

MANAGEMENT QUESTIONS

When you are certain you have a firm grasp of listening to your people, your next step is to ask questions encouraging them to talk about their issues and **leading** them into a thought process which teaches them to solve problems for themselves. The result of this effort will allow you to delegate more and more authority to your employees, leading to a happier employee and a happier you.

So what do I mean? Here is a simple example:

John, who operates the plant packaging machine, walks into his boss' office and says, "Boss, we have a problem with the packager."

Boss: "What's wrong?"

John: "It won't dispense the glue."

Boss: "Why not?"

John: "Don't know."

Boss: "Have Anderson take a look at it and if it needs repairing, have him call Mary to set up an appointment with maintenance and have it done."

John: "OK."

Conversations like this go on by the thousands every day. Sounds normal enough, yes? What's the outcome of this little exchange likely to be? John will call Anderson, who will have a look at the packager. John will ask him to call Mary, who will call maintenance, who will then fix John's packager.

What will happen the next time the packager breaks? It's highly likely they'll go through something similar. In the end, John still won't be calling the shots about what to do to fix his packaging machine. He'll be coming back to the boss again.

So how can we change this situation so that the repair takes place and John is brought up to a higher level of productivity and decision making by asking the right Management Questions or MQs.

John, who manages the plant packaging machine, walks into his boss' office and says, "Boss, we have a problem with the packager."

Boss: "What's wrong?"

John: "It won't dispense the glue."

Boss: "What's your plan?"

John: "Huh?"

Boss: "What do you think you ought to do about it? What steps should you take?"

John: "Oh, I never thought about it. Well, Anderson is very familiar with the packager. He managed it all last year. Maybe I should ask him to have a look at it."

Boss: "Uh huh. Then what?"

John: "Well, then maybe I can fix it."

Boss: "Is there anyone else who has worked on it before?"

John: "Oh yeah, maintenance worked on it a few months ago and they bought a new tool set just to be able to do our own repairs."

Boss: "Who's in the best position to fix it?"

John: "Maintenance really. I'll call them to fix what needs fixing."

Boss: "Sounds good, John, let me know how it goes."

Pretty simple example, but play along with me here. In the second conversation, John has been asked to come up with a **plan** as opposed to dumping the problem on the boss. He's been forced to connect synapses in his brain that were never connected before. He has recorded "learning" in his gray matter that will stand him and the company in good stead long into the future. He is on his way to becoming his own problem solver instead of a "problem reporter."

Like the boss, it doesn't matter if you, the manager, know how to resolve the problem. Your responsibility is to use every interaction to improve the effectiveness of your employees.

If the boss doesn't manage/lead his employees to become better at solving their own problems, he'll never be able to free himself to do those things that only the boss can do – to make bigger decisions for the company's success.

Some of the bosses of the world have a hard time asking questions they already know the answers to. They believe it's a waste of time. In an emergency situation, I'll agree with them. But if the boss doesn't take his duties to develop his employees seriously – in other words, invest the time to ask the questions – he will effectively be holding the company back by maintaining a less productive workforce.

Managers who keep their employees coming back to them for answers are either lazy (don't want to go to the trouble to develop their people) or want to be in control (they say things like, "it's faster if I do it myself"). It takes a bit of effort to take a situation and turn it into a teaching question but the payoffs are cumulative.

It takes an "ego" to keep people coming back to you for answers when they should be figuring things out for themselves.

Asking Management Questions is a subtle and powerful form of training that can occur daily.

Ask the questions. Make them think. It makes the job more stimulating and interesting for the employee and it makes the team more successful for you.

Some of the questions you can easily ask your people every day that will have a positive effect on your work environment are:

- “What do you think?”
- “What do you propose we do?”
- “What would you do?”
- “What can you do about it?”
- “What would you need to know to move ahead?”
- “What resources would you need to make this happen?”
- “Who would you ask to find out?”
- “What do you need to know to solve this?”
- “Do you have the authority to handle this? If not, what authority do you need?”
- “Who can help you?”
- “What do you think we can do to make things better?”

You get the idea.

A closing note: there are certain things you are supposed to know in your capacity as manager. Not every situation can be turned into a question that delegates the problem-solving responsibility to the employee. However, if you’ve managed for a while, you’ll know when asking questions is appropriate to move your people and your organization in the right direction.

Management Questions

Why Is This A Concern?

- Managers miss opportunities daily to develop their people by giving them “the answer” instead of asking questions and stimulating them to come up with a solution.
- Managers fail to ask the right questions of their employees that will make them stronger individual performers.
- Often, either a manager’s laziness about developing his people or his desire to “control” keeps him from taking the time to ask management questions.

How To Approach It.

- Free up more of your managerial time by using MQ’s to lead employees to problem-solve their own challenges.
- Get in the habit of asking your employees key questions when they bring a problem to you.
- Listen for the unique solutions being offered by employees after you ask the question about their next step. Be amazed.

References

- *Leading With Questions*, Michael Marquardt

