

What is the most important question
employees should ask leaders?

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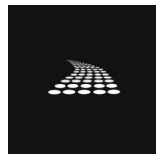
BOOK 5 OF 6

BILL FOX

MOST IMPORTANT QUESTIONS FOR LEADERS

WHAT ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT QUESTIONS
EMPLOYEES CAN ASK LEADERS 2022

BILL FOX



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Judge a man by his questions rather than by his answers.

VOLTAIRE

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INTRODUCTION

What is the most important question employees should ask leaders?

Introduction

What started as an experiment has evolved into a growing and ongoing conversation with over 80 pioneering business and thought leaders worldwide.

Forward Thinking Workplaces is now a global narrative that's uncovering exciting new perspectives that will help you succeed and be a forward-thinking leader and workplace in the 21st century.

In these conversations, I begin each interview with the same six opening questions -

- How can we create workplaces where every voice is heard and matters, everyone thrives and finds meaning, and change and innovation happen naturally?

INTRODUCTION

- What does it take to get an employee's full attention and best performance?
- What do people really lack and long for at work?
- What is the most important question leaders should ask employees?
- What is the most important question employees should ask leaders?
- What is the most important question we should ask ourselves?

I can't think of anything that's had a more significant impact on my life and work than asking myself new questions.

These forward-thinking experts will introduce you to powerful questions that you've likely never heard or considered asking your leaders before.

This book contains an abridged collection of each leader's response to the question: What is the most important question employees should ask leaders?

Each leader's full response and the complete interview are available at forwardthinkingworkplaces.com and in *The Future of the Workplace*, published by Apress.

This book is updated periodically as we engage with pioneering leaders in an ongoing exploration and conversation.

— Bill Fox, Founder, Forward Thinking Workplaces

It's important to distinguish that the question you're in is also creating a context and giving a trajectory of where we will go. It will influence what line of thinking and actions we will take.

DIANNE COLLINS, *THE FUTURE OF THE
WORKPLACE*

WHAT DO YOU CARE ABOUT?

What's important to the management of the company? What's important to the company? Because we have to find out, do we meet here? To me, it's not just the question the employee is asking of the potential employer, but for the employee to have a chance to ask that question of other people working for the company. What does this company care about? It's one thing to hear that from the management; it's another thing to listen to that from the people who are part of the company. What do they really care about? Then the potential employee can discern how that fits for them. They can ask themselves, "Is this a place I want to be?"

ALAN SEALE, AUTHOR AND DIRECTOR, CENTER
FOR TRANSFORMATIONAL PRESENCE

WHERE ARE WE GOING?

I think employees should ask where are we going? What's our direction? What's our strategy? What do you want from us? What's the definition of done? Because I think when employees have that information, they know the direction, the strategy, and the expected outcomes. When employees understand the "what" and "why," they can figure out the "how." Sometimes the manager needs to facilitate the conversation or be a sounding board. But that is part of their role in the new management environment.

ALAN ZUCKER, FOUNDER, PROJECT MANAGEMENT
ESSENTIALS

WHAT CAN I DO TO SUPPORT YOU?

I think it's a question reflecting reverse servant leadership, "What can I do to support you?" What are your biggest challenges as a leader? I always think the vision question between employees and leaders is important. There was a survey by an organization several years ago that asked employees worldwide, do you know the strategy for your organization? Eighty-six percent of them said no, they couldn't. Then they had a related question with five different strategy statements. One of which was their own company's strategy, and you were supposed to pick which one belonged to your company. It was the combination of those two questions, and still, 86% didn't know. It's such a basic observation to say, well, how can we really do that well if only 14% of people know where we're going? When an employee is with a leader, an excellent question is, where do you see us going? Even if there's a vision statement or talked about in Town Hall meetings, I still believe it's essential for employees to ask, where do you see us going and what's important to you?

ANDREW BENNETT, LEADERSHIP COACH AND
PROFESSIONAL MAGICIAN

WHAT IS THE VISION FOR THIS COMPANY?

The key factor is to make sure people have the right motivation. Then people can learn faster, adapt faster, and will work harder. As an employee, you need to be at a job that keeps you motivated. So it's important to understand the vision or the big picture of the company and where the business is going. The key question employees need to ask management is, what is the vision for this company? Where is it going? If the answer doesn't motivate the employee, they are probably in the wrong place.

ANDY YEN, CEO, PROTON TECHNOLOGIES

HOW DO I BECOME A GOOD FOLLOWER?

To me, that's a simple question, "How do I become a good follower?" I wrote an article for Forbes on how you become a great follower. We are loathing to admit that we are followers. Everybody in the country thinks they need to be a leader. I was the oldest of eight children, so I started as a leader. But I was happiest in my life when I was following somebody I believed in. People often wonder how to become a great leader, but nobody asks how do you become a great follower. That, to me, is the most important question that people should be asking their leaders. Once again, it's the service of selflessness. It's a two-way street. We talk all the time; what should leaders be doing? But I'll be honest, as somebody who has worked in business many years, employees can be a pain in the ass too. The sympathy, the understanding, the empathy—those are all wonderful things—but it can go both ways.

AUGUST TURAK, AUTHOR AND CONTRIBUTING
AUTHOR AT FORBES MAGAZINE

WHAT IS THE MOST INCLUSIVE AND
MOST ENERGIZING FUTURE YOU CAN
IMAGINE FOR OUR ORGANIZATION?

I'd encourage employees to ask their managers, leaders, and senior management the following question: "Describe to us, please, the most inclusive and most energizing future you imagine for our organization? What are we doing differently in this future? What new outcomes will we create? How are we showing up in the world differently?"

AVIV SHAHAR, FOUNDER, AVIV CONSULTING

WHY IS THIS THE WAY IT IS?

I have to tell you my joke. There's a film called *Buck* about a horse trainer. The horse trainer says in the movie that people hire him to help them with horse problems, but he's helping horses with people's problems. I always say that managers hire me to help them with team problems, but I'm helping teams with management problems. Most of the time, I feel like the question needs to be inverted, but I think the thing teams need to ask their managers is to let their managers know what they need to be successful. It's not so much asking questions, but it's proactively curious. Every broken process inside your organization was, at one time, an elegant solution to a problem that was close at hand—for example, the classic cover on a report. I'm sure it was at one point an elegant solution to somebody's problem. Not everybody's, but it was an elegant solution to someone's problem. Rather than sit around and complain, which I think is the common thing for we employees to do on the front line, just be curious and ask, "Why is this the way it is?"

BOB GOWER, CONSULTANT

WHAT DO YOU SEE?

