

*The 2020*

# FORWARD THINKING SUCCESS SERIES

WHAT IS THE MOST IMPORTANT QUESTION  
TO ASK EMPLOYEES?



# THE 2020 FORWARD THINKING SUCCESS SERIES

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What Is the Most Important Question to Ask  
Employees?

Bill Fox

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*This book is dedicated to the forward-thinking leaders who contributed their time, intellect, and wisdom to the Exploring Forward-Thinking Workplaces conversation. Thank you for being part of this journey.*

# Table of Contents

|  |    |
|--|----|
| Table of Contents  | 4  |
| Introduction   | 7  |
| How Do You as the Employer Choose to Show Up as You Meet That Person?                        | 9  |
| How Can You Do Your Job Better?  | 10 |
| What Will Help You Create Your Biggest Contribution?   | 10 |
| How Do I Make This Better?   | 11 |
| How Are You Doing?   | 12 |
| Are You Doing Things That Make You Happy?  | 12 |
| How Can I Help You?  | 13 |
| Is This Question Relevant in the New World of Work?  | 14 |
| What Do You Really Want to Be Doing?   | 15 |
| What Makes Sense to You?   | 16 |
| What's Working Well That We Can Continue?  | 17 |
| How Do I Get the Insight Into the Right Questions to Ask?                                    | 17 |
| What Are You Noticing?   | 18 |
| How Can I Support You?   | 19 |
| How Can I Help?  | 19 |
| What Percent of Your Capability Do You Think You Get to Contribute?                          | 20 |
| What Do You Think We Should Do?  | 21 |
| What's Your Greatest Pain Point?   | 22 |
| Have We Given You the Tools, Training & Environment to Do Work That Gives Your Life Meaning? | 23 |

|  |    |
|--|----|
| What Are You Thinking?   | 24 |
| What Do I (The Leader) Need?                                       | 25 |
| Do You Feel Like You Have Freedom Here to Be Yourself?             | 26 |
| If You Weren't Doing This With Your Time, What Would You Be Doing? | 27 |
| What Am I Not Seeing That I Should Do?                             | 28 |
| What Are the Problems to Doing Your Job?                           | 29 |
| What Do You Need Me to Do to Help You Do Your Job Better?          | 30 |
| Are You Happy Here?  | 31 |
| What Can We Do Better?   | 31 |
| Do You Know What You're Up To?                                     | 32 |
| How Can I Help?  | 33 |
| How Can I Empower You?   | 34 |
| What Do You Need to Learn, and How Can We Help You?                | 35 |
| How Can the Organization Serve You Better?                         | 36 |
| What Obstacles Exist That I Can Clear for You?                     | 36 |
| What Have You Improved Today?                                      | 37 |
| How Do You Intend to Do This?                                      | 38 |
| What's Getting in Your Way Keeping You From Getting Stuff Done?    | 39 |
| What Do We Need to Subtract?                                       | 40 |
| Who Would You Be and What Would You Do If You Had 100% Freedom?    | 41 |
| What Can I Do for You Today?                                       | 42 |
| Are You Happy?   | 43 |
| What Do You Think?   | 43 |

|  |    |
|--|----|
| What Do You Think?   | 44 |
| How Can We Ask More Questions?   | 45 |
| How Can I Make You Look Good?  | 46 |
| How Could We Come Together in Service of Something Greater Than Ourselves? | 47 |
| What Drives You Most?  | 48 |
| Why?   | 48 |
| What Is It That I'm Not Seeing?  | 49 |
| What Do You Bring to the Table That I Don't Know About?                    | 50 |
| Why Do You Come to Work Every Day?   | 51 |
| What Don't We Know?  | 51 |
| What Can I Do to Help You Grow?  | 53 |
| How Can I Make You More Effective?   | 54 |
| About Bill Fox   | 55 |
| What others are saying...  | 56 |
| The Forward Thinking Approach  | 57 |

# Introduction

Every organization I've ever worked with has had an "us" vs. "them" dynamic at some level.

I wondered, "Is there anything I can do to impact this?"

