

ASK MORE... TALK LESS...

When asked who is the Audience for Ask More... Talk Less... inspired by the Coaching Habit, the answer is Everyone.

The purpose of the material is to support you in the following:

- Managing Projects, Individuals, and Teams
- Coaching Team Members and Team Leaders
- Negotiating with Vendors and Individuals

Asking More and Talking Less can help you break out of three habits that plague the workplace:

Creating Overdependence – Break this habit by reducing the need to jump in and take over.

Getting Overwhelmed – Losing focus makes you feel overwhelmed. Focus is needed so you and your team can do the work that has real impact, directing your time, energy and resources to solve the challenges that make a difference.

Becoming Disconnected – Help people learn from others' experiences and help fulfill a person's potential.

To Ask More and Talk Less you need to build a new habit, as follows:

Make a Vow – Think less about what talking can do for you and how listening to others will enable people to improve their communication skills.

Figure Your Trigger – Define what triggers the old behavior (Location, Time, Emotional State, Other People, and the Immediately Preceding Action).

Be Short and Specific – Be concise, express your thoughts / comments using brevity, one that will take 60 seconds or less to do.

Practice Frequently – Repeat, repeat, do it fast, do it slow, do it differently, but keep repeating.

Solicit Feedback – Partner with individuals for feedback.

Celebrate Success – Be mindful when it goes well, and when it does celebrate your success.

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One of the laws of change:

As soon as you try something new, you will get resistance. To help counter resistance, start with something easy, start small, buddy up to develop check-ins, get back on the horse when you slip. Do not get frustrated when you regress. Through deliberate and regular practice, you'll move to conscious competence.

Question Asking Tips:

Ask just one question at a time. Be quiet/patient while waiting for the answer.

Cut the intro and ask the question. If you know what question to ask, get to the point and ask it.

Do not ask rhetorical questions. Stop offering up advice with a question mark attached. Question should include meaningful content and be expressed with sincerity.

Stick to questions starting with "What". Avoid questions starting with "Why". Why? often equals "What were you thinking?", putting them on the defensive. When you ask "Why?" to get more detail, you want more detail so YOU can fix the problem yourself. If you're not trying to fix things, you don't need the back story.

Get comfortable with silence. Silence is often a measure of success.

Listen to the answer. Acknowledge the answer you get. This isn't about judging people; it's about encouraging them.

Use every channel to ask a question. Questions work just as well typed as they do spoken. Some people are more comfortable providing feedback individually rather than a group session.

Ensure the audience understands the question.

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The Seven Essential Questions:

The Kickstart Question – What’s on Your Mind?

The AWE Question – And What Else?

The Focus Question – What’s the Real Challenge Here for You?

The Foundation Question – What Do You want?

The Lazy Question – How Can I Help?

The Strategic Question – If You’re Saying Yes to This, What Are You Saying No To?

The Learning Question – What Was Most Useful for You?

The Kickstart Question: What’s on Your Mind?

Breaking the Ice – A good opening line can make all the difference. A good way to start a chat that quickly turns into a real conversation is with the question “What’s on your mind”.

If you feel stuck in a conversation that seems boring or not useful, one of these three situations might be at play:

Small Talk Tango – Small talk can be a way to warm up but is rarely the bridge to lead to conversation that matters.

Ossified Agenda – This is commonly found in standing meetings: same time, same people, same place, same agenda. It can put process in front of what really matters.

Default Diagnosis – There’s no conversation about what the issue is but one or all parties “think” they know what it is, so you go off pursuing something that “might” be the real topic. This response is comfortable and feels like progress because you’re solving something. However, you’re off the mark.

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Develop a behavior of asking “What’s on your mind” to execute the 3P Model:

Project – Any challenges around the content

People – Any issues with the team members

Patterns of Behavior – What’s getting in your own way. Where should we start?

The AWE Question: And What Else?

The three words “And What Else?” creates more wisdom, more insights, more self-awareness, and more possibilities.

There are three reasons this question has the impact that it does:

More options can lead to better decisions – When you use “And What Else?”, you will get more options, that may be better options. Better options lead to better decisions. Better decisions lead to greater success.

You reign yourself in – Tell less and ask more. Your advice may not be as good as you think it is. Even though we may not really know what the issue is, we feel sure we have the answer. “And What Else?” is a self-management tool to keep your “advice monster” under restraints.

You buy yourself time – When you do not fully know what’s going on, and you need more time to figure things out, asking “And What Else?” buys you that little extra time.

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Four practical tips for asking “And What Else?”:

Stay Curious, Stay Genuine

Ask it One More Time – Ask it at least three times, but not more than five.

Recognize Success – At some point in the conversation someone will say, “there is nothing else”, which means you are at the end of this line of inquiry.

Move On When It’s time – If you feel the energy going out of the conversation, it is time to move on from that angle.

