. He was himself, and that's what made him different. That was what made him one of the most successful comedians in the United Kingdom.

I'll skip out of this story for a second and tell you, I get people asking me all the time, how do I become a great coach? How do I explain what I do? What do clients want? What should I do? Can they get my advice? And I'll go back to the words of Dave and his story. He says, when people ask him that, I believe that this is a formula for failure, because they're performing, they're behaving like Jack Dee did before he got successful. They're looking for someone to tell them what to do to be liked, and they'll end up making themselves the same as everyone else. It didn't work for Jack Dee. It doesn't work in coaching, and it won't work for you.

What works is being different. Don't try to be liked. Find out how you're different and then be that. That's where the power is. That's what's new. That's what's wanted. Be you. Be different. That's what your clients want. Be it.

For most of human history, it wasn't called coaching, it was called leadership, and it's what I love to do, to coach people, to lead people, and to mess with people's thinking. If you'd like more of this or if you'd like to learn more about our community of extraordinary top performers, go to [richlitvin.com/1insight](http://richlitvin.com/1insight).