Questions . . . "Good questions outrank easy answers" *Paul A. Samuelson*

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The Leader Within

What are three ways that a question can be a valuable tool for leaders?

1.) 2.) 3.)

No, it's not a trick question! How much better is it to ask that question than simply to tell you the three ways?

With the exception of interviews, court settings and game shows, questions seem to be under-utilized. We were accustomed to them during our years of formal education and in school settings. Why is it that we miss the value of a question in other cases?

Here are some reasons I believe questions to be powerful. **Questions . . .**

Mine information
Even if one knows a lot about something, a good question will lead the person to more insights and information.

Assess understanding and potential for contributing
"Who knows what here?"

Keep lines of communication open
Ask a question and you should get an answer (*ergo* dialogue); tell and it can become a monologue.

Stimulate involvement
A good question is like a compliment . . . "What is your opinion on this matter?"

Increase the common good
As in brainstorming, questions draw upon people to share perspectives and knowledge in a way that can build up.

Serve as reminders
"What did we agree upon when we started this process?"

Help the leader to stay humble
Not "Mr. Know-it-all" but a curious seeker (and a good example to the team of an inquiring mind).

The above list and explanations may seem a bit cryptic. If you want to discuss them with me, would you send me an e-mail (bret.realization@gmail.com) to set up a call?

Reminder: "Do you know the difference between an 'open-ended' and a 'closed-ended question'?" [That was a closed-ended question needing only a simple "Yes" or "No" answer.] Now look at this. "What is the difference between an 'open-ended' and a 'closed-ended question'?" [Open-ended questions require more of a response.] Start a question with "how," "what," "why," "when" or "where" if you want to stimulate dialogue.

Bret Maukonen

The Coach Within

The ability to answer questions accurately has, at times, been extremely lucrative. In the 1940s, there was a contest on the radio called the "$64 Question." That set the stage for the "$64,000 Question" on television in the mid 50s. Since that time, people have continued to become rich by giving the right answers. However, let's not lose sight of the value of the question!

In coaching, questions are of high value—e.g., we use "essential" questions and "powerful" questions in our conversations with clients. We also have an expression, that is, to "stay in the question." It reminds us to avoid advice-giving and focus on drawing responses from the client. It is really amazing what people discover with the use of a good question.

When we were children we were full of questions. Our curiosity seemed unlimited. The patient caregiver (parent, grandparent and teacher) tried to answer them and stay a step ahead. Sadly, not all of us have been encouraged to continue asking questions.

Rediscover that child-like curiosity! If you were given the opportunity to ask 100 people the same question, what would it be? I think I would choose a purpose-related question like: "What's it all about, Alfie?" Or, for younger generations: "What is life all about?"

James Stovall wrote a book whose title captures the typical format of newspaper articles—***Journalism: Who, What, When, Where, Why, And How.*** These are the key words around which we build our questions—which one of those intrigues you the most? And where do you go when you have a question? If you are like me you often head for your computer and begin a search (I'll do this especially when Bret is not around to ask!). The Internet is truly an amazing resource. However, is it the final source for answers to your most important questions?

And lastly, one more question for you—I wonder, what is the most important question you have ever been asked and have answered?

I know mine. It dates back to a conversation I had on May 12, 1961. Care to know more? Ask me about it sometime. (lynne.realization@gmail.com)

Lynne Maukonen

To Ponder . . .

What is the most important question you have been asked?

What is the most important question you could ask someone?