



Leading With Questions
How Leaders Find the Right Solutions by Knowing What to Ask

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Author's Bio: Michael Marquardt is an internationally noted educator and consultant, and professor of human resource development and program director of Overseas Programs at George Washington University. He is also the director of the Global Institute for Action learning.

Author's big thought: Leadership is not about knowing all the answers. It's about knowing what great questions to ask, and carefully listening to those answers. This book is a piece of management wisdom that shows leaders how to ask great questions – questions that inspire, motivate, and empower the organization. It's about developing a culture where asking questions is safe and desired.

Notes:

Introduction

- Astute leaders use questions to encourage full participation in teamwork, to spur innovation and outside the box thinking, to empower others, to build relationships with customers, to solve problems, and more.
- The most successful leaders lead with questions, and they use questions more frequently. Successful and effective leaders create the conditions and environment to ask and be asked questions.
- Questions wake people up. They prompt new ideas. They show people new places, new ways of doing things. They help us admit that we don't know all the answers. They help us become more confident communicators.
- The purpose of leading with questions is to help you become a stronger leader by learning how to ask the right questions effectively, how to listen effectively, and how to create a climate in which asking questions becomes as natural as breathing.
- Among the many leaders that were identified, the author interviewed a total of 22 leaders from all over the world. Their responses to the following questions and their stories are interwoven throughout this book.
 - When did you start using questions and why?
 - What are some of the ways in which you use questions?
 - What questions have been most effective?

- What has been the impact of waiting for questions on A) your organization and B) you as a leader?
- *Leading with Questions* provides a comprehensive foundation on ways to employ questions effectively when leading others. The book offers a variety of principles and strategies for asking questions as well as numerous stories of how leaders from every type of organization have used questions to attain organizational success and personal fulfillment.

Part1: The Power of Questions

Chapter 1: An Underused Management Tool

- We live in a fast paced, demanding, results oriented world. Leaders are expected to be decisive, bold, charismatic, and visionary to know all the answers even before others have thought of the questions.
- When the people around us clamor for fast answers, sometimes any answer, we need to be able to resist the impulse to provide solutions and learn instead to ask questions.
- From an early age, we are discouraged from asking questions, especially challenging ones, be it at home, school, or at church as they are considered rude, inconsiderate, or intrusive. As we ask fewer questions, we become ever less comfortable and competent in asking questions.
- When we become leaders, we feel that it is important for us to have the answers rather than questions.
- A growing number of leaders recognize that their organizations success, if not survival, depends upon creating a learning organization, an organization that is able to quickly adapt to the changing environment, where every engagement becomes a learning opportunity, where learning and business objectives are necessarily interlinked.
- What happens when leaders do not ask questions? History is replete with tales of dire consequences experienced by leaders who did not ask questions. People lost lives when the titanic sank, when the challenger crashed, when President Kennedy authorized a covert attack on the Bay of Pigs in Cuba.
- The failure to ask questions, allows us to operate with a distorted sense of reality. Sometimes they're afraid of asking dumb questions, but what they don't realize is that the dumbest questions can be very powerful. They can unlock a conversation.
- The key difference between leaders and managers is that leaders focus on getting to the right questions where as managers focus on finding solutions to those questions.
- As Collins (Good to Great) tells us, leading from good to great does not mean coming up with answers and then motivating everyone to follow your messianic vision. It means having the humility to grasp the fact that you do not yet understand enough to have the answers and then to ask the questions that will lead to the best possible insights.
- Leaders need to create a questioning climate where employees feel safe and able to trust the system and the people involved. Without this level of safety and comfort, people are generally unwilling to be vulnerable, and to be comfortable answering questions that might seem threatening.

Chapter 2: Benefits of a Questioning Culture

- Leaders, through questions, can build a culture in which questions are welcomed, assumptions are challenged, and new ways to solve problems are explored. Questions establish an inquiring culture in organizations, and such an inquiry and culture builds a learning organization.
- Questions also build a culture of accountability.
- When we ask questions of others and invite them to search for answers with us we're not just sharing information, we are sharing responsibility. When responsibility is shared, ideas are shared, problems are shared- problems are not yours or mine. Asking questions results in empowerment and shared ownership of results.
- A questioning culture has six hallmarks. When an organization has a questioning culture, the people in it
 - Are willing to admit, "I don't know."
 - Go beyond allowing questions; they encourage questions.
 - Are helped to develop the skills needed to ask questions in a positive way.
 - Focus on asking empowering questions and avoid disempowering questions.
 - Emphasize the process of asking questions and searching for answers rather than finding the "right" answers.
 - Accept and reward risk taking.
- Questions serve as the foundation for increasing individual, team, and organizational learning.
- Learning depends upon curiosity and asking questions.
- Questions, especially challenging ones, cause us to think and to learn.
- When we open our eyes and minds to the perspective of others, we open ourselves to learning.
- Questioning helps people gain perspective and understand the perspectives of the others. As they see issues and problems from different points of view, they gain an appreciation for their complexity and also expand the range of possible solutions.
- Questions encourage and enable individuals and groups to understand, to clarify, and to open up new avenues of exploration for solving problems. They provide new insights and ideas for strategic actions and potential paths for solutions. Questions and responses to those questions provide necessary and valuable information to solve problems faster and make better decisions.
- Through questions, leaders seek to learn not only what directly causes the problem or what solutions may work (which is single loop learning), but also to seek to discover and learn what might be the underlying causes and solutions (double loop learning) as well as the culture and mindset that creates these causes and solutions (triple loop learning)
- Questions also generate alignment with a shared focus and make it more likely that you will solve the right problem.
- Change brings new ideas, new ways of doing things to the organization. Change and new ideas are often rejected in organizations without a questioning culture because they might conflict with existing, established mental models or ways of doing things, *which have never been questioned*.

