

15 Great Leadership Questions

By: John McKee, February 23rd, 2010

Many leaders fail to effectively tap in to the knowledge and experience of their team. Executive and leadership coach John M. McKee says this is like working with one hand tied behind the back. In this article, he shares questions any leader can use to improve results and morale.

1. "What can I do to make you more effective?"

That is one of the first questions I ask new clients. It gets a dialog going. It encourages a thoughtful reply. For those reasons alone, it's a question that I recommend to any leader who's looking for a candid and insightful communication with his or her team members.

I started using this particular one as my key "starter question" years ago when I was a leader in large corporations like DIRECTV and Hudson Bay Company. I always found it valuable in those environments, but it worked for me in start-ups just as well. Good leadership questions aren't just for those who work in large organizations or businesses. They'll work equally well for someone with a small team. That's because everyone has opinions, and when given a chance, in a safe environment, they'll share them. Great questions can bring great insight. They can help you make important changes and facilitate progress.

Here's a list of the best questions I've frequently heard being asked by great leaders. Test them out and see which ones "feel" most natural. Find out which ones provide you with the most meaningful responses. Then make them a continual part of your leadership approach:

2. What's keeping you from falling asleep at night?
3. What one thing should I do more? (or one thing I should do less?)
4. What roadblocks are holding you back? (or preventing your projects from moving ahead?)
5. What's the most important issue you are dealing with right now?
6. What do our competitors do better than us?
7. If you were in my job, what's the first thing you would you do?
8. What do we do better than anyone else?
9. How can I improve your team's productivity?
10. What are the two key behaviors of our leadership team?
11. What one thing can we do to make our weekly meeting more effective?
12. What are your top three goals for next month?
13. What's waking you up at 3:00 in the morning?

14. When you think about our goals, what are we forgetting?
15. If I could do just one thing for you as a result of this discussion, what would it be?

Leaders who use these open-ended questions, and others like them, will learn a lot. They hear statements and ideas, often for the first time. If you use any of them, I recommend that you follow up with the person who gave you the feedback. Send her or him an e-mail (or better yet, send them a handwritten note, which is much more meaningful) to tell them that you appreciated their candor.

Finally, if you change anything as a result of his or her feedback, tell everyone! If appropriate — and it may not always be, so ask permission — use the name of the person who caused you to make the change as a result of their idea. This will create an environment where people are more inclined to provide input, which in itself will improve things further.

Looking forward,
John

John M. McKee is the founder and CEO of *BusinessSuccessCoach.net*, an international consulting and coaching practice with subscribers in 43 countries. One of the founding senior executives of *DIRECTV*, his hands-on experience includes leading billion dollar organizations and launching start-ups in both the U.S. and Canada. The author of two published books, he is frequently seen providing advice on TV, in magazines, and newspapers.