Going Too Far, “The Paradox of Choice”:

When you ask, “And What Else?” the goal isn’t to generate a multitude of options, it is to see what ideas that person has. If you get three to five answers, you have made great progress.

The Focus Question: What’s the Real Challenge Here for You?

This question will help you slow down the rush to action, so you can spend time solving the “Real” problem. This question will help you find which challenge matters most and keeps the question personal. Adding “for you” to a question pins the question to the person you are talking to, keeping it personal, and helps people figure out the answers faster and more accurately.

When someone starts talking to you about a problem, remember that what they are saying is rarely the “Real” problem. When you jump in to fix it, things may go off the rail in three ways: you work on the wrong problem; you do the work your team should be doing; and the work doesn’t get done.

Without a properly formulated question, a good answer has no place to go. There is less of a chance the response will be effective.

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An Irresistible 1-2-3 Combination

The first three of the seven essential questions can be combined to become a robust script for your conversation.

You open with the Kickstart Question – What’s on your mind?

This is the perfect way to start. The question is open, but focused.

Check in with the AWE Question – Is there anything else on your mind?

Give the person an option to share additional concerns.

Begin to probe with the Focus Question – So what’s the real challenge here for you?

The conversation deepens and your job now is to find what’s most useful to pursue.

Ask – And what else (is the real challenge here for you)?

The person will most likely have something, and there may be more.

Probe again – Is there anything else?

You’ll have most of what matters in front of you now.

Get to the heart of it and ask – So... what’s the real challenge here for you?

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The Foundation Question: What do you want?

Untangling “wants” and “needs”. The illusion that both parties in a conversation know what the other party wants is pervasive and can result in frustrating exchanges.

Understand the difference between “Wants” and “Needs”:

Want: I’d like to have this.

Need: I must have this.

Recognizing the “Need” gives you a better understanding of how you should address the “Want”. There is a flip side as well. As you frame your own request for what you want, see if you can articulate what the need is behind the request.

The Lazy Question: How Can I Help?

The power of “How Can I Help?” is twofold. First, you are forcing the individual to make a direct and clear request. Second (and possibly more important), it stops you from thinking that you know the best way to help and leaping into action.

Be blunt... The more direct version of “How Can I Help?” is “What Do You Want from Me?”. It changes the conversation to understanding: What do you want? What do I want? And now, what shall we do about it?

However, be careful. How “What do you want from me?” is received will depend on the tone in which it is asked. Soften the question by using the phrase “out of curiosity”. Other phrases with a softening effect are “just so I know...” or “to help me understand better...” or “to make sure that I’m clear...”.

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The Strategic Question: If You're Saying Yes to This, What Are You Saying No To?

When someone says Yes, asking, "let's be clear: what exactly are you saying Yes to?" brings out commitment. If you then ask, "what could being fully committed to this idea look like?" brings things into sharper focus. Saying Yes more slowly means being willing to stay curious before committing.

A Yes is nothing without the No that gives it boundaries and form.

Understanding the No helps you understand the implications of the decision. There are two types of No answers – the No of omission and the No of commission. The No of omission applies to the options that are automatically eliminated by your saying Yes. The No of commission puts the spotlight on how to create the space and focus, energy and resources that you'll need to truly do that Yes.

The Learning Question: What Was Most Useful for You?

There are several questions you can ask to help drive the learning process:

What did you learn?
What was the key insight?
What do you want to remember?
What's important to capture?

"What was most useful?" helps hit the spot in at least six ways:

It assumes the conversation was useful and creates a moment to figure it out.

It asks people to identify what was most useful. This question typically focuses on one or two takeaways from the conversation.

By adding "For You" to the question makes it personal, taking it from the objective to the subjective.

It gives you feedback. Listen to the answer you get. It will give you guidance on what to do more of next time.

It's learning not judgement. It forces people to extract the value from the conversation.

It reminds people how useful you are to them.

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Conclusion

Many conversations between individuals end up ill-fated with:

Too much baggage

Too much certainty, thinking you have the destination and the path to get there

Wandering off the path too quickly

Working way too hard to get to the path

Being exhausted at the end, making less progress than you intended.

Make the Seven Essential Questions part of your management repertoire and everyday conversations. You'll work less hard and have more impact. Your people, your boss, your career and your life outside of work will thank you for it.

However, the key is building a habit of curiosity. The change of behavior that will serve you best is a little less advice providing a quick opinion and a little more curiosity. Find your own questions, find your own voice.

Resource Material and Additional Readings:

The Coaching Habit – Michael Bungay Stanier

In the Pursuit of Elegance and the Laws of Subtraction – Matt May

Decisive: How to Make Better Choices in Life and Work – Chip and Dan Heath

Flawless Consulting – Peter Block

The Power of Habit – Charles Duhigg

Drive – Dan Pink

Immunity to Change – Lahey and Keegan

The Dip – Seth Godin

Switch – Chip and Dan Heath