- When an organization develops a questioning culture, however, questions cease to be unusual, cease to be threatening. This makes it easier for even difficult and challenging questions to be addressed and for the organization to adapt to change.
- Great questions cause the questioner to become more aware of the need for change and to be more open and willing to change.
- Motivating and empowering employees - Good questions energize people. A questioning culture can energize an entire organization.
- Leaders who promote a questioning culture in their organizations move people from dependence to independence. By asking questions, leaders hope people discover for themselves what is important for them in doing what is necessary for the organization.
- When leaders encourage a questioning culture, they put out subtle messages that build their people's self esteem and self confidence, which is the key to shifting their thinking paradigm. Good questions empower people to devise their own solutions. When people discover their own answers, they develop self-responsibility and accept ownership of the results.
- The people on any team possess an array of knowledge, wisdom, creativity, and energy. Leaders can best access this wealth of experience and empower their people by encouraging questions as a natural part of team discussions.
- As group members engage in asking questions of one another, they gradually gain a group consensus on the answers and strategies since they now more clearly see each other's perspectives and also gain greater clarity of their own.
- Questions build strong and cohesive teams because of the many effects of questions on a group of people. Questions serve as models of responsiveness, helpfulness, and cooperation.
- Innovation happens when people see things differently. It starts with a questioning culture that helps people gain new perspective and see things differently.
- Questions can also encourage people to take risks and risks are the precursors to most of the great ideas of history.
- Still other benefits of a questioning culture accrue primarily to individuals and only secondarily to the organization's of which they are members.
- A questioning culture encourages reflection. When we feel free to ask questions and are open to the questions of others, it heightens our need to reflect.
- When we are immersed in a culture that encourages questions, it helps us become more self-aware, more conscious of choices we have made, more deliberate about our decisions.
- Self reflection enables us to better understand ourselves, gaining insight into why we do some things, and avoid doing other things.
- Reflection helps us to become more attuned to our values, more candid and authentic, and better able to speak openly about our emotions.
- Questioning cultures, by generating self confidence, also tend to encourage adaptability and meeting new challenges. People who are comfortable with questions are nimble in adjusting to fluid change and limber in their thinking in the face of new data or realities.
- People who are comfortable with asking and being asked questions have an increased ability to listen attentively and can more easily grasp the other person's perspective. Those who lead

with questions become less concerned about strict control and trust their people more. This freedom enables them to listen better and communicate in a more effective manner.

- The questions themselves force leaders to listen. Because followers see the questioning leader as more empathetic, they're willing to question and listen themselves; they hear more closely and are thus more willing to support initiatives and ideas from the leader.
- Questioning leaders are better at managing conflict because their solid questioning skills enable them to draw out all parties, understand the differing perspectives, and then find a common ideal that everyone can endorse.
- Questioning leaders are more comfortable in surfacing conflict, acknowledging the feelings and thoughts of all sides, and then redirecting the energy toward the shared idea. They move toward a collaborative style of conflict management as opposed to being overassertive or passive and withdrawn in their approach to conflict.
- Questioning leaders tend to have more organizational awareness; their use of questions makes them more politically astute and better able to detect crucial networks.
- Questions not only demonstrate a greater commitment to developing others, they make you more adept at cultivating others' abilities as well as your own. Leaders who ask questions develop their emotional intelligence through questions. Questioning leaders thus improve their ability to teach, mentor, and coach.
- Through questions, people know more about what leaders expect of them and are therefore more committed to learn. Through questions, colleagues know better how to set challenging but achievable goals and recognize the importance of continuous learning.
- Great leaders are humbled by the realization of all they do not know. They know that asking questions of a few will not give enough data; to succeed they must make asking questions of anyone and everyone their top priority.

Part Two: Asking Questions Effectively

Chapter 3: Why We Have Trouble with Questions

- We have difficulty with questions for four primary reasons:
 - We avoid questions out of a natural desire to protect ourselves.
 - We're too often in a rush.
 - We often lack skills in asking or answering questions due to lack of experiences and opportunities, lack of training, and of role models.
 - We find ourselves in corporate cultures and working environments that discourage questions, especially those that challenge existing assumptions and policies.
- Asking questions is a natural part of our biological makeup. From an early age we are discouraged from asking questions, especially challenging ones, be it at home, school, or church, as questions are considered rude, inconsiderate or intrusive. Thus we become fearful of asking *any* questions. As we ask fewer questions, we become ever less comfortable and competent in asking questions.
- Then when we become leaders, we feel that it is important for us to have all the answers rather than questions.
- We sometimes fear that if we ask a question we will get an answer we do not like, one that paints us as part of the problem, or one that indicates that a favored project has gone off

course. We might get the answers that cause us to change our minds or force us into an action we would prefer not take.