Employees should be talking to their management and asking, “What do you see?” Sometimes as an employee, I know what I’m thinking about how things are going, but what does the manager think about the obstacles? Then ask them, “What’s your plan to address it?” Many of the challenges that people face are under the control of management, so ask them, “What are we going to do about this issue?” This is all to get management thinking about how we grow, and how do we measure that growth of what we’re doing to produce value for the end-user or customers? It’s tough at the middle-management level. Requests and obstacles are coming up from employees, and there’s pressure to execute coming from the top. Most middle managers are just trying to survive and not rock the boat too much. But they know there are problems, and they do have the power to improve. They must have the courage to be better. If they’re unwilling to give their total effort there, the organization loses its capacity to serve the customer.

BOB SCHATZ, AGILE LEADER, AGILE INFUSION

ARE YOU DOING THINGS THAT MAKE YOU HAPPY?

While I don't work in a traditional office building, I consider myself a leader because I have a team I lead. The question I always want to make sure I'm asking the people I work with and for is, are you doing things that make you happy, and are you doing the things you love? That's the most important part because if I know that they're not happy, then I know their work isn't as good as it could be. Maybe they're not in the right spot or the right position, and I want to see if they do not feel like they're in the right spot. I want to put them in the right spot as it makes sense in our business. Really what it comes down to is, are you fulfilled? Are you happy with what you're doing? Because if you're not first, you may already detect that, so I'd like to put you in a place that makes you happy.

BRIAN GARDNER, MINIMALIST DESIGNER,
ENTREPRENEUR

WHAT CAN YOU DO TO HELP ME FLOURISH?

What can you do to help me flourish? People have this concept of CEOs being all-powerful, and they do have a lot of power. However, we're a lot more constrained than people realize. There are a lot of laws and regulations that the existing system has created to handcuff CEOs. Particularly public companies especially. We can only do so much, and I can only do whatever is in my power to do. Given our limited resources, we are a very small company. If you feel you need to flourish elsewhere because you can't do it here, that's a good reason to leave, and I'm okay with that.

CLAUDE CLOUTIER, PRESIDENT, CEO, AND
FOUNDER AT XTREMEEDA

IS THERE ANYTHING I'M DOING THAT IS MAKING IT HARD FOR YOU?

Employees need to understand the bounds of what they're responsible for and what decisions they can make. "What are we trying to achieve here?" We publish a periodic article called The Weekly Leadership Nudge. The idea is that too many times, workers can hide behind death by 1001 questions. Leaders can kill initiative by asking too many questions, but workers can kill leaders' attempts to give them any initiative by asking too many questions.

DAVID MARQUET, PRESIDENT, TURN THE SHIP
AROUND

WHAT DO YOU NEED FROM ME TO
HELP YOU DO YOUR JOB BETTER?

What do you need from me to help you do your job better and
make you and the company more successful?

DAVID SHEDD, AUTHOR AND CEO, THE RAYMOND
GROUP

IF WE ARE SELF-ORGANIZED, WHY IS THERE STILL THIS DIVIDE BETWEEN MANAGEMENT AND EMPLOYEES?

In the context of self-organization and the work of encode and Holacracy, the question becomes, “If we are self-organized, why are there still employees? Why is there still this divide between management and employees? Or this divide between owners and employees?” In this new context of self-organization, how do we reframe leadership? Historically, we’re coming from a top-down autocratic system, but I think the age of “heroic leadership” is over. Heroic leadership is the one person who calls the shots and heroically saves the company. That’s the old way of looking at things. It might have been helpful in the old framework, but it’s no longer practical in the new framework because you’d usually step on someone’s toes. We need to unlearn traditional leadership habits that were useful in the previous context of the corporate world as we know it.

DENNIS WITTROCK, PARTNER, ENCODE.ORG

WHAT IS YOUR VISION FOR WHERE WE'RE GOING?

I think the employee should be asking, “What’s your vision for where we’re going?” This is an important question for several reasons. The first is that leaders are expected to have a vision, but they may not be making it known. Employees may be unaware of it. Or perhaps they may not be asking about it. Yet, the vision is equivalent to a “living intent.” The vision generates the energy-intelligent field that gives rise to actions and results. From a QuantumThink perspective, a vision is a living possibility that consistently generates outcomes—it’s not a someday-maybe future event. I think when we ask a question like that, “What’s your vision for where we’re going?” it gives the leader an opportunity to express it in a conversation. It provides the leader with a platform to present the vision and bring it alive for everyone. It’s one of the most satisfying experiences for both leaders and employees. It’s a co-creative dynamic. New possibilities open up in the dialogue. That question is a force that creates the future.

DIANNE COLLINS, AUTHOR, DO YOU QUANTUM
THINK?

HOW CAN I HELP YOU?

They can ask management how they can help the management control? When I worked for someone else, I asked my boss that question all the time. How can I help you? And he'd stop and reflect. It would be a show-stopper. How can I help you be of more service? What would be most helpful for you? How can I take things off your plate so that you have more time for reflection? The higher up you are in the company, the more important it is to be reflective. Many leaders have so much on their plates they never stop and pause. They don't have time to reflect on what's most important and helpful. It's been my experience in unhealthy companies that the attention all gets focused on what people are dissatisfied with within the company, rather than continually focusing on how do we be more of service to the customer. When the flow of attention goes toward the conflicts in the company, as opposed to toward the customer, you know there are going to be difficulties.

DICKEN BETTINGER, FOUNDER, THREE PRINCIPLES
MENTORING

HOW CAN I CONTRIBUTE?

How can I contribute?

EVA SCHIELEIN, OWNER, AESTIMAT

WHAT NEW QUESTIONS WOULD WE
ASK IF WE VIEWED THE
RELATIONSHIP AS A
COLLABORATION?

I like this question because it challenged me in a lot of ways. There are so many questions you could ask. You could ask where the company is going? What's the vision? What are we working towards right now? The number one thing that comes to me right now is that an employee should view their relationship with management as a collaboration. By that, I don't necessarily mean—I'm on the bottom, and you're above me—but a partnership. The reason why I'm saying that is because essentially, you're all in it together and whether that's something that's embodied in the company is a whole another thing.

FELICIA SPAHR, ARTIST AND TRANSFORMATIONAL
LEADER

HOW ARE WE DOING?

Let's invoke that collective awareness. "How are we doing?" That might not be the best question, but I'm looking for what's that opening question that moves the conversation to something broader and something bigger than just me if I'm that employee. Having employees think that way is a good thing. Those are the conversations that serve us in that in-between space.

GWEN KINSEY, LEADERSHIP COACH,
GWENKINSEY.COM

HOW CAN I UNDERSTAND WHAT MY PLACE IS HERE?

How can I understand what my place is here and best use my skills to advance the overall mission of the company?

HELENA LASS, FOUNDER, WELLNESSORBIT

WHAT HAPPENS IF I SCREW UP?

