

Application Guide

GREAT LEADERS ASK GREAT QUESTIONS, PART 2



BOTTOM LINE:

Great leaders use questions strategically to invite curiosity, reinforce what matters, and create better opportunities for organizational success.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

I. Three questions great leaders regularly ask:

- A. What do I believe is impossible to do in my field, but if it could be done, it would fundamentally change my business?
- B. What would the **next** leader do?
- C. What would a **great** leader do?

II. Great leaders ask questions that **challenge what's possible**.

- A. Every organization has a paradigm, or framework, they get locked into.
 1. This paradigm shapes how decisions are made and problems are solved.
 2. Author Joel Barker explains when you get locked into a certain paradigm, innovation becomes limited.
 3. Leaders should purposefully seek out new ways of doing things by:
 - a) Asking the paradigm shifting question, **“What do I believe is impossible, but if it could be done, it would fundamentally change my business?”**
 - b) Intentionally listening to perspectives from outside organizations.
- B. This kind of curiosity positions leaders to recognize possibilities that exist beyond their existing framework.
 1. Most people will not immediately know the answer to this kind of question.
 2. But if you aren't asking the question, you may not recognize the answer when it appears.

III. Great leaders ask questions that **create objectivity**.

- A. Leaders can become emotionally attached to people, products, processes, and models they helped create.
 1. Whenever organizations get their identity wrapped up with something that should be temporary, the clock is ticking backwards, and they often miss important opportunities to move forward.
 2. “People who have no emotional stake in a decision can see what needs to be done sooner.”
—Andrew Grove
- B. Asking **“What would the next leader do?”** removes some of the emotional attachment and forces leaders to get really honest.
- C. Marry the mission, date the model.
 1. The mission represents what the organization exists to accomplish.
 2. The model, product, or approach is simply a means of accomplishing the mission.
 3. Great leaders know when accomplishing the mission requires the model to change.

IV. Great leaders ask questions that **raise the standard of their leadership**.

- A. Great is as great does. Great leaders aren't great because of what they think or say, but because of what they do. Doing is what makes the difference.

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- B. Asking **“What would a great leader do?”** shifts your attention away from what is easiest, most comfortable, or most natural and toward what the situation actually requires.
1. Sometimes you have to invite an issue into the room and address it head on.
- C. This question accomplishes four things:
1. **Raises the standard of leadership above circumstances.** It helps you move beyond the immediate situation and consider the larger leadership responsibility.
 2. **Unveils your motives.** It can expose when fear, selfishness, jealousy, or personal preference is influencing a decision.
 3. **Reveals weaknesses.** It highlights tendencies such as avoiding necessary conflict or responding too aggressively.
 4. **Inspires you to reach beyond the limits of personality and style.** Saying “That’s just not who I am” isn’t always a sufficient reason for avoiding what leadership requires. Great leaders understand when a certain circumstance requires something more than they would normally do.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION OR TEAM DISCUSSION

1. Where might an existing assumption or paradigm be limiting the way you think about a problem or opportunity?
2. What problem in your organization would fundamentally change your effectiveness if your team could solve it?
3. If someone replaced you tomorrow, what is one change they might make that you have been hesitant to make?
4. Where might your team be holding onto a process, product, or approach because it has worked in the past rather than because it is still the best way forward?
5. Based on your current circumstance, what would a great team of leaders do differently?

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