- It is a natural human tendency to push potentially unwelcome information away. Thus we avoid asking questions especially when the answers may be threatening.
- Courage includes the willingness to ask questions that might challenge-even break up- current perceptions and patterns.
- Courage is required because to keep looking for better answers, we have to be willing to give up our current beliefs or positions.
- Sometimes we must ask questions that we do not know the answer to. This type of behavior takes courage because asking questions and admitting we don't know an answer are behaviors not expected from leaders.
- Not being able to risk and being fearful of asking questions traps many leaders into a cycle of inaction, defending intentions, and interpreting or explaining away others' perceptions.
- Few practical ideas are more obvious and critical than the need to get perspective in the midst of action. We all get swept up into the action, particularly when it becomes intense or personal.
- Being temporarily above the hustle and bustle of the crowd is important; to take the mental activity of stepping back in the midst of action and asking, what's really going on here?
- Having the ability to do critical thinking and ask critical questions that can lead to clarity, precision, and accuracy is the sign of a leader who is concerned with truly making a difference and not just going for a quick fix.
- Many of us don't know how to ask questions for the simple reason that we're out of practice. The asking of questions, especially how to ask great questions, has never appeared in any of our curricula or in any of our performance appraisals. We have never gotten feedback on the quality of our questions.
- Even when we do ask questions, we find the process uncomfortable and frustrating. Too often, we provoke defensiveness.
- When we lack questioning skills, all too often our questions are limited, incorrect, or simplistic. Ineffective questions lead to detours, missed goals, and costly mistakes.
- Asking good questions requires two critical skills. First you must know *what* questions to ask, for questions are not all created equal. Second you must know *how* to ask them.

Chapter 4: Asking the Right Questions

- The words we choose to use are metaphors for concepts that define our attitudes and behaviors, structures and concepts. The questions that a leader asks send messages about the focus of the organization. They are indeed indicators of what's of most concern to the leader.
- A key for leaders in asking questions is contextual: what do I want my question to accomplish?
- Questions can be very powerful in focusing attention.
- One of the reasons that questions cause trouble is that we often ask the wrong questions, that is, questions that disempower others. Questions that disempower focus on the reasons why the person did not or cannot succeed. Here are some examples of such questions:
 - Why are you behind schedule?
 - What's the problem with this project?

- We end up creating what we focus on. By asking disempowering questions, the leader closes the gateway to identifying paths to success. *What's wrong* questions threaten self esteem and thereby cause people to get mired in their problems.
- *Empowering questions*, on the other hand, get people to think and allow them to discover their own answers, thus developing self responsibility and transference of ownership for the results. Empowering questions build positive attitudes and self esteem.
- Empowering questions help develop alignment within teams and draw out the optimum performance from individual members and the team as a whole. They create a high energy, high-trust environment and enable people to identify, clarify, and express their wants or needs. Such questions encourage people to take risks, nurture deep relationships, and dissolve resistance to change.
 - How do you feel about the project thus far?
 - How would you describe the way you want this project to turn out?
 - Which of these objectives do you think will be easiest to accomplish? Which will be the most difficult?
- Most of us who have experience with great questions would agree that they can create the following benefits:
 - Cause the person to focus and to stretch.
 - Create reflection.
 - Challenge taken-for-granted assumptions that prevent people from acting in new and forceful ways.
 - Generate courage and strength.
 - Lead to breakthrough thinking.
 - Contain the keys that open the door to create solutions.
 - Enable people to better view the situation.
 - Open doors in the mind and get people to think more deeply.
 - Test assumptions and cause individuals to explore why they act in the way that they do as well as why they choose to take action.
 - Generate powerful action.
- Oftentimes, the best, easiest and most effective way to ask a good question is to simply build on a previous question or on the response to that question.
- Effective questions are those that accomplish their purpose as well as build a positive relationship between the questioner and the questionee.
- Broadly speaking, questions come in two types: open-ended questions and closed-questions. Closed questions seek a short specific response like yes or no. Open-ended questions give the person or group a high degree of freedom in deciding how to respond. Consider the following examples. The topic is the same in both questions, but the responses you get will probably be very different.
 - How have sales been going?
 - Did you make your sales goal?
- Open ended questions encourage people to expand ideas and allow exploration of what's important to them and what is comfortable for them to reveal; they also encourage people to do the work of self reflection and problem solving rather than justifying or defending a position.

- Open ended questions should begin with words such as “why” and “how” or phrases such as “what do you think about...” Open ended questions can help people think analytically and critically.
- *Why questions.* Why questions are perhaps the most important types of open ended questions for leaders to ask as these questions force everyone to go into deeper layers of cause and effect, and of purposes and assumptions.
- When asking *why* questions, the leader should watch their tone of voice. The *why* question should indicate curiosity and the search for knowledge, and not anger or frustration.
- Other types of open ended questions:
 - *Explorative questions* open up new avenues and insights and lead to new explorations: have you explored or thought of?
 - *Affective questions* invite members to share feelings about an issue: How do you feel about leaving this job?
 - *Reflective questions* encourage more exploration and elaboration: You said there are difficulties with your manager; what do you think causes these difficulties?
 - *Probing questions* invite the person or group to go more deeply into a particular issue. Words such as describe, explain, clarify, elaborate, or expand get into more depth or breadth on a topic
 - *Fresh questions* challenge basic assumptions: has this ever been tried?
 - *Questions that create connections* establish a systems perspective: What are the consequences of these actions?
 - *Analytical questions* examine causes and not just symptoms: Why has this happened?
 - *Clarifying questions* help free us from ambiguity, but such questions are sometimes difficult to ask: What specifically did you mean by that?
- Open ended questions can address either content or process issues, and content and process questions have different roles. Content questions ask about the data used to solve a problem or make a decision, and process questions focus on how the problem was solved or the decision made.
- Closed questions call for a specific answer, either yes or no, or calls for the respondent to select an answer from a limited range of choices. Closed questions often begin with *what, when, or how many*, or ask the respondent to agree or disagree with a statement.
- Closed questions also tend to be quick and easy to answer.
- Besides disempowering questions, two other types of questions that are not helpful from the leader are *leading questions*, those that force or encourage the person or group to respond in the way intended by the questioner or *multiple questions*, a string of questions put together to meet the needs of the questioner but confusing to the responder.