That's a tricky question because if you have the self-confidence to ask these questions, then great. But too many people don't have the self-confidence to ask—especially if they're new on the job, but maybe they've been there a while, and then they will have the self-confidence. In a few years, let's say my son graduates from the university, gets his first job, and asks me, what should I ask my first boss? I'd say you should ask these questions during the interview, but ask what happens if I screw up? Who can I speak with if I'm concerned about not having the correct answer or not doing the work correctly? Who do I talk to if I'm worried about that before I've delivered it? What can I do?

HILLEL GLAZER, CEO, ENTINEX, INC.

WHAT'S HAPPENS TO ME IF I MAKE A MISTAKE?

The one I particularly like for new hires is, “What’s the gap between what we say we do and who we are and what actually happens?” “What’s the intrinsic reward, recognition, and penalty structure inside the organization not what’s stated?” “How do I live within that gap?” And another question every employee should ask is, “What happens to me if I make a mistake?”

HOWARD BEHAR, FORMER PRESIDENT, STARBUCKS

WHAT WILL YOU DO TO MAKE ME THRIVE IN YOUR ENVIRONMENT?

How can I best support the objectives, visions, and my colleagues? To do the best job that I can do, what are you offering me so that I will thrive and build my skills, and I will become so good that I still decide to work for you, but not somebody else? I think that's a question I'd like to see more of because it's dynamic. It's not arrogant to think about automation and how jobs are becoming more technical, and many jobs will disappear or change. Many people hear the message: More than half of you aren't going to have any jobs. We already have that in the banking industry, for example. Managers and leaders are not responding to that question because they also worry about their own jobs. It may sound counterintuitive, but could it be genuinely economically feasible that employers build employees' skills that do not directly relate to the jobs they're in? But they make them feel like they will be sought after in the workplace in the future? Because that could lead to some extraordinary innovation inside that same corporation. It's again about trust and self-confidence. Discovering the creative potential that we can have. One of my favorite sentences now is, "The only thing that's certain about the world we live in today is

MOST IMPORTANT QUESTIONS FOR LEADERS

uncertainty.” So how do we build skills that enable us to navigate uncertainty best?

HRUND GUNNSTEINSDOTTIR, WRITER AND CO-DIRECTOR, INNSAEI

HOW CAN WE HELP YOU TO SERVE
THE WORLD?

How can we help you serve the world and your purpose, vision,
and mission better?

IRENE RICOTTA, CEO, VISION COACHING

HOW CAN I MAKE THIS ORGANIZATION ROCK?

I'm writing a book for young technology professionals about taking steps early on to be more successful in their careers. As part of that book, I've been interviewing CEOs of technology companies to get their perspective. I'm hearing from them that, especially with the younger team members, they are not focused on making the company successful. They are not asking, "What can I personally do to make you and your company more successful?" I think the most important question an employee should be asking management is, "How can I make this organization rock?" "How can I help us win?" When I was coming up in the technology business, I asked my immediate manager, "how can I make you successful in your mission?"

JEFF DALTON, CHIEF EVANGELIST AT AGILECXO,
AUTHOR & CEO AT BROADSWORD SOLUTIONS

HOW CAN I HELP?

You've got something you're trying to do that's important. We want to be successful as a business. How can I help? What can I do? Many careers are built by somebody taking on a challenge, problem, or situation that others didn't want to take on. So I think that's a really good question to ask, how can I help or what problems are you trying to solve? Then see how you can add value. The other question is just ask, what's most important? As head of Human Resources, I laughed; I got involved in many compensation plans and goals. It was fascinating to watch many executives struggle to get the number of priorities under 25, much less under ten or even 5! They try to cover the waterfront, and it's like now we've got to have that, and we've got to have that. The most brilliant CEOs that I've ever supported were the ones who could take the organizational complexity and distill it down into the three things that matter most. But it's not a natural skill even of some pretty senior people.

JILL RATLIFF, LEADERSHIP COACH

WHERE ARE WE GOING?

Employees really need to understand the business of the business. “Why are we in business?” “What’s our purpose?” “How do we add value back into the community that we serve?” Most of the dysfunction I have observed in organizations comes from a lack of understanding and connection with the business. Where we are going is always the question people don’t know about. Management sometimes isn’t transparent, doesn’t want to share, or can’t express it in a way that engages people.

JIM FINKELSTEIN, CEO, FUTURESENSE

WHAT ARE THE DRIVERS OF SUCCESS?

I think there's a reciprocal nature to this question. When leaders appeal to people's highest level of thinking, they get the highest response. As employees, partners, or associates, we all have to be more curious about the business we work in rather than just the job we have. We all have to be more curious about the company we work in rather than just the job we have. I think the challenge as an employee is to say, "I have to be more curious about how this business works." What are the drivers of success? How can I contribute or detract from that from where I sit and live? How can I be a force to make enlightened decisions with my head, hands, and heart? Because if I get it, and I get how this all comes together and where it's headed, I can make a much more significant contribution and be more highly engaged.

JIM HAUDAN, CHAIRMAN AND FOUNDER,
ROOT, INC.

WHERE ARE WE GOING?

Employees have the right to know and ask leaders, "Where are we going?" It doesn't need to be those exact words. You could say, "Can you share with me some of the goals for the next five or ten years?" Or, "Can you share with me your vision for this department, next year in the coming year or the coming years?" A leader should have answers to these questions at the ready. They should have a vision in place because they are the ship's captain. I sometimes use a metaphor of being on a boat that's leaking water. Do you want the boat captain to describe the amount of water coming in and talk about the peril that the water will bring to the boat and its crew? Or do you want that leader to say, here's my vision for how we're going to get out of this mess and reach dry land?

JOEL SCHWARTZBERG, PUBLIC SPEAKING COACH,
SPEECHWRITER, AND PRESENTER

WHAT SHOULD WE BE ASKING ABOUT THE FUTURE OF THE EMPLOYEE OR OF THE COMPANY?

I think the answer to this question depends on the situation. If a company is losing money and is at risk, the question will be very different from one that deals with a project or the future of a new initiative. Ultimately, the question is either about the company or about the employee. The common thread is that both questions should be about the company's future or the employee. I believe talking about the future is an excellent conduit for the engagement that we must have.

JOHN BELL, CEO (PAST), JACOBS SUCHARD

WHY DO WE EXIST? WHY ARE WE ALL HERE?

If you as a leader cannot answer that clearly—if you don't have a clear mission and vision statement that you firmly believe in—then that's where you've got to start. Otherwise, that's going to be at the base of everything people are troubled by. When people have the long-term vision in mind, it makes what's going on in front of them at the moment less concerning. If you *don't* have that big picture in mind, then all you have is what's in front of you: like my cubemate talks too loudly or farts all day. Unfortunately, this becomes your life at work. Instead of “Yeah, I can put up with that because what I'm doing is part of the company's mission, and I believe in it.”

JOHN RYSKOWSKI, CONSULTANT, JFR CONSULTING

WHAT IS IT I CAN DO THAT'S GOING TO CONTRIBUTE TO THE SUCCESS OF THE ORGANIZATION?

