

Building Better Communication

How do you connect with your people?

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With the opportunity to teach a variety of courses over the years, I have become a big proponent of changing the way we teach and train adults. This involves moving away from the elementary school model where students are placed in rows and the teacher is the center of attention. In this type of instruction, the teacher is “telling” the students what they need to know. This type of learning is at its most basic level if students are simply remembering concepts for a test.

In order for our adult students to learn, we must challenge them and get them to think about the concepts being presented. If they are thinking, then they are learning. This is accomplished by using well-developed questions. The questions allow us to “ask” our students about concepts instead of simply “telling” them what they need to know. The use of questions and the “ask” approach allows instructors to teach a topic while engaging their students. This engagement builds rapport and enhances communication. This approach is foundational for leading and managing our people.

My article on [Socratic Leadership](#) addressed the leadership skill set of asking questions to teach your vision and mission. This is a good strategy, but it can also be applied to your daily interactions with your staff, your team, and your people. But let me be clear, these questions are not gimmicks nor are they strategies to manipulate people. Your intent must be genuine, and it must be rooted in achieving the greater good. The questions to be asked can follow into the following categories.



Mission and Goals

- What is the purpose of our unit/company?
- What is our overall objective? What are our goals?
- How do we achieve success? How will we define success?

Acceptance of Change

- Why are we facing this type of change? Who is affected?

- How can we make the transition as smooth as possible? Can we meet our goals during this process?
- If you had to implement the change, what would it look like? How would it be implemented?

Future

- Why do we exist?
- What changes need to take place for use to remain relevant?
- Are we operating in the status quo? What needs to be initiated to move us forward?
- Are we relying on our past reputation to justify a lack of current production?

Informative

- What is your position on (topic)?
- What do you know about (topic)?
- Can you provide me with information on (topic)? How do you know this information is good/relevant/current?
- Who can we talk to about (topic)? Can we find someone with an outside perspective on (topic)?
- How does (topic) affect our team?



The last type of questions is relational. There are no set of standard questions to be asked of your people. These questions should be a natural part of your daily interaction with them. Ask about their family, interests, problems, and anything else that is important to them. Ask because you care. If you care about them, they will more likely care about you and the work they do for you. If this is not your comfort zone, move out of it and connect with your people. Ask questions which will let you connect with your people. You will be greatly rewarded for it.

Move yourself into the direction of “asking” versus “telling.” When you are in a position to tell someone information, challenge yourself and propose a question instead. The question should get your intended audience thinking about the topic. Lead them down your intended path with a series of questions where they begin to voice information about the topic you are discussing. If you are still unsure about this process of questions, I will provide a process in a future article.

What is your question to be asked today?

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Al Cobos is the owner and lead consultant for [Dychelon](#) which improves team performance and promotes successful team building. Al has successfully built teams over the past two decades. He has over thirty years of public sector experience in addition to teaching for several universities. His focus is to improve people in their personal and professional lives.