Chapter 5: The Art of Asking Questions

- In her book, *Change Your Questions Change Your Life*, Adams refers to two types of mindset that may reside in the questioner: *Learner* and *Judger*. In the learner mindset, the questioner seeks to be responsive to life’s circumstances.
- Leaders with the learning mindset tend to be optimistic and presuppose new responsibilities, a hopeful future, and sufficient resources. They exude optimism, possibilities, and hope.

- The judger mindset, on the other hand, is reactive. When our focus is on judging, we worry more about fixing responsibility for problems than on working with others to find solutions.
- Leaders who focus on learning rather than judging can be flexible and relate to others in a win-win manner that facilitates the search for creative solutions. A leader with a learner mindset can be more open to new possibilities than one who prefers to judge, and less attached to personal opinions and the need to be right.
- The learning mindset leads to much greater effectiveness, breakthroughs, and transformations.
- A leader, who is habitually judgmental, puts employees on the defensive because they live in constant fear of being judged and found wanting. The judging attitude encourages employees to hide their mistakes, defend their behavior, and refuse to ask for help or admit their weaknesses or vulnerabilities.
- A supportive attitude of mutual discovery on the part of the leader creates trust and builds support in return.
- Here are some specific suggestions that can help you coach others and adopt a learning attitude:
 - Respond without judging the thoughts, feelings, or situations of other people.
 - Consider yourself a beginner, regardless of experience.
 - Avoid focusing on your own role (which can lead to a self protective approach) and take the role of an outside observer, researcher, or reporter.
 - Look at the situation from multiple perspectives, especially your respondents.
 - Look for win-win solutions.
 - Be tolerant of yourself and of others.
 - Ask clarifying questions.
 - Accept change as constant and embrace it.
- Before we ask a question, we should preview it in our minds from the other person's point of view to determine whether the question as phrased will be truly helpful.
- In today's diverse workplace, particular attention needs to be given to framing questions.
- It is best if the leader frames questions in a positive way, using what Cooperrider (2001) refers to as *appreciative inquiry*. So instead of asking what went wrong, the wise leader will tend to ask questions that focus on what has gone well, what could be done and how it could be improved. The approach will guide the group in seeking what might be rather than what is not. The focus remains on improvement and continuous learning rather than complaining and venting.
- Finding the ideal time for asking questions is an art. If we bring up questions too early in a process, the group or individual may lack the experience to have sufficient data to respond adequately, and thus we may miss an opportunity for understanding. If the questions come too late, we may miss an opportunity for learning and frustrate the participants in the group, who've been struggling without help and support for too long. Experience will make the leader grow more comfortable and confident in timing questions for optimal results.
- When you find that you are confronting a difficult issue, and want to plan things out ahead of time, it can be useful to follow a simple process. First, break the ice and get the conversation going. Second, set the stage for the conversation by explaining what you want to talk about.

Third, ask what you want to ask. Fourth, listen attentively to the answers. Fifth, and most important, follow-up.

- It is useful to start with casual questions to put people at ease and get them talking.
- Be forthright in saying that the purpose of the conversation is to learn, not to judge. Let the other person know where you're coming from. One way to set the stage is to explain what you hope the outcome of the conversation will be.
- As long as your objective is learning rather than judging, specifying your objective clearly should not be threatening to the other person.
- The key to framing good questions, according to Kouzes and Posner (2002), is to think about the "quest" in your questions. What do you want this person to think about? What do you want to learn?
- Once the purpose of the conversation is clear, you should move directly to asking you questions.
- Make sure your questions are empowering rather than disempowering. Open ended questions are much more likely to generate a positive, non-defensive response than are closed questions, which offer only a limited range of possible responses.
- When asking questions, keep your focus on the questioner and the question. The key to this skill is that you must be genuinely curious and not make the employee feel judged, interrogated, or manipulated.
- Try to ask one question at a time. Too often we overwhelm or confuse people by asking several questions simultaneously. Allow for a response before asking the next question. Such a questioning approach leads to responses of poor quality.
- Leaders should be careful not to rush the responses to their questions. A great question will cause even more reflection and silence. Allow the people being questioned to reflect and let them know that you're comfortable with the silence.
- Effective listening skills are critical if you wish to get the most out of questions. It is a wonderful gift to have people give you their full attention. By fully listening to employees without interruption or leaping in to solve their problems, you set the stage that allows them to find their own answers.
- As a leader you have a number of ways to demonstrate that you are listening to and caring about the person you are questioning:
 - Pause at the end of a question so that the answerer can think, formulate, and deliver an answer.
 - Once you have asked your questions, listen.
 - Use steady eye contact and supportive nods; staying silent is more than just not talking. It means keeping eye contact, staying still, and feeling comfortable while you wait.
 - Be certain to demonstrate that you really want to grasp what is being said. Many times it is necessary to ask clarifying questions so as to assure yourself that you have a complete understanding of the situation.
 - Listen patiently, without interrupting.
 - Use reflective listening, hearing the words and reading the emotional content.

- Restate what you heard in your own words and whether you understand about the argument is consistent with what was said.
 - Voice your critical questions as if you're curious.
 - Request additional reasons that might enable the person to make a stronger argument than the one originally provided.
 - Ask the other person for permission to allow you to explore any weaknesses in their reasoning. The idea with this strategy is to encourage the other person to examine the argument with you.
 - Convey the impression that you and the other person are collaborators.
 - Show respect for their views by asking open ended, unbiased question.
 - Focus your listening by asking questions such as "what is useful about this?" and "what can I learn?" rather than "whose fault is this?"
 - Help people learn through the process of answering.
- Following up after a questioning conversation is critically important. Someone who has openly and thoughtfully answered your questions deserves to know what you did with the information.
 - When we don't follow up on the responses we get to our questions, others will see our questions as insincere and untrustworthy.
 - The art of questioning is really not about tips and techniques at all. It all comes down to being sincere in wanting to learn rather than blame, in wanting to listen to responses openly and non-judgmentally, and following up on the conversation with action.