If the environment's been created to flourish, the employees then need to ask, "What is it I can do that's going to contribute to the success of the organization? How can I contribute? What do you need from me to be successful and effective?" But the first condition is leaders have to create that environment. Then once that's made, the employees have a responsibility to respond to that environment with their best work. My experience has been after being CEO for three different companies that if the leaders do create the environment, most of the time the employees will respond because frankly, people do want to get up and go to work and do a good job. I fundamentally believe that people given suitable environments will make good choices. They don't make good choices because the environment stinks, so they have to go into survival mode. But if you have an organization that's really trying to achieve the top of Maslow's triangle, and if the leader has been able to create that environment, then that brings out the best in people

JOHN TOUSSAINT, CEO, CATALYSIS

WHAT IS THE ROLE OF OUR BUSINESS IN SOCIETY?

For the last year, this question has been on my mind, so my response is really related to that. As the generational shift continues within the workplace, it will become more critical. The question is this, what is the role of our business in society? You could say that it relates directly to the company, but it doesn't relate to the business. But each organization plays a role within society. The answer can be very straightforward we create jobs. We grow by doing that, providing a tax base and revenue back to our communities. That's the role of our business.

JON MERTZ, CEO, ACTIVATE LEADERSHIP

WHAT ELSE CAN I LEARN

What else can I learn? Where else can I learn more about the company and what the company is doing so I represent the company and that I am part of the change and transformation going on? People don't want to be left out. They want to get into as many of the right meetings and subgroups that they need to be in to do the best they can do. It's engagement at its deepest level, having a role, having a place to fit in, and then contributing to lots of people.

JUDITH GLASER, CEO, CREATINGWE

WHAT DO I THE EMPLOYEE NEED?

There are many important questions. Start by asking oneself important questions such as what do I (the employee) need and then frame questions based on the clarity of one's own needs. What is the need or desire based on? From here, create the questions that you need to ask others. For every employer with ten employees, the most important question will probably be ten different questions—or at least ten different versions of one general question. For employees, consider that your question may only apply to you. It's good to be as objective as possible when asking questions. Overall, I don't believe that there's just one question that can be asked because each employee and each leader are different. Understanding what you're trying to learn or know from the other person will help you form the questions you need to ask no matter who's asking.

KAREN MACK, OD PRACTITIONER, PROCESS
FACILITATOR, AND LEADERSHIP COACH

WHAT DO YOU NEED, AND WHAT'S MEANINGFUL TO YOU?

What do you need, and what's meaningful to you in the role you want me to play? And how do you want me to play it? I think we all need to be in service to each other. Suppose the company is in service to something meaningful. In that case, ultimately, the opportunity is for us to all work together—to do something meaningful together — that's meaningful to ourselves individually in different ways. Picture it as a Venn diagram regarding how our combined efforts will achieve something meaningful for people or the world.

KEN MANNING, AUTHOR, AND PRESIDENT, INSIGHT
PRINCIPLES

HOW CAN WE INSPIRE OUR DIVERSE
EMPLOYEES TO BE ALL THEY CAN BE
AT WORK?

I would ask leaders, “How can we inspire our diverse employees to be all that they can be at work?” How can we avoid stifling people of faith in particular?

KENT JOHNSON, SR. ADVISOR, RELIGIOUS
FREEDOM AND BUSINESS FOUNDATION

CAN YOU TREAT ME LIKE A CUSTOMER?

On occasion, my wife would say to me something like, “Treat me like a customer.” And I think that’s a pretty good question to ask leaders. Leaders are asking us all the time to provide top-notch customer service. All I need from a leader is to treat me the same way they’re asking me to treat the customer. It’s as simple as that. In the end, we should be treating each other and all of us, not just customers and employees but vendors, government regulators, unions—whoever is involved in making whatever it is we do happen. We should be treating each other the same way, making sure that we’re inspiring each other. I think focus is an important aspiration too, and I believe employees get excited by that. They like to know what’s going on and where we are heading. What are we trying to do here? A lack of focus, vision, the direction is very discomfoting for employees. Employees like to know there’s clarity around the direction of the organization.

LANCE SECRETAN, CEO, THE SECRETAN CENTER

WHY IS THIS COMPANY HERE?

Why does this company or this business deserve to exist beyond creating and perpetuating a financial profit and loss? What are we doing here?

LINDSAY PEDERSEN, BRAND STRATEGIST AND
AUTHOR OF FORGING AN IRONCLAD BRAND

WHAT DO WE NEED TO DO?

I'd like to see them asking something around the question, "What do we need to do?" It's not so much about what should "I" be doing or tell me what to do, but it's more about, "What do we need to do?" I'd love for employees to be taking on the role as more of a facilitator rather than waiting for management to answer that question while involving their colleagues at the same time. When we ask what we think we need to do, it becomes more action-based than about permission.

LYNNE CAZALY, AUTHOR, SPEAKER, AND
FACILITATOR

IF YOU WEREN'T DOING THIS WITH YOUR TIME, WHAT WOULD YOU BE DOING?

Ask the same question I said that employees should be asking their leaders, “If you weren’t doing this with your time, what would you be doing?” I only say that because I think in offices and work environments, people tend to put so many boxes around things like, “Well, this is what a manager would ask of an employee, and this is what an employee would ask of a manager.” I think we’re all just humans, and we forget that. I don’t know that the question should change. We tend to think the question should change, but in truth, it’s, “What makes humans come alive?” Let’s all talk about that more.

MARA GLEASON, CO-FOUNDER, ONESOLUTION

WHAT IS IT THAT YOU NEED TO MAKE THIS TEAM BETTER?

If you are an employee with the mindset of a servant follower, then your best question to ask a leader is to help empower and support that leader. One question could be, what is it that you need to make this team better or support you better as a manager? Another is, what's that one thing that you need from me as an employee to make this work environment better? In the best workplace environments, it's never about me. It's about us. It's about how does the team win? This question might be a little different from most other questions where the employee focuses on themselves. But I tossed that out as potential questions to ask because it already implies that the employee is experiencing a level of engagement, to begin with, because that's what we're after.

MARCEL SCHWANTES, LEADERSHIP COACH

WHO ARE YOU, AND HOW CAN I
HELP?

My simple answer is, who are you, and how can I help?

MARC HANLAN, PARTNER, LMC PARTNERS

ARE THEY BEING COHERENT

If I could choose one word to define good management, it would be *coherence*. An example of incoherence in leadership is when someone decides upon the actions or directions the company should take but without investing in the knowledge to understand the problem entirely. Leaders often expect others to understand the new strategy and how to do new things without putting in the effort to master the knowledge, skill sets, and behaviors they wish to see in others. Usually, because of the hierarchical nature of organizations, orders come top-down. For instance, middle management is challenging because they have to understand what the leaders above them want and translate it to the operational people. Usually, they don't question the leadership team because they aspire to move up in the hierarchical structure. They only accept the orders, and they believe that if they ask certain types of questions, they may think that the leaders will perceive them as weak or that they don't understand, so they usually don't ask clarifying and probing questions.

