

ANDY STANLEY



The Leading Question

An Organizational
Leader's Guide to *Ask It*
by Andy Stanley

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The Leading Question: AN ORGANIZATIONAL LEADER'S GUIDE TO *Ask It*,
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INTRODUCTION

What if there were a single question you could ask yourself that would guide just about every decision you need to make in your personal life and in your role as a leader in an organization? A question that would bring clarity and fresh insight for every choice you have to make? A question that would pierce the fog of your self-deception and erase all those shades of gray that cloud your reasoning? A question that would sidestep waste of effort and prevent useless regret, foolproofing every aspect of your life?

I believe there is such a question. And whether you lead a church, a business, a nonprofit, or some other kind of organization, I believe you can use this question in all aspects of your life to help you reach your fullest potential.

Ready for it?

The question that will set you up for success where it count is this:

WHAT IS THE WISE THING TO DO?

I know what you might be tempted to say right now—“That’s not very revolutionary.”

But it is. Because you see, usually when we’re faced with a decision, we ask ourselves, *Is there anything wrong with this course of action?* If it’s not illegal, unethical, or immoral, then it qualifies as a live option. We can all think of companies and even whole sectors of the for-profit and not-for-profit worlds that have been built on the question “Is there anything wrong with it?”

The problem is that this question can lead to terrible decisions that create bubbles that eventually burst. It can lead to taking excessive risk and potentially to losing everything.

But the biggest problem with an *Is-there-anything-wrong-with-it?* approach is that it usually leads to people trying to get as close to the line as they can without actually doing something wrong. And once that happens, you’re on your way to thinking, *How did I get myself and my organization into this mess?*

A much better question to ask is “What is the wise thing to do?” This questions gets at, not what is permissible, but what is right, what is best, what would most please God in a given situation. Asking this question, arriving at the right answer, and then acting on that answer can set loose a cascade of positive results in a leader’s life and in the lives of all those who are depending on him or her for direction.

Does that sound to you like a better way to go?

If so, I urge you to read my book *Ask It* and work through the following personal reflection questions that adapt the key ideas of the book for men and women in positions of leadership. They will help you to make the “ask it” question—*What is the wise thing to do?*—a standard part of your operating procedure as a leader.

If you find this guide useful, pass it along—email it as a .pdf, post it to your blog, or print out multiple copies for your associates.



PART 1: THE QUESTION

Please read chapters 1–7 of *Ask It* and reflect on the following questions.

What are some of the past decisions you have made that you regret the most? How did poor planning or self-deception contribute to those mistakes? Besides yourself, who was hurt, and how?

How has asking the question “Is there anything wrong with it?” gotten you into trouble when making decisions in the past?

How would you define wisdom?

What is a major decision you are facing right now, whether in your personal life or in your work as a leader? Analyze your options according to the following three questions:

- In light of your past experience, what is the wise thing to do? That is, what insights about your strengths and weaknesses that you have discovered through previous experience can guide your decision?
- In light of your current circumstances, what is the wise thing to do? Perhaps understanding the season of life you are in can help you winnow out some options.
- In light of your future hopes and dreams, what is the wise thing to do? You will want to make decisions today that can help lead you to the kind of future you have in mind for yourself or your organization.

What would it look like for the leadership team of your organization to use the same past-present-future analysis when establishing wise organizational strategy?



PART 2: THE ALTERNATIVES

Please read chapters 8–9 of *Ask It* and reflect on the following questions.

Do you recognize yourself (even a little) in any of the following descriptions of the types of people that Solomon described as not wise?

- The simpleton—someone who is young and hasn't yet gained much wisdom through experience
- The fool—someone who willfully does what is unwise
- The mocker—someone who doesn't care about the difference between wise and unwise and makes fun of those who do

As you think about the decisions you have made up to this point in your life, what do you learn about yourself? What tendencies do you need to correct in yourself in order to turn away from foolishness and walk in the direction of wisdom?

Thinking about the people you lead or manage, what poor decision-making patterns do you see? How can you teach and model better decision-making skills for them?



PART 3: A QUESTION OF TIME

Please read chapters 10–11 of *Ask It* and reflect on the following questions.