Chapter 5: Creating a Questioning Culture

- The goal for the inquiring leader is to change the corporate culture from one of *telling* to one of *asking*, to help everyone see and understand that questions need to become their primary communications tool.
- How can a leader develop a questioning culture? Here are some strategies that can build a powerful learning and questioning culture:
 - Start at the top. The questioning culture must begin with the most senior leaders, who model the frequent use of good questions.
 - Create an environment that enables good people to challenge the status quo, take risks, and ask more questions. Recognize that many standard practices, policies, and procedures are no longer valuable to the company -if they ever were.
 - Connect the values and processes of the organization to the use of questions.
 - Optimize the opportunities to ask questions by building questioning into every business activity, including formal and informal meetings, sales calls, and conferences with clients, or presentations.
 - Report and appreciate questioners; promote risk taking and tolerate mistakes.
 - Provide training for people to be better at it and more comfortable in asking questions.

- Successful and effective leaders continually search for opportunities to ask questions.
- Leaders model the way not only by asking questions but by demonstrating their willingness to learn and change.
- Great leaders are eager to see people learn. They understand and appreciate adult learning and see learning as a way of life.
- Practicing action learning, taking risks, seeking innovative answers, and asking fresh questions all exhibit solid learning practices and skills to employees.
- Successful leaders go beyond asking questions themselves; they work to create an environment in which everyone can ask and be asked questions. This means, first of all, that they focus on fostering a climate where employees still feel safe in asking questions and able to trust the system and the people involved. Without trust and openness, people are unwilling to communicate about feelings and about problems, so they refrain from asking the leader questions that may help them.
- It is important to be careful in selecting a place and time to ask questions.
- If we really want to create an environment that is safe for questions, we must be committed to the growth of people. This includes not only promoting their learning but also taking a personal interest in their ideas and suggestions and encouraging involvement in decision making. When leaders demonstrate this personal interest, they help create a safe environment for questions.
- Dialogue is a form of communication that balances advocating and inquiring. Dialogue involves a relationship built on trusting, caring questions, and when practiced well and often, it builds trust as people see that their questions and observations are appreciated. Central to the concept of dialogue is the idea that through the interaction, people acknowledge the wholeness, not just the utility, of others.
- Through dialogue people can begin to move into coordinated patterns of action and start to act in an aligned way. They can begin to see how to fit parts into a larger whole.
- Too often, we fail to ask questions because we are in a rush. When we rush through an agenda at a meeting or tell people to hurry up decisions, we're squeezing out the possibility of questions.
- The leader who begins to use a questioning style and to encourage the organizational culture to welcome and appreciate questions is likely to meet two kinds of resistance. The first comes from people who are taken aback by a leader who starts asking questions more regularly, who are used to having the leader *tell* them answers instead of asking them questions. These people have answer dependency. The second comes from other leaders in the organization who are uncomfortable in adopting a questioning style themselves, who see their source of power as stemming from getting answers. These people have telling dependency.
- If the leader's role has been to solve problems, provide information, and have all the answers, a change to a questioning style will usually cause those who have become dependent on a leader to feel abandoned. Tell those you lead that you have been rethinking your leadership style and that one of the things you're exploring is the value of being a leader who asks questions. This way, listeners are prepared when you ask questions, in your reassure them that you have no ulterior motive.
- People don't resist change as much as they resist being changed. In other words, the way to get others to adopt a questioning leadership style is to ask them to do so, rather than tell them

to do so. Telling people rather than asking by its very nature lays the foundation for defensiveness and resistance because it does thrust change upon them.

Part 3: A Guide for Leaders on Using Questions

Chapter 7: Using Questions in Managing People

- Three questions that are found to be especially helpful in building relationships with staff:
 - *How can I help you?* It clarifies immediately what the person wants. Oftentimes, the only thing that people want is permission to execute their own strategy. Other times, they may be seeking advice or wishing to inform.
 - *What would you do?*
 - *What would someone else do?*
- Reflection helps people experience “breakthrough learning” when they become aware of the need to reach beyond their conscious beliefs and challenge their assumptions about their present worldview. Questions that encourage reflection are the key to significant, transformative learning.
- Reflection increases self awareness, which helps people relate to others more genuinely.
- The following questions are very valuable in generating reflection, learning, and career development:
 - How do you learn best?
 - How did you foster your own development?
 - What made this a high-point learning experience?
 - What were the most challenging and exciting career development opportunities that you have experienced?
 - What made it challenging and exciting?
 - How did you benefit?
 - How did the organization benefit?
- Changes in attitudes, assumptions, and values require reflection on the individual’s own mental models. Without self awareness of mental models, it is impossible for a person to change.
- Questions transform problem and possibility talk into action as they move people from the present to the future.
- Here are a variety of questions to spur innovation and activity:
 - What is a viable alternative?
 - What are the advantages and disadvantages you see in this suggestion?
 - Can you more fully describe your concerns?
 - What are your goals?
 - What is the current reality?
 - What are a few options for improvement?
 - What will you commit to do by when?
- To encourage innovation and action, leaders should encourage people to think about their own solutions, instead of giving them solutions to problems.

