

Leading Through The Art of Inquiry

by
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Clients tell me that one of the most useful services I provide is to help them ask the right question. As someone said, “half the solution to any problem lies in framing the question.”

Perhaps it’s my background as an attorney and former law professor that leads me to coach and teach through the Socratic method (the classic style the philosopher Socrates used with his students).

An executive of a health care organization recently told me that one of the things she appreciated most about my book on strategic conflict management was the way I asked questions. “Our executive team is calling this skill “The Art Of Inquiry,” she told me.

“What a great title,” I responded. Can I steal it?”

Many times I’ll find that the deadlocked executive or group I’m working with has not asked the right question. Once I help them reframe the issue, they respond with a barrage of creative ideas and solutions.

We live in an age when we need to involve those we lead in order to accomplish our goals. In order to gain their buy-in, we need to learn how to inquire instead of just informing them of what we’re doing. Notice how much more effective questions, rather than orders, are in the following examples:

ORDERS

Here’s the schedule for completing this project.

Here’s what I need from you to accomplish this.

Here’s how to handle patient complaints.

You need to get along with “x.”

QUESTIONS

What are your ideas for a workable schedule for this project?

What are you willing to do to accomplish our goals?

How can we resolve patient complaints more effectively?

There seems to be something “x” does that sets you off. What might

that be?

You need to meet deadlines.

There seems to be something in the way of you meeting deadlines. What might that be?

The most effective questions after a mishap: “What did we *learn* from this?” and “What did we *learn* today?”

A current goal, vision or project I need to communicate to my staff: _____

Questions I could ask to engage them: _____

Start practicing the Art of Inquiry. I guarantee you’ll find the process an effective leadership tool to add to your arsenal.

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