MARIA MORALES ROBINSON, AUTHOR AND CO-
FOUNDER HOLONOMICS EDUCATION

WHEN EFFICIENCIES ARE CONSIDERED, COULD THESE BE DISCUSSED WITH STAFF TOO?

I put down, “When efficiencies are considered, could these be discussed with staff too?” This response relates to a theme, which is staff involvement in terms of how we work and what we do. It’s a bit strange if you’ve never worked in schools. Twenty years ago, you’d go to a staff meeting, and it was usually an opportunity for a teacher to speak their mind – because they were regarded as the professionals. As a teacher, you were considered to be somebody quite important in a school. In this country (UK), you were employed by the LEA. It’s like the council hired you instead of the specific school you belonged to. So, you had the credibility of being almost like a doctor. But when we changed over to the new structure, you started to work for businesses, and you were no longer considered the professional in the room. You were supposed to be a member of staff who was there to work, and your job was to try to avoid being sacked.”

MARK RICKETTS, CEO, IMPACTRI

WHAT IS THE OUTCOME WE ARE TRYING TO ACHIEVE?

What is the outcome we are trying to achieve, and what is the line of sight to what I'm doing? I once worked with a group that was required to produce a cumbersome monthly report. Completing the report was a heavy lift and took away when the staff could have better used performing their primary roles. None of the staff could tell me for whom they were producing the report or what it was used. We decided to stop making the report to see who would come looking for it. Instead, we consolidated the data into a quarterly report of about 12 pages instead of a monthly report two inches thick. And guess what? No one missed the extensive monthly report. There were no complaints; there were no questions. However, the feedback on the quarterly version was quite positive. Suddenly, there was value – and the group producing the report felt valued. All of this came from asking a couple of clarifying questions, “. . . to what end? Who's using this and for what purpose?” I didn't argue with the group about what they were doing; I questioned the desired outcome and how they added value.

MARTHA KESLER, DIRECTOR, FEDERAL PORTFOLIO
AT KOTTER

ARE OUR CUSTOMERS HAPPY WITH THE VALUE WE DELIVER?

Are our customers happy with the value we deliver? This question implies a lot. It means quality, genuinely understanding the customer's needs, and creating a proper solution that satisfies them.

MASA K MAEDA, CEO, VALUEINNOVA

WHAT DO YOU SEE IN ME THAT I
DON'T SEE IN MYSELF?

Explore your blind spots with your supervisor by asking, “What do you see in me that I don’t see in myself in 1) terms of possibility, and 2) the things that hold me back? Then you have to have some faith that your manager has your best interests in mind.

MEREDITH HABERFELD, CEO, THINKHUMAN

WHAT DO YOU WANT FROM ME AS YOUR SUBORDINATE?

My response isn't a question, but I like the dialogue of, "Here is how I like to be managed. What do you want from me as your subordinate?" As a follower, I respect hierarchy because I want to know what I'm here for and doing. If I'm there for us to get a job done, then lead me! When I have a boss or someone I report to; I want to know how to show up and be the best employee I can for him. I want him to know how I like to be managed and led. For example, I've worked with some programmers who, if they never had a face-to-face conversation they'd be so happy because they're just uncomfortable in that. I want to respect that. I have other people who crave face-to-face discussions; if you send them a text message, they're like, "Oh my God, why can't we...". Everybody's different; it's not for me to judge them. It's up to me to find how they respond best to things and adjust to them.

MICHAEL ANDERSON, AUTHOR AND LEADERSHIP
COACH

WHAT WOULD MY CONTRIBUTION LOOK LIKE IF I COULDN'T WAIT TO GET TO WORK EACH DAY?

If we all ask ourselves that question and then use that to drive the questions we ask at work, one of two things will happen. One, we're either going to unlock our potential at work and do great things. Or two, we're going to recognize that where we're at doesn't recognize what we're passionate about, and it's going to stop us from wasting time in a job that's just a salary. We're going to realize we're not resonating with the organization quickly. We'll either self-select out of the organization, or the organization will select us out. Sometimes people think that's a bad thing. They'll say, "I want to make sure I'm the best at my company." Well, you can, but I mean, you have to be the best at what you're passionate about. So if you're not asking yourself that question and driving that, you're never going to be fulfilled with the company. You might fake it for a while, but fundamentally, that's not fulfilling. You have to ask what you're passionate about and how do I make that my job every day? And if it's not, move on to something that that is.

MICHAEL BONAMASSA, CEO, PLADCLOUD

CAN YOU HELP ME SEE WHAT I DON'T SEE?

This may sound a little bit idealistic, but I think it would be, “Could you help me see what I’m not seeing? Help me see what I do not see that would make my job easier and make me better at my job. That would allow me to participate fully, express myself fully, and give myself more to this. To get more out of it and put more into it.” Because if you have the choice—and most people don’t see this as the choice — but if you’re going to do the job anyway, you want to be fully engaged. You want to be all in. You want to love it. “Help me love it”... that’s wrong because people then say, “Give me more time off and ...” No, it’s not that. It’s “help me see what I don’t see.” People are amazing. When we see a better way, we’ll take it.

MICHAEL NEILL, COACH AND CEO, GENIUS
CATALYST

HOW IS CONFLICT DEALT IN THIS ORGANIZATION?

The most important question that any employee should ask, particularly an employee from any marginalized identity, is how is conflict dealt with in this organization? Time and time again, what I see with my clients is that one of the largest obstacles to true diversity, equity, and inclusion is that leaders -- particularly those who have been raised or assimilated into white culture -- are conflict avoidant. If you are conflict avoidant or a people-pleaser, it's hard, if not impossible, to do diversity, equity, and inclusion work in your organization. Conflict is natural. Conflict always happens. But if people are conflict avoidant, conflict happens behind closed doors or people's backs. Or it's passive-aggressive because people can't talk about it openly. The minute you put two people together, there's going to be a difference of opinion about something. Now, you've put a hundred to a thousand people together. Think about how many differences of opinion are and different ways of doing things. And so there's going to be that natural conflict. I think how well organizations can manage conflict is one of the best measures of their success and ability to change and transform as the world changes.

MOST IMPORTANT QUESTIONS FOR LEADERS

MINAL BOPAIAH: FOUNDER, BREVITY & WIT.
AUTHOR OF *EQUITY*

HOW CAN I BE OF SERVICE?

