

Why Asking Questions Makes You a Better Leader



In a world of constant change, how do you maintain your edge? How do you lead well while executing your strategy and keeping your people engaged?

Use powerful questions; they make all the difference in successful leadership.

Questions open the mind and create new possibilities. They are the best way to gain deeper insights and develop more innovative solutions – and especially during times of change, questions can keep your team members united and circumvent resistance.

Think about your last leadership team meeting. How would you evaluate the outcomes? What was the ratio of asking versus telling? Imagine if you asked more questions and listened deeply for most of the meeting. How would that change your impact and the experience of your leadership team?

As a leader, your focus should be less on sharing what you know and more about how you challenge and inspire those around you. You don't need to have all the answers. The reality is that your organization is much more purposeful, focused and ultimately successful when you are open to finding solutions **with** your team. Questions help you uncover the challenges you're facing, ensure that you and your team are aligned on the issues, generate better solutions to address those problems, and motivate your people to act on them.

Questions are useful leadership tools because they help you:

- **Get better information.** Good questions unearth essential information you need as a leader. Do you accept the initial response you get, or do you dig deeper? How often do you assume that everything is fine when you don't hear bad news? That is a dangerous assumption. It may mean your staff are afraid to share anything with you but good news. When information surfaces in your conversations and meetings, probe further for details without straying into blaming. Focusing on learning rather than judging. Use questions to help gather the information that helps you see the entire picture.
- **Grow your people.** You can increase the capacity and potential of those you lead by asking questions that help them discover growth insights. Ask "How can I be most helpful to you" when presented with a problem, instead of jumping right in to suggest a solution.

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This conveys respect for the person's abilities and encourages his or her development as a problem solver and resourceful, creative thinker. Discovering his or her own solution will increase competence, build confidence, and create ownership of the results. There's a physiological reason for this – when a question triggers an insight, the connection that is established in the brain releases neurotransmitters that create the motivation to follow through on the idea. This is why author Peter Fuda noted, “People may **agree** with your conclusion but will only **act** on their own!”

- **Get a competitive advantage through a better culture.** Asking questions and deeply listening to the answers builds trust, communicates respect and encourages your team to fully engage. As Steve Jobs famously said, “It doesn't make sense to hire smart people and tell them what to do; we hire smart people so they can tell us what to do.” By asking great questions, you will empower your team to use their skills and do their best work.
- **Eliminate ambiguity and create alignment** around the issues that matter most when you ask questions that challenge assumptions and bring clarity. For example, if a product isn't selling, you might assume that the cost is too high, or the marketing is ineffective, and be ready to direct your team's resources towards those problems. But what if others believe the product itself is flawed? You won't know unless you ask for their perspective on what they think the issue is – and once you are all agreed on the real problem, you will be much more effective in finding a solution that addresses it.

Powerful questions serve as catalysts, cutting through complacency to inspire and redirect your team's focus. Because we have seen the tremendous impact that the simple shift from 'telling' to 'asking' creates, we developed Catalyst Questions for Leaders to help the leaders we work with establish the habit of inquiry. The deck offers a visual reminder to incorporate the power of questions into your meetings, one-on-one's and other daily encounters.