How much effort do you usually put into planning your use of time?

What are some activities that you need to invest time in consistently over a long period if you want to be successful in your personal life? If you want to be successful in your professional life?

What might be the results if you neglect making consistent investments of time in those areas?

What are some of the distractions or alternatives that keep you from spending adequate time on the things that really matter?

Starting today, what areas of your life will you begin investing time in more consistently? What things will you say no to in order to have more time for what's important? Be specific.

How can you help the people in your organization to make wiser use of their time?



PART 4: A QUESTION OF MORALITY

Please read chapters 12–16 of *Ask It* and reflect on the following questions.

What are some public or private examples you have seen of the devastation caused by morale failures? What have been the repercussions?

What were the unwise choices that led up to these examples?

What are some decisions you could make now to not only keep from crossing a line into a morale failure but not even get close to the line? Define some specific boundaries for yourself.

If you were to stay within the boundaries you just defined, what would be the advantages for you in your personal life? In your professional life?

How can you help to establish a culture of decorum and respect between the sexes in your organization?



PART 5: WISDOM FOR THE ASKING

Please read chapters 17–20 of *Ask It* and reflect on the following questions.

As you think of a decision you're currently wrestling with, what do you think is the reason you're having a hard time making up your mind? Could it be because your emotions are clouding your judgment? Or because you don't have enough knowledge to make a decision you can be confident about?

How do you generally feel about asking other people's advice when you have a tough decision to make? Do you tend to invite input or resist it? Why?

What was one time when you made a decision all on your own and later came to regret it? What was one time when you sought and received advice and as a result took smarter action than you otherwise would have?

If you were in need of counsel today, who could you trust to give you good advice about your work? About your finances? About your relationships? About your spiritual life?

In your organization, are leaders who seek others' counsel looked upon as wise or as weak? How could you reshape the organizational culture so that it values mentorship and collaboration more strongly?



PART 6: THE BEST DECISION EVER

Please read chapters 21–22 of *Ask It* and reflect on the following questions.

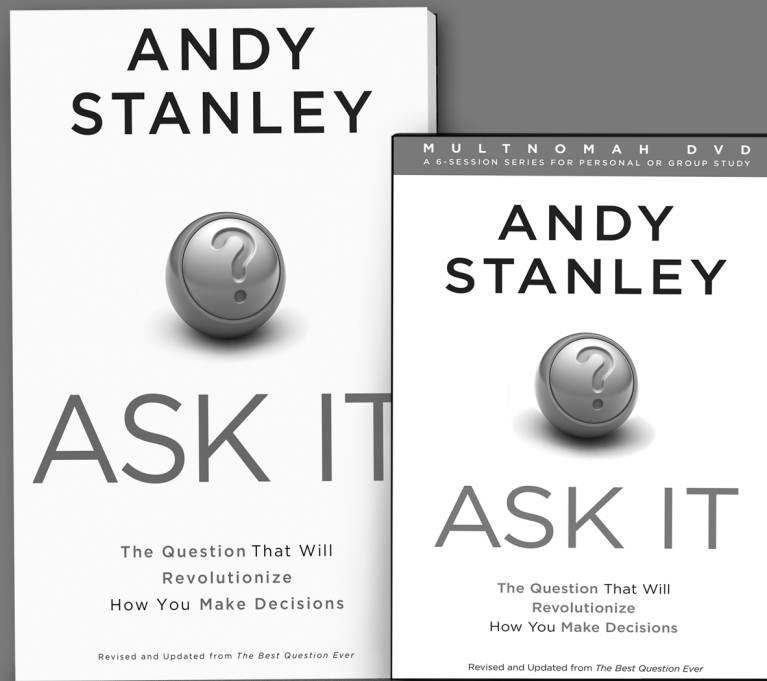
As you think about a decision you have recently made, what will it mean for you to follow through on that decision? What do you need to *know* in order to execute the decision? What do you need to *do*?

How can you submit your life, and specifically the choices you make, to the God who made you and loves you?

What reasons do you have to trust God with your life and decision making?

How will submitting yourself make you a better leader and a better person?

You'll Never Make a Decision the Same Way Again



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