How can I be of service? How can I make management more manageable? How can I be a part of creating change for the organization? We all have different roles. Even in a relationship, we have other things we're good at. I think it is helpful to ask yourself questions. What do I love to do? What would I like to do? What would I do if nobody paid me? We do our best work when we do what we love, not necessarily because we are paid for it. I think the intrinsic values around motivation are much more potent than extrinsic ones. I think that carrots and sticks are very much part of yesterday's way of management, and today, it's much more about working together in creating a workplace that we want to belong to. So asking managers, "How can I help?" "How can I be of service to you so that you as a manager can be your best." By working as one, we can all be part of creating some of the larger changes in the organization — and hopefully, this can create ripple effects that will help serve the world.

NATASHA SWERDLOFF, AUTHOR & OWNER, THE
PRINCIPLES INSTITUTE

HOW CAN I CREATE VALUE FOR THE COMPANY AND OUR CUSTOMERS?

Most employees know the technology or type of project they'd like to work on, but they don't necessarily know how to contribute to the company effectively. It's just not enough. Each employee should learn how to create value. Value aligned with economic as well as non-economic value. For example, how else can they contribute to the company's vision, mission, or culture?

NEM BAJRA, CEO, CALSOFT SYSTEMS

HOW CAN I HELP YOU?

Not only how can I help you, but what are your expectations of me? As an employee looking toward your leadership, you need to know what's expected. Second, how am I being evaluated? And third, what is success? If you can ask those questions and get clear answers, you're going to know the path ahead and how you will be judged or evaluated to determine if you're successful in your position. It's unfortunate—and it happens more often than I think we know—that individuals don't know what's expected of them and how they're being evaluated. How are you supposed to go about your job and do a good job when you don't even know what the criteria are? It would make the most sense to ask what's expected of me? What does success look like? How am I being evaluated? How do we get there? Those are good questions to ask your leadership.

NICK HUGHES, FOUNDER, FOUNDERS LIVE

WHAT CAN I DO BETTER FOR THIS COMPANY

I want to do the best possible job for this company, so what should I do better for you? What can I do better for this company? And of course, the CEO and managers should have an open ear to listen to the people. They're filled with marvelous ideas, but we don't have systems that work that way. We have a screwy system that rewards the power with more money instead of dispersing the power throughout. Getting people to be responsible, learning, and self-reliant is the challenge.

NORMAN BODEK, LEAN LEADER AND AUTHOR,
OWNER PCS PRESS

WHAT ARE YOUR EXPECTATIONS OF ME?

As I was saying, it does come down to trust. You want to make sure that they feel comfortable asking questions. I think the key question that needs to be asked is, “What are your expectations of me?” So often and especially in the government, I’ve learned there is a very formal process for conducting performance reviews. I sometimes found myself as a supervisor realizing that there was some point very early on where there was a mismatch of what the employee thought they were supposed to be doing and what the manager thought was supposed to get done. The employee might be afraid to ask, and the manager makes assumptions. So, the employee should continue to ask for clarifications such as, “I think our goal is X, and I think you’re asking me to reach there by Y. That’s a broad vision, but it could be more specific. For example, they might say, “You’re telling me I must staple the TPS report, but previously you had given me the authority not to do a TPS report if I don’t have to. What should I be doing here?” Getting that clarification of the path and an employee’s ownership of that path is critical. Clarifications will avoid about 95% of potential conflicts and performance failures.

MOST IMPORTANT QUESTIONS FOR LEADERS

PATRICK ROSS, ENTREPRENEUR, MARKETING AND
COMMUNICATIONS

WHAT IS MY WEAKNESS?

Without giving that any thought, it's "What is my weakness? What do I need to improve on? What do you see as my weakness?" I'm sitting next to the chief engineer in my company right now. If he were to ask me that question right now, I would tell him, "Be more aggressive."

PAUL AKERS, AUTHOR AND PRESIDENT, FASTCAP

WHAT OUTCOME ARE YOU LOOKING FOR?

The most important mission is to get clear on what the leader is looking for. If they don't get a clear picture of the outcome that the leader wants—if it's not clear to them—they need to have the courage to say, "I'm not quite following what you're looking for?" And then to initiate a conversation that says, "Here's how I'm going to do it, does that seem right to you?" Usually, multiple groups are involved in any problem that has to be solved. Sometimes the leader doesn't want that.

As you know, that shouldn't be a problem, but you have to take accountability to acquire what the leader's requirements are and a picture of how to solve the problem. The employee should be saying to themselves, "I know how to do this; what's the culture here, and how should I do it?" "What are the limits?" "What are the landmines I could step on?" This is a meaningful conversation for the employee to have with their leader.

PAUL DAVID WALKER, AUTHOR AND CEO, GENIUS
STONE PARTNERS

CAN YOU HELP ME WITH THIS?

I learned the answer I will give you to this question the hard way when I was an employee, and I didn't know enough to ask this question. This goes back to when I was a young programmer just a few years out of college. I came into work one weekend to rewrite a large part of my code on my current assignment because I realized I had made a significant mistake with my design. I was afraid to tell my manager because I didn't want him to know I had made that mistake. So I never let him know. Since that time, I have heard similar stories from other junior programmers. I had also heard stories about new software developers who did ask for help when they thought they needed it, but no one was available to help them. So, from my experience, the most important question employees should be asking management is any question related to getting help when they feel they need it. But it is equally important for management to be ready for that question — and recognize it in whatever form it comes — so they can ensure the right kind of help is available when needed.

PAUL MCMAHON, PRINCIPAL CONSULTANT, PEM
SYSTEMS

HOW ARE WE DOING?

I think employees need to know what's the scorecard. How are we doing? Employees really respond when they know. Every week, we have a meeting where the company's key employees review all of the product lines we're selling, all of the sales numbers, all of our sales projections — everything. People want to know whether we're hitting our targets or not. People want to know whether things are working or not. This thing hit the ball out of the park. This other thing was a dud. People need to know. It's just part of a healthy culture and a winning team.

PERRY MARSHALL, AUTHOR AND ENTREPRENEUR

WHAT DO WE WANT TO CREATE HERE?

I would leave each employee to have their own most important question. There are as many questions as we are on the planet earth. Best to leave this one to the open will of the concerned people. I believe everyone has his own focus, priorities, and personality. But maybe, if we think about the organization and ask in the name of the organization, what is the most important question it would expect from employees, perhaps that would be, what do we want to create here? What is the big picture project? What is the purpose of this organization? I would expect a response that would enchant me and summon the best part of me. And here, as an employee, I would not expect words. I would expect a response that would enchant me and summon the best part of me. What is the great project I am contributing to? What big issue am I solving by working for this company?

PIERRE-BORIS KALITVENTZEFF, FOUNDER AT
ENTHALPIES

WHAT IS MY MOST VITAL AREA FOR IMPROVEMENT?

