

Asking Questions as a Superpower

Few things are as powerful as a well-crafted question. When we ask good questions, we help people think more deeply, give them space to express themselves, and learn what truly matters to them. Effective questions lead to better decisions and increase the likelihood that we are perceived as collaborative, thoughtful partners. For that reason, the ability to ask strong questions is not a soft skill, it is a strategic one worth developing intentionally.

Turning this into *YOUR* Superpower

Questions serve different purposes depending on their design. Some explore assumptions, others surface emotions, and still others help clarify direction or drive decisions. Understanding the different types of questions, and when to use them, allows us to engage more effectively with individuals and teams.

As you review the question types below, consider which ones you tend to use naturally and which may benefit from more deliberate practice.

Eight Types of Questions and Their Purpose

1. Probing / “Why” Questions

Purpose:

To obtain detailed information, explore assumptions or hypotheses, and identify underlying causes.

Example:

- *What could be causing the recent change in performance?*
- *Why do you think this occurred?*

2. Affective Questions

Purpose:

To understand how a person feels about an issue, decision, or situation.

Example:

- *How do you feel about the decision to market the product in this way?*

3. Reflective Questions

Purpose:

To encourage deeper exploration and elaboration, often beginning with a shared observation.

Example:

- *Given that our communications have not been well received, what do you think contributed to this?*

4. Innovative Questions

Purpose:

To generate insights, stimulate creativity, and expand possible solutions. These often include *what if*, *what else*, or *how else*.

Example:

- *What if we looked at the problem from the customer’s perspective?*

5. Clarifying Questions

Purpose:

To reduce misunderstanding or ambiguity. These questions implicitly ask, “*What did you mean?*” and should be delivered with care and appropriate tone.

Example:

- *Could you provide an example of what you meant when you said the team was not performing well?*

6. System / Process Questions

Purpose:

To consider the broader system, connect the dots, and anticipate downstream effects or unintended consequences.

Example:

- *If we modify your role, how might that affect the rest of the team?*

7. Challenging Questions

Purpose:

To test assumptions, surface blind spots, and ensure ideas have been fully thought through.

Example:

- *Why do you believe this solution requires X? What leads you to that conclusion?*

8. Decision Questions

Purpose:

To determine whether a decision has been made and clarify next steps.

Example:

- *What will you do now?*

Turning Questions into a Strategic Advantage

When used skillfully, questions do far more than gather information. They shape conversations, influence thinking, and create environments where insight and ownership can emerge. Strong leaders, coaches, and professionals do not rely solely on answers, they leverage questions to unlock clarity, alignment, and forward momentum.

By intentionally expanding the range of questions we ask and aligning them with our purpose, we can transform questioning from a habit into a true superpower, one that strengthens relationships, improves decision-making, and drives meaningful progress.

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