

The Power of Questions

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The ability to ask a great question is a critical leadership skill. The irony is that we've often been taught that we need to know the answers, particularly if we are in a leadership role. Finding the right solution, or the next great idea, is necessary however such things don't unfold until someone asks a question, and then another, and then another.



Asking good questions benefits everyone and costs nothing. Good questions provoke insight, generates options, solves problems and engages others. From good questions, only good things can happen.

If a leader is too often only giving the answers, he or she allows no opportunity to encourage workplace growth. A leader might feel good and revel in their role of problem solver, but the best problem solvers are the ones who empower the team they lead to solve their own problems. A good leader coaches their teams to a solution.

The majority of our teams come to work each day wanting to contribute, to do something that matters for the place that employs them. Use questions to engage them and help them to see how to make that contribution count. Use the situations of the day as opportunities to support your team in solving problems and through that inquiry, you'll find that they will become more skilled and equipped for the future.

Here are some things you can do to shift your conversations and ask great questions:

1. **Hold back from jumping in with your views** While there are some circumstances when someone simply needs an answer, and a quick one at that, these are the exceptions. In most situations, the person on your team already has a view. Resist the temptation to share your view, especially before you have heard the view of the other person.
2. **Ask "open" questions** Asking great questions is a skill. A good place to start in developing this skill is to simply notice the extent to which you ask questions that result in one-word answers (closed questions) as opposed to questions that are open. These types of questions are much more likely to generate dialogue. Often, they start with "how" or "what". For example, instead of asking, *"Do you like the schedule change?"* you can ask, *"What are your thoughts on the schedule change?"* or *"How has the schedule change impacted you?"*

3. **Adopt a mindset of curiosity** A mindset of curiosity will help you to not only ask great questions, it will enable you to remain open to the answers. Getting curious about what people know, think and feel will enable you to know your team better and unearth their ideas and insights. Often, the mishaps and missteps of the day can result in frustration and “stuckness”. Instead, what if we looked at the day’s challenges with a mindset of curiosity? How would that impact the tone and outcome of the conversation about a problem you are trying to solve? What could you, and your colleagues, discover through the power of questions, originating from a place of curiosity? A spirit of honest inquiry and the ability to ask a good question is a hallmark of great leaders. Those questions don’t just spark conversation between leaders and team members, they create conversation between colleagues as well.

Seek to understand. You will build trust within relationships, discover new things and get better results ...when you ask great questions.



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