I would have had that answer a lot faster back when I was an individual contributor, but as I've been managing for almost a decade now, it's harder to get back into those shoes. For me, the trouble is optimizing for one best question. When my folks talk during one-on-ones, it's a range of things we discuss. Sometimes it's talking through a difficult problem in their work tasks. Sometimes it's a balancing question because they got these things going on at home, and it's intruding on how they keep space. And sometimes, it's even more personal than that. Trying to put my thumb on the most important question is difficult because there are many more of them than there is me right now. They have such varied lives, needs, and personalities that are trying to have a single question seems very difficult to me.

ROB ALLEN, CO-CEO, THE PEOPLE STACK

WHAT DO I NEED TO LEARN?

I think the current view on employee engagement is too short-sighted. The future of work will change dramatically, so employees' focus should not be on the present and how a company can fulfill my dreams and wishes today but in the future. 50% of jobs will disappear due to digitalization and automatization within the next 20 years, and so will many business models and companies. Therefore, the most important questions for employees should be "What do I need to learn? How can I grow to be still more valuable than an algorithm in 5 years?" The point is that humans are in a race against algorithms. Only if we can do things bots can't do will we have a job in the future.

ROBERT FUCHS, HAPPINESSGROUP.EU

HOW DO YOU SEE THE FUTURE?

Employees should be asking managers how they see the future. Anything employees can do to get managers more future-oriented will be a significant contribution to the business because the future is likely going to be very different from the past. If the managers are wrapped up in crisis management just responding to the immediate change in front of them, they will never outrun this pace of change. If managers can look further into the future, anticipate what's happening, and go into the employees' minds to get a sense of where their customers are. Management can shape the company's direction in a very different way that will be more aligned with the future that's going to happen rather than the future that management would like to happen. If employees can raise questions and get managers thinking about the future, that can contribute.

ROD COLLINS, STRATEGY AND INNOVATION
EXPERT, OPTIMITY ADVISORS

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

I don't know because I'm not an employee. I'm thinking of a scenario. If my son came to me and said he was unhappy or something was wrong at work, what should he do? I would tell him to go openly explain it to the people running the company. When someone says something like that, I want them to come to me, and I will stand by them and thank them. You've just done something very important for the company.

RUSSELL DALGLEISH, MANAGING PARTNER, EXOLTA

HOW CAN WE BE MORE CURIOUS, ASK MORE QUESTIONS, AND HAVE AN OPEN DIALOGUE?

Employees should be asking a lot of questions. I think we get the idea that asking questions is a bad thing. Oh, I should know, or I don't want to tell them I don't know. It's just ego. It's that image of self-importance that we all suffer from. As people gain more respect for how brilliant the mind is and how much intelligence and wisdom there is in every human mind, we become more comfortable asking questions. Questions are truly the gateway to finding new information. We don't look for new thoughts if we think we've got everything nailed. We think we know everything already. Why would we look? As people gain more respect for how brilliant the mind is and how much intelligence and wisdom there is in every human mind, we become more comfortable asking questions.

SANDRA KROT, HUMAN DIMENSION CONSULTANT,
INSIGHT PRINCIPLES

HOW CAN I MAKE YOU LOOK GOOD?

I think the best leaders understand that it makes them look good when they manage well. One thing I've seen, especially in the public sector after working there for nearly 20 years, is that the success of their employees threatens leaders. They miss this whole colossal opportunity. When your employees do a great job, you acknowledge that you look good. If you have a good leader, you can say this is what I want to do in my job. This is how I want to make an impact. This is how I can make you look good. Is that what you want? Is this how I can make you look good? Is this your ultimate goal as a leader?

SARAH ELKINS: COMMUNICATIONS COACH,
STORYTELLER, AND KEYNOTE SPEAKER AT ELKINS
CONSULTING

WHAT'S THE FUTURE YOU'RE SENSING INTO?

I would be encouraging employees to ask me, “What’s the future you’re sensing into? What do you feel wants to emerge here? What’s the marketplace really calling for in terms of this organization and how it needs to evolve and what that might mean for us as employees?” What I would be hoping for from a leadership team is that sense of them scanning the horizon. At Oxford Saïd Business School, they use the term “ripple intelligence.” What are the ripples coming through that can inform us about the future and how we need to be evolving? A leadership team has a responsibility to sense and feel into the ecosystem and share that with employees. Then also hear what the employee’s sense of that is. That would be the dialogue I will be encouraging employees to stimulate with leaders.

SARAH ROZENTHULER, AUTHOR AND DIALOGUE
COACH, BRIDGEWORK CONSULTING

WHAT AM I LOOKING TO ACHIEVE?

I would start by asking, what am I looking to achieve? I am contextual and need to connect to purpose. Because of that, I tend to assume people want that, too. Then, what are the values I need to honor along the way? I see a lot of organizations sort of trip because they either have a misunderstanding of the values that they have agreed to play by or misalignment on the values themselves. The last question is, how can I best contribute? When someone is brought to a job or a particular task or project, there's usually a good reason or why. So, what are the strengths they're looking for me to play with? I would like to understand that and then build on that.

SESil PIR, ORGANIZATIONAL PSYCHOLOGIST, HR
EXPERT

WHY?

Why is the absolute most important question an employee can ask a leader. “Why are we doing this?” And that question can get applied in a whole host of different directions. “Why is the strategy what it is? Why has the organizational restructuring happened?” The questions can be big picture why questions or can also be on the day-to-day matters. Many organizations allow you to access a personal calendar to book a meeting with somebody else. I’m a big believer in rejecting meeting requests unless they explain to me why they want to meet. Sorry, you don’t get an hour or two hours out of my Thursday afternoon unless you can articulate why this will be essential and valuable. Of course, you want to be polite about that. If somebody sends me a meeting request, my response can be that I saw your meeting request, and I would love to get it together. I was just wondering if you could give me some idea about why you want to meet to come to the meeting better prepared. But I think that we should be asking the people around us why? Why are we meeting? Why is this the strategy? Why are we doing what we’re doing? When people get an answer to that question, it gives them a) a sense of engagement and a

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sense of belief in what they're doing, and b) it empowers them to make good decisions.

SIMON HEATH, EXECUTIVE COMMUNICATIONS
COACH

ARE THEY BEING COHERENT?

That's a great question and one which very much depends on the culture of an organization since many are still driven with a command-and-control mindset where deep questioning is not encouraged. The most important question in many businesses and organizations is that employees can only ask about their leadership teams rather than directly to their leadership team. Maria and I always ask people in leadership positions, "Are they being coherent?" This question of coherence lies at the heart of our tool, the holonomic circle, to help organizations implement what we call "customer experiences with soul." At the very center of the circle is the trinity of what I say, what I do, and what I mean. We define authenticity as the maximum coherence between what someone says, what someone means, and what they do. Nowadays, I think many younger people want more coherence from the leadership. They want more connectivity; they want more engagement, and they're looking for coherence. Even when I view this now, when I look at leaders, I don't just look at the words they say. I don't just look at the purpose they claim to be living. I look for coherence between what they say, what they mean, and what they do. I also

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look for this coherence when we are approached to create partnerships or are asked to get involved in a project or a network.