- Questions can open people to the possibility that they are capable of spontaneously generating astonishing new material, material that goes far beyond what anyone imagined as possible.
- In planning and setting objectives, the leader could ask some of the following types of questions, which can act as springboards to better, more effective action:
 - What do we need to accomplish?
 - What do you think is realistic?
 - How are you planning to accomplish this objective?
 - What resources are you looking for?
 - What kind of help do you need?
- In checking progress toward goals, you can inspire better work by asking your colleague a series of non-threatening questions such as these:
 - Are you still on track to have that report finished by Friday afternoon?
 - Do you have all the information that you need?
 - Would it be useful for us to go through some aspects of the report?
- A number of other types of questions that can be introduced during sessions to set plans and determine strategies.
 - *To call attention to a point:* why do you think John found it difficult to accept this challenge?
 - *To get information:* What is the best way to get there from here?
 - *To uncover causes or relationships:* How has the conflict with Bob affected progress on this project?
 - *To test ideas:* Suppose we did it this way? What would happen?
 - *To keep the discussion to the point:* Can we go back to what the original focus was?
 - *To bring out opinions and attitudes:* How do we feel about this?
 - *To bring out the reactions to a point made:* How do you feel about?
 - *To suggest an action, idea, or decision:* What do you think the results would be if you did?
- Using questions can help you become a better leader and generate stronger results from your staff. But it has another benefit. Questioning your colleagues can help them become questioners as well, individuals who generate questioning insight as a way of life. Enabling and equipping people to become reflective practitioners will help them become better leaders. This readiness to change and grow via questions is a prerequisite for development.

Chapter 8: Using Questions to Build Teams

- Teams are now the predominant unit for decision-making and getting things done.
- The traditional leader focuses on control, seeks to minimize risk, and pushes to be the initiator of action. Such a leader tends to give commands via statements, to control change, hoard information, and foreclose debate. From the traditional perspective, the team exists for the convenience of the leader. The result is a group that achieves limited development, remains dependent on the leader, asks few questions, and accomplishes relatively little.
- On the other hand, the leader who coaches with questions sees the team as having an independent existence in its own right, serving a larger organizational purpose. Such a team has the potential to grow continuously. A coaching, questioning leader develops a group which

possesses and demonstrates the culture of trust, support, and open discussion. In this type of leadership, the leader reminds people of their capabilities and strengths, and that they are more likely to continue to build their power as a group.

- Skillfully using and encouraging questions can help you achieve a number of specific goals:
 - *A shared commitment to solving problems.* To help the members realize that they are accountable and that they must work together if they're going to be successful, ask, *how has this problem affected us? What help do we need? How can we improve our communication and collaboration? Who else has something to contribute on this topic?*
 - *Alignment around clear values and goals.* To help people jointly clarify the goal and achieve agreement on what the group should do, ask, *what are we trying to achieve? Who has a different view? What's the ultimate purpose behind this goal?* Use questions to remind members not to assume that everyone automatically agrees on the goal of the group, and that consensus on a goal is only possible if they ask questions of each other.
 - *Willingness to work with others to develop strategies.* To remind people that no one in the group will have all the answers, ask, *what is marketing's perspective on this? What is manufacturing's perspective? Who else has something to add? How can we bring these different views together? Have we thought of all possible options?*
 - *Improved morale.* For example, *what can the rest of the team do to help you on this project?* When people know you want them to succeed and you're willing to put your work aside to help them, they tend to perform better and do so with less stress.
 - *Clear and accepted norms.* To help establish unique and strong group norms, norms that are powerfully ingrained and provide strong cohesion for the group, ask, *how well are we doing? Are we listening to each other carefully? What is not working in how we deal with each other? How can we improve? Are we excluding ideas or approaches without giving them full consideration?*
 - *Respect for one another and support for one another's ideas.* When the leader is careful to ask questions of, and listen to, every member of the group without exception, it sets a powerful example for everyone on the team. To make sure everyone is included, single out by name those who have held back and ask, *do you have anything to add?*
 - *Improved learning and willingness to help others to learn.* To help members discover how to learn from each other and put that learning to work for the organization's benefit, ask *who has had experience with this issue? Does anyone have a different idea? How do people feel about this in your department?*
 - *A fuller understanding of the situation you are facing.* Questions can provide a useful reality check.

- Team meetings too often sap energy and enthusiasm. When you find people sitting around a table looking bored or distracted, get them engaged by asking questions. Questions, especially challenging ones, cause the group and the individuals to think and to learn. Questions create energy and vitality in the group by triggering the need to listen, to seek a common truth, to justify opinions and viewpoints. Questions generate a dialogue in which everyone begins to leave their individual limitations to find a new wholeness.

- The way meetings begin often sets tone for how they proceed and what will be accomplished. Thus questions can get staff members off to a good start:
 - What are procedures that will bring us together?
 - How can we listen for what is different (rather than start with fighting)?
 - How can our work together be more relaxing and less stressful?
- Here are several ways to use questions to engage people and generate energy during a team meeting:
 - Instead of selling your idea, ask meeting participants to identify why your idea will work. Then listen carefully to what people say. This legitimizes the sharing of doubts and shifts the process from selling to co-creation.
 - Give everyone a chance to speak by going around the room and asking where people stand on an issue. Many times conversations are dominated by one or two people. Hearing from everyone often shifts a conversation and allows you to bring closure to an issue.
 - Separate understanding from agreement. Simply understanding someone's point of view does not mean agreeing with it, but it builds a bridge. Working for understanding means seeing the world through the other person's eyes. When you do this, you build trust and rapport with that person, and solutions become possible where none existed before.
- At the conclusion of the meeting, additional questions should be asked to determine what went well at the meeting as well as what could be improved at the next meeting. Unless you encourage and enable the members to reflect on the just-concluded meeting by asking a few questions, little or no learning or improvements will occur and your meetings will never get any better. At the end of each session, help the group learn by asking some of the following questions:
 - How well has this session gone?
 - What has the group done well?
 - What could the group do better?
 - What are we not doing that we could be doing?
 - What actions are we going to take as a group next time that will improve our performance?
- Effective problem solving requires an environment that allows for and encourages people to ask, fresh questions. We should focus on generating questions and look for the right questions to start with, rather than jumping directly to finding right answers. The right questions will lead us to right answers. Questions help everyone in the group recognize and reorganize their knowledge. As group members are engaged in asking questions of each other, they gradually gain a group consensus on answers and strategies since they can more clearly see one another's perspectives as well as gaining a greater clarity of their own.
- Gaining clarity and consensus on the real problem is thus the first and more important part of problem solving, for if we jump for solutions too soon, we may end up solving the wrong problem.

