

“A QUESTION NOT ASKED IS A DOOR NOT OPENED.”

MARILEE GOLDBERG, THE ART OF THE QUESTION

A LEADER'S WORK

A core aspect of the leader's new work involves creating multiple opportunities for learning conversations around challenging questions. When the human mind and heart are fully engaged in authentic conversation and listening for core questions, new knowledge often begins to surface. Thus, the ability to facilitate working conversations that enhance trust and reduce fear is an important leadership capability.

To succeed in this pursuit, it's essential for leaders to strengthen their skills in the use of dialogue and other engagement approaches that deepen mutual inquiry and foster collective intelligence. These capabilities include:

- Creating a climate of discovery
- Suspending premature judgment
- Exploring underlying assumptions and beliefs
- Listening for connections between ideas
- Encouraging diverse perspectives
- Honoring everyone's contributions
- Articulating shared understanding
- Harvesting and sharing collective discoveries

IS YOUR ORGANISATION AN INQUIRING SYSTEM?



- ✓ Do your leadership development programs contain as much of a focus on the art and architecture of framing powerful questions as they do on techniques for solving problems?
- ✓ Do your organization's strategic planning processes include structured ways to discover the "big questions" that, if answered, would have real strategic leverage?
- ✓ What enabling tools or technologies does your organization employ to "seed" itself with strategic questions that "travel well" and catalyze learning conversations both within and across functions?
- ✓ Does your organization use collaborative technology tools to enable people on the frontlines to ask each other questions related to their daily work and receive help with these questions from colleagues in other locations?
- ✓ Do senior leaders in your organization see the process of strategy evolution as one that engages multiple voices and perspectives in networks of conversation?

HOW CAN I FRAME BETTER QUESTIONS?

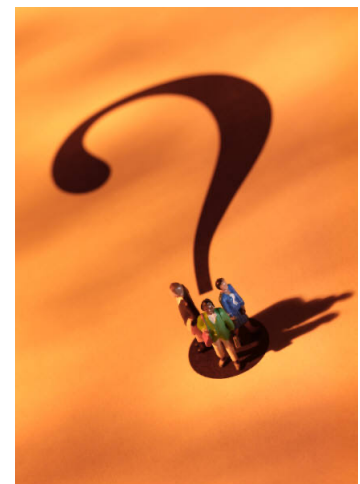
Here are some questions you might ask yourself as you begin to explore the art and architecture of powerful questions.

- Is this question relevant to the real life and real work of the people who will be exploring it?
- Is this a genuine question—a question to which I/we really don't know the answer?
- What “work” do I want this question to do? That is, what kind of conversation, meanings, and feelings do I imagine this question will evoke in those who will be exploring it?
- Is this question likely to invite fresh thinking/feeling? Is it familiar enough to be recognizable and relevant—and different enough to call forward a new response?
- What assumptions or beliefs are embedded in the way this question is constructed?
- Is this question likely to generate hope, imagination, engagement, creative action, and new possibilities or is it likely to increase a focus on past problems and obstacles?
- Does this question leave room for new and different questions to be raised as the initial question is explored?
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Adapted from Sally Ann Roth Public Conversations Project c. 1998

QUESTIONING

- ✓ Stimulates creativity^[SEP]
- ✓ Motivates fresh thinking^[SEP]
- ✓ Surfaces underlying assumptions^[SEP]
- ✓ Focuses intention, attention, and energy
- ✓ Opens the door to change^[SEP]
- ✓ Leads us into the future



“STRATEGIC QUESTIONS CREATE A RESONANT FIELD INTO WHICH YOUR OWN THINKING IS MAGNIFIED, CLARIFIED, AND NEW MOTION CAN BE CREATED.”

THE GAME PLAN PROCESS

- Assess Your Current Situation
- Discover the “Big Questions”
- Create Images of Possibility^[SEP]
- Evolve Workable Strategies

QUESTIONS FOR ALL SEASONS

Here is a series of generative questions that we and other colleagues have found useful to stimulate new knowledge and creative thinking in a wide variety of situations around the world. Look at these questions to stimulate your own thinking about questions related to your own specific situation. Play. Use your imagination.

Questions for Focusing Collective Attention on Your Situation

- What question, if answered, could make the most difference to the future of (your specific situation)?
- What's important to you about (your specific situation) and why do you care?
- What draws you/us to this inquiry?
- What's our intention here? What's the deeper purpose (the big "why") that is really worthy of our best effort?
- What opportunities can you see in (your specific situation)?
- What do we know so far/still need to learn about (your specific situation)?
- What are the dilemmas/opportunities in (your specific situation)?
- What assumptions do we need to test or challenge here in thinking about (your specific situation)?
- What would someone who had a very different set of beliefs than we do say about (your specific situation)?

Questions for Connecting Ideas and Finding Deeper Insight

- What's taking shape? What are you hearing underneath the variety of opinions being expressed? What's in the center of the table?
- What's emerging here for you? What new connections are you making?
- What had real meaning for you from what you've heard? What surprised you? What challenged you?

- What's missing from this picture so far? What is it we're not seeing? What do we need more clarity about?
- What's been your/our major learning, insight, or discover so far?
- What's the next level of thinking we need to do?
- If there was one thing that hasn't yet been said in order to reach a deeper level of understanding/clarity, what would that be?

Questions That Create Forward Movement

- What would it take to create change on this issue?
- What could happen that would enable you/us to feel fully engaged and energized about (your specific situation)?
- What's possible here and who cares? (rather than "What's wrong here and who's responsible?")
- What needs our immediate attention going forward?
- If our success was completely guaranteed, what bold steps might we choose?
- How can we support each other in taking the next steps? What unique contribution can we each make?
- What challenges might come our way and how might we meet them?
- What conversation, if begun today, could ripple out in a way that created new possibilities for the future of (your situation)?
- What seed might we plant together today that could make the most difference to the future of (your situation)?