

How To Get A Better Answer - Ask a Better Question

As humans we like to repeat behaviours. In fact, in the face of choice, our brains will predominantly opt to take the direct route - the pathway most travelled. This repetition makes us feel safe, secure and certain. It enables us to make decisions confidently based on a set of assumptions and provides a dose of steadfastness when faced with difficulty.

Whilst we often hear that 'insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting a different result', and know intellectually that this is true, we are still typically creatures of habit. The challenge is breaking the habit.

So when faced with a personal challenge, or a difficult issue stemming from your team, your manager or your customer, stop, step back and ask a better question.

Better questions to ask yourself

Sometimes we procrastinate or sabotage progress towards our goals. This might be because we are fearful of failure, success or maybe the responsibility that comes with making a decision is too revealing. Free yourself of these limiting beliefs by asking yourself questions that challenge the assumptions that drive your daily actions.

*What would you do now if you knew you couldn't fail?
What rules do you have that are getting in the way?
How would your ideal self create a solution?*

Better questions to ask your team

It's all too tempting to tell people what to do even if your natural inclination is not to do so. If you are in a position of authority you may find yourself as the recipient of a constant stream of questions. This is because there is a tacit expectation that you will provide the answers. But what if you responded with a question, rather than an answer? (Now, there's a question for you!)

*What have you tried so far?
What small steps could you take to get you closer to the goal?
What elements are within your control?*

Better questions to ask your leaders

Leaders are often blamed for being too directive, not communicating enough, squashing creativity, not giving enough responsibility, amongst a host of other traits. These traits are often left unaddressed when things are going well but in more challenging times the impact of these behaviours can lead to poor engagement and low employee satisfaction. To provoke a more helpful response, try using questions to manage upwards.

*What is the outcome we are working towards?
What do you need to see, hear and feel to make you feel confident that we will get the best result?
What would happen if we did this differently?*

Better questions to ask of your organisation

Organisations have personalities too, with shared history, values, attachments and aversions. The norms and assumed truths of the organisation can hold back critical change that can impact on its performance and competitiveness in an ever changing socio-economic backdrop. It's beneficial for organisations to ask questions that can mobilise effective change.

*What organisational values do we want others to strongly resonate with?
What is it about this strategy that holds us back or moves us forward?
What can we stop doing?*

Better questions to ask your customers or clients

The modern customer is more dynamic than ever before, with bespoke expectations and the resources to communicate and feedback, instantaneously. Taking a catch-all approach is unlikely to help build a productive dialogue. Better questions however, may help you get closer to understanding and meeting their needs.

*What can we do differently?
What do you want that no-one else is offering?
How do you know when we have delighted you?*

It might feel alien at first, but by taking this very small step you can affect a big difference in yourself and the quality of the relationships you develop with others.

Remember to stop and take a step back first. Insincerity is quickly recognised and potentially detrimental. If you ask a question expecting to hear a specific response, or in order to lead the person to a foregone conclusion, you will risk that person feeling manipulated and despondent.

By asking a better question, you are letting go of the outcomes and adopting the mindset that people (including yourself) have the inner resourcefulness to develop deeper understanding, manifest ideas and options, and translate these in to plans and actions.

Why not try it today, ask a better question and let us know what happens - did you get a better answer?

Change starts with taking small steps. So your challenge today is just to have a go. Instead of telling someone what to do, stop, step back and ask a better question.

We'd love to hear more about your experiences. Please respond and briefly describe what happened when you chose to ask a better question or send us an email to laura@businesscoaching.co.uk.

To learn more about how you or your organisation can benefit from taking an 'enquiry-led' approach please call us or visit our website www.businesscoaching.co.uk/operational-coaching

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