Stages in problem solving

- Questions are used to open possibilities, to clarify meaning, and to structure the progression through the four stages of problem solving. Particular types of questions are most beneficial at each stage of the problem solving process.

- *Problem articulation and framing*: What questions are best at this stage; they allow the group to gather details and descriptions of the situation and help members understand the real problem and thus reframe it in a way that everyone can agree upon. For example, *what* is the most important thing...?
- *Problem analysis stage*: At this stage *why* questions are most helpful; questions such as *why* is that important? *Why* do you think it happened? *Why* were you feeling that way?
- *Hypothesis generation or diagnosis stage*: *how* questions allow the group or individual to begin to formulate a tentative theory to explain or address the problem: *how* is this situation similar to or different from other problems? *How* could you do things differently? *How* could we intervene?
- *Action stage*: At this stage, the group may be seeking to describe behavior (test for different behaviors) or to share inferences (test for different views); *what* questions become important again. *What* are the implications of all this for future action? *What* should you do now?
- At any stage of the problem solving process, a team can get stuck, not seeing a way forward. To help shake things up so that the team can see things from a new perspective and move forward, it's useful to ask the following types of questions:
 - *Open-ended questions*: Unlike closed questions, which seek a short, specific response like yes or no, open ended questions encourage people to expand ideas and allow exploration of what's important to them or what is comfortable for them to reveal. Asking open ended questions also encourages them to do the work of self reflection and problem solving rather than justifying or defending a position. For example: *what do you think...? Could you say more about...? What possibilities come to mind? What might happen if you...?*
 - *Clarification questions*: When someone is not clear or you do not experience the full understanding of the situation, you might ask the person to define or explain the statement. For example: *Let me see if I am clear. Are you talking about...? Are you saying...? Could you say that in different words?*
 - *Questions for details*: When someone is not clear, you might ask for further bits of information. For example: *More specifically, what are some of the things that you have tried? Have you asked so and so what his major concerns are? Does thus and such agree that there are performance problems?*
 - *Stimulating questions*: Introduce ideas and options by asking questions rather than suggesting a course of action. Emphasis is on asking, rather than telling, inviting a thoughtful response and maintaining a spirit of collaboration. For example: *Let me see if I'm clear. Are you talking about setting goals based upon your feedback?* This implies that person should use feedback as a guide to setting goals. Similarly, *have you asked so and so what his concerns are?* Can be used to offer someone the option of inviting so and so to speak about his priorities.
 - *Probing questions*: go below the level of events and behaviors to search for internal drivers that trigger a person's behavior. For example: *Why did this happen? Why did you believe this would be the result?*

- *Summarizing questions:* Invite others to complete or end the discussion with questions that capture the key issues of action. For example: *What is the major point that has been made here?*
- Questions help you manage team conflict. Conflict around ideas is natural, healthy, and to be expected as teams are organized so as to gain benefits of multiple perspectives. Conflict is an integral part of team process. Healthy conflict is focused on task issues over which there may be legitimate differences of opinion; or differences in values and perspectives, or expectations about the impact of decisions.
- What are some questions that a leader can employ when managing team conflicts? How can we develop trust and rapport among the participants?
 - How can we separate the people from the problem –diagnose the cause of the conflict.
 - What goals are in conflict?
 - What does each side want?
 - How can I encourage them to view the conflict from the other side’s perspective and to practice active listening?
 - How can I encourage them to view the conflict from the other side’s perspective and to practice active listening?
 - What are the common areas of interest?
 - What are the issues (not what is the each sides’ position)?
 - How can we decide what each side wants?
 - What are the issues that are incompatible between the two sides?
 - What are the most important goals of each side?
 - How can we generate options that can be used to solve the problem?
 - What objective criteria will we use as a basis for our decisions?
 - How can we disagree in an agreeable fashion?
- When we ask questions of others and invite them to search for answers, we’re not just sharing information, we are sharing responsibility. Teams are all about sharing responsibility. Teams function best when responsibility is shared, ideas are shared, problems are shared, and ownership for results is shared. Helping everyone on the team become a better questioner is thus an important way to improve teamwork.

Chapter 9: Using Questions to Shape Strategy and Enable Change

- When leaders shape corporate vision, purpose, and strategy, their focus must turn outward and the questions they ask must go far beyond the company’s walls.
- Questions involving corporate strategy are questions about how the organization relates to the world around it: what markets it competes in, what customers it serves, what alliances it pursues with partners, how it produces its products and services and outsourced work to vendors, and how it relates to the community and other stakeholders. Vision and values also must look outward – for while we cannot look to others to tell us what our values should be, our values must be informed by the perspectives of outside stakeholders and relevant to the changes we face.