SIMON AND MARIA MORAES ROBINSON, AUTHOR
AND CO-FOUNDERS HOLONOMICS EDUCATION

HOW CAN I BE HELPFUL TO YOU IN THE PURSUIT OF YOUR VISION?

We're trying to help each of us go one step forward on our journey in any relationship. For example, Bill, what can I do to help you go to the next level? And what you can do for me (which is what you're doing right now) is ask questions that I can ponder to go into the next step of my journey. That's what we can do for each other.

SIRAJ SIRAJUDDIN, AGILITY AND LEADERSHIP
TRANSFORMATION CONSULTANT

IS THERE A REASON WE DO IT THAT WAY?

Is there a reason we do it in that way? Sometimes even managers have inherited practices, processes, and procedures from other managers. That doesn't make them right or mean they are the best fit for the business. I think sometimes people go along with things. Then the day becomes really boring or mundane or stressful or frustrating just because they don't ask the question, "Is there a reason we do it that way?" Some people just go along with the flow and turn up for work and take the paycheck. And never bother to ask.

STEPH HOLLOWAY, FOUNDER ELEMENTAL
POTENTIAL

WHAT ARE YOU DOING NOW AND DOES THIS MAKE SENSE?

Why are you coming to work today? Suppose top leaders start asking those questions and really mean it and work in that direction to create a community of profound values and a unity of purpose. In that case, the expectation becomes that the employees would no longer feel uncomfortable asking tough questions to their leaders. If at some point, the leaders are behaving in ways that go counter to these profound values of unity of purpose and community of trust, then employees should feel free to call them to order. They should ask them what they are doing now and if this makes sense? Is this consistent with what you've been teaching so far? I think that has some good effects as well.

STEVE TENDON, MANAGING PARTNER, TAMEFLOW

WHY ARE WE DOING WHAT WE'RE DOING?

Why are we doing what we're doing? What are we aiming to accomplish big picture? And what are we aiming to achieve with these specific tasks and initiatives? As an employee, when I have clarity around how what I'm doing fits into the big picture, that helps me make all kinds of day-to-day decisions that affect quality, productivity, and so much more. For example, maybe I can do a project in several different ways. When I know what we want to accomplish, I can do the project in the best way to move us closer to that goal. Understanding how what I'm doing fits into the big picture also helps me determine what matters and what doesn't. Each of us, during our day-to-day work, is going to come upon some information that "doesn't fit." It could be an exception to the rule. Or it could be a behavior that we didn't expect to have happened due to what we're doing. Whatever it is, if we know the big picture, then we know if this is an important data point or an unimportant data point. We know if it's something that we need to share with others right away because it's an urgent potential problem, or if it's insignificant, we can keep going about what we're doing.

MOST IMPORTANT QUESTIONS FOR LEADERS

SUE ELLIOTT, PERSONAL TRANSFORMATION
LEADER

WHAT COUNTS THAT WE AREN'T COUNTING?

What counts that we are not counting? I think many organizations are a bit fixated on things like data, numbers, something you can see, tangible things. This question would be necessary for an employee to ask a senior leader or manager because the answer the manager gives is going to tell you where he sits about his intention around how people are involved and the importance of those people, and how he values employees. For me, “what counts that we are not counting” is really a question about what’s missing. Based on how your manager answers, I think it’s also a way to bridge a gap and understand where you stand as a human being in that company. It will help you discern whether the intangible things are just as important as the numbers and the data.

SUSAN TAYLOR, LEADERSHIP COACH AND CEO,
GENERON, INTERNATIONAL

WHAT IS IT I'M DOING THIS FOR?

I'm not sure I have a simple answer to this question. I think in a little bit more palatable manner, they need to be asking, "Why?" Not why am I doing this specifically, but what is it I'm doing this for? The way I'm looking for is the goal in the big picture of what we're attempting to solve with any specific piece of work. The answer will allow the asker to answer, "What value am I providing?" People always want to perform better if they know how they fit into the organizational value equation. If they know what they're targeting, they can perform above and beyond. I know that's a harder question for most employees and followers to ask a leader, but I believe it's a critical question to ask.

TOM CAGLEY, PRESIDENT, TOM CAGLEY AND
ASSOCIATES

ALWAYS TRY TO FIND OUT WHAT I WANT TO DO THEN DO IT!

What they shouldn't ask is, may I do this? Or, would you allow me if I did something like that? Don't ask for permission. I want to say the most important thing is don't look for leadership too much. I want to encourage people to look at themselves. Look inside themselves to find out what they want and need to do. If you think you need a manager to help you, then ask them for help. You can also ask them if they can get past any roadblocks. As an employee, always know that you shouldn't take a leader's opinion too quickly. Always try to find out what I want to do? What is it I really want to do and then do it! Don't do things because somebody else says: "You have to do this because you're my slave. Listen to me." People should be strong. That's the most important thing.

TOBIAS THEEL, INNO-MARATHON-COACH

WHAT CAN WE ALL DO TO MANIFEST PURPOSE IN THE WORLD?

In a world with no employees or managers, this question drops to, “What can we all do to manifest purpose in the world?” And just to restate what I said above, everyone should be working on lending their time, energy, and talent towards a purpose that has meaning for them. This shifts the focus of organizations to purpose. Organizations for a purpose. Work for a purpose. That purpose is presumably something that the world needs and would be missing from the world if not delivered by this organization, so it has deep meaning. And employees get an opportunity to usher that in, not as employees but as individuals who happen to care about that purpose in the world. I think that is the reframe for both managers in the previous question and employees in this question. Remove the artificial distinction and get everyone energizing the work of the organization for purpose.

TOM THOMISON, PARTNER, ENCODE.ORG

WHERE ARE WE GOING?

My first instinct would be to ask, “Where are we going?” When businesses and corporations were small versions of themselves — when they were starting to get established — they were more born from a market need or an opportunity. Then as these companies mature regarding how many different organizations can solve a problem, how many products can we have to do any one thing, and how many choices even with services that we have, it becomes even more important to have clarity on why are we here. What is our role? What is our vision? What do we want to bring to the table?

VALERIA MALTONI, CONVERSATION AGENT

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Bill Fox, Founder, Forward Thinking Workplaces

Forward Thinking Workplaces is a global narrative that's uncovering exciting new perspectives that will help you succeed and be a forward-thinking leader and workplace in the 21st century.

I help CEOs and leadership teams start and have new strategic conversations that engage and leverage the collective voice, energy, and wisdom of everyone—to attract, retain and grow exceptional people and results.

I'm also the author of *The Future of the Workplace* (Apress, August 2019) and *5 Minutes to Process Improvement Success*.

I invite you to contact me at bill@billfox.co to share which questions you find most helpful and intriguing or share your questions with me.

To your forward-thinking life & success!

Bill Fox

billfox.co