- Using questions to bring fresh perspective- People can easily become entrapped in the organization's accumulated knowledge and established procedures. As leaders, we must periodically question the collective wisdom of the organization. We need to be able to question assumptions about structures, strategies, values, and business processes that shape an organizations culture and operations.
- In addressing strategic issues, a fresh perspective is absolutely essential if the organization is to perceive new opportunities, uncover hidden and potentially threatening trends in the marketplace, and create new business models.
- Questions can open up new possibilities for virtually every organizational goal and function, be it the understanding of emerging markets, the gathering of information, the building of key relationships, or thinking objectively, learning, or developing an organization. Deep questions about structures, strategies, and values function as open handed invitations to creativity, "calling forth that which doesn't yet exist."
- Leaders must be willing to say I don't know and model the frequent use of questions. They need to encourage everyone in the organization to challenge the status quo, take risks, and ask more questions – and reward those who do.
- Leaders at all levels, including senior leaders, need to create opportunities for asking questions of individuals and groups outside the organization – customers, business partners, suppliers, community groups, academic and training institutions. Questioning such groups is often vital to the long-term success of the enterprise.
- Although asking questions of customers is of course useful for finding out how your company is currently dealing with them, and even greater benefit can be derived from using questions to create the future together. Effective leaders focus on the customer's goals and aspirations.
- Build questions into conversations with customers, questions such as: *"What are your goals? What is holding you back from achieving these goals? What are the consequences of not achieving your goals? What have you tried to overcome these obstacles? How much is the problem costing the business? In your opinion, what would be the ideal solution for the issue?"*
- The most critical questions to ask customers are:
 - Why do you do business with us?
 - Why do you do business with their competitors?
 - How and when have we made it hard for you to do business with us?
 - What will you need from us in the future?
 - If you were me what's one thing you'd change about my organization?
 - What's the most effective way to tell you that we are grateful for your business?
 - Suppose this organization could choose just three things to do more of or differently to dramatically enhance our customer's loyalty – what would they be?
- Questioning (in learning from) partners and vendors has become a critical process across all types of organizations today. Resources available from vendors and partners, including the gaining of intelligence and competencies via questions, can be critical for the survival of the company. They can also provide competitive advantage.

- Up front, at the very beginning of the relationship, the leader should consider what learning is possible from the alliance – customer intelligence, process, and operations policies, cultural nuances, and so on. You may even want to build these learning objectives into the agreement.
- Companies need to reach out to other parts of their business network as well, bringing in partners, contractors, suppliers, and vendors together in an overall learning environment with core employees.
- A leader who leads with questions quickly recognizes the many benefits that accrue from involving the community as a part of the questioning chain, benefits such as the enhancement of the company's image in the community, the generation of greater community interest in working for or buying from the company, the strengthening of the quality of life in the community, the preparation of a future work force, and the opportunity to exchange and share community resources.
- Just as important – if not more so – is making yourself available to answer questions from the community.
- Once your company has gained a full picture of the current reality by asking questions of all stakeholders, it has the context it needs to begin talking about its vision for the future and the values that will help guide it there.
- What then are the questions used by leaders to build corporate vision, purpose, and values? Blanchard has identified five key higher level questions in determining the direction of the organization. First, to determine *the purpose or mission* of the company, the leader should ask, *what business are we in?* The *image* or picture of the company can be developed by responding to the question, *what will the future look like if things are running as planned?* The *values* of the company are determined by the question, *what do we stand for?* *Goals* are determined by *what do we want people to focus on now?* The *ethical question*: *is it legal, fair, and does not hurt self esteem?*
- Ask some of the following questions when considering organizational vision and strategy:
 - What options have we considered, have we not considered?
 - How can this be the best possible win-win?
 - What limitations may we be placing on thinking, planning, or actions?
 - How else can we think about this?
 - Are we being honest with ourselves?
 - What's useful about this?
 - What can we learn about this?
 - How can we make sure we stay on track?
- The extent to which change is embraced within an organization depends on how adept the leader is at engaging the staff in designing the organization's response to change. Effective leaders use questions to both motivate and guide to change the effort. A question calls for an answer, so it acts as a catalyst to fresh thinking and helps to initiate new action. Questions cause new openings whereas statements and opinions rarely do. Effective questions, lead to effective action: ineffective or neglected questions result in detours, mixing goals, and costly mistakes.

- When leaders use questions to promote change, they demonstrate that they do not have all the answers and that they're willing to change themselves.
- When leading change, *how* questions are often the most powerful. We know where we want to go and the issue is how to get there.
- How questions empower others to find a way.
- Questions have the power to transform organizations large and small. They can connect us to customers, markets, vendors, the community, and other stakeholders as we shape strategy.

Conclusion: Becoming a Questioning Leader

- Almost everyone has heard the adage; *you become what you think about*. What perhaps is even truer is that *we become what we ask about*. The people who are most successful in life get to the top because of how they question what happens to them and the people and environment around them.
- How can a leader practice inquiry leadership and become more comfortable and better at asking questions? Marilee Adams suggest the following steps:
 1. Start by becoming more aware of the questions you ask now and of the questions other people ask of you. Notice what works.
 2. Pick an hour and force yourself not to ask questions. This will focus your attention on the importance of questions. We tend to find ourselves asking questions mentally even if we are not voicing them.
 3. Ask yourself more questions silently. As you become a conscious observer of your own thinking, you can shape it more intentionally, which will lead you to construct better, more effective questions that will lead to better answers and actions.
 4. Before asking someone else the question, ask yourself this question: what do I want my question to accomplish? Intentionally frame your questions so that you encourage collaborative thinking and cannot be perceived as threatening.
 5. Encourage staff to ask you questions.

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