This question led me to include the following question in the Exploring Forward Thinking Workplaces interviews:

*What is the most important question leaders should ask employees?*

My intention with the question is to help bridge the gap between leaders and employees as well as help leaders be better leaders and employees be better employees.

When we ask each other better questions, we unleash the enormous power of questions.

*The energy around an unanswered question may very well be the most powerful motivating force in the universe.*

— Kurt Wright

Even more importantly, the answers to this question will help you see that too often we are still asking the same old questions—or not asking questions at all.

This book will help you discover just how important it is to create a space for questions to be asked, as well as for us to listen to each other.

Did you find a favorite question here or have one of your own already?

I'd like to know, so please feel free to email me at [bill@billfox.co](mailto:bill@billfox.co) and let me know.

To your great work life & success,



Bill Fox, Co-founder

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# How Do You as the Employer Choose to Show Up as You Meet That Person?

As I sit with your question, I feel it's not about what is the most important question to ask the potential employee; it's even more about how you as the employer choose to show up as you meet that person. And what do you care about with them? And how does the company care about its people? What is the relationship that you start to build with them right from the beginning? As you start to build a relationship with that person, you'll quickly recognize whether or not this person is the right fit for a good working relationship, and not just for a transaction— not just for getting a job done.

**Alan Seale, Author & Director, Center for Transformational Presence**

# How Can You Do Your Job Better?

It's very important for management to ask questions to employees. The most important question is to ask employees, how can you do your job better? Often there's a tendency to tell employees how to do their jobs. But in fact that's not effective because many times managers themselves don't know how to do the job. It's much better to ask the employees, who are experts in their area how they actually could do their job better. What resources do they need? What changes would help them be more effective? Then incorporate that feedback into the way they do their jobs.

**Andy Yen, CEO, Proton Technologies**

# What Will Help You Create Your Biggest Contribution?

I'd encourage leaders to ask their employees, what will help you create your biggest contribution? And perhaps in broader stated way, I'd offer they ask:

Imagine a day at work when you feel energized and excited about what we are doing here and about your contribution. Describe what you're doing. Specifically, what enables you to perform so well at such a high level?

That's the question I'd encourage leaders to ask their teams.

**Aviv Shahar, Author, Create New Futures**

## **How Do I Make This Better?**

I'll refer to the Toyota production system. How do I make this better? What am I getting wrong? What am I doing that gets in the way of you doing the best work of your life? One of the questions my wife and I ask each other all the time is, "Hey, what can I do to make your day go better?" I think if more managers were walking around and authentically asking their teams with curiosity, we'd see a lot of improvement. People know what they need. I love Drucker's definition of a knowledge worker—it's anyone who knows more about their job than their boss does. Frankly, most bosses don't know what they need to know, and it's the people on the ground who know what they need. Asking employees is probably the most important thing they can ask.

**Bob Gower, Consultant**

# How Are You Doing?

What I've always done is just walk around and talk to people and ask, "How are you doing?" Not how's that project coming or how's your task coming but really to ask how are you doing as a person? Is there anything you need to do your best work? Is there something you're missing to do the job the way you need to do it? Do you have any ideas about something we could improve? As a manager and a leader, that's what I need to know. I want to find out from people which areas need to improve so that we can serve our customers better? Get their ideas and involve them in moving to action, "How can we do it? What do you see that we need to do?". I've seen too many companies where it's survey after survey after survey, but then fails to move to action.

**Bob Schatz, Agile Leader, Agile Infusion**

# Are You Doing Things That Make You Happy?

While I don't work in a traditional office building, I do consider myself a leader because I have a team that I lead. The question I

always want to make sure I'm asking the people I work with and for is, are you doing things that make you happy and are you doing the things that you love?

That's the most important part to me because if I know that they're not happy, then I know their work isn't as good as it could be. Maybe they're not in the right spot or the right position, and I want to be in a position to know if they're not feeling like they're in the right spot. I want to put them in the right spot as it makes sense in our business. Really what it comes down to is, are you fulfilled? Are you happy with what you're doing? Because if you're not, first of all, you may already be able to detect that, so more importantly I'd like to put you in a place that makes you happy.

**Brian Gardner, Founder of Authentik and StudioPress**

## How Can I Help You?

I think there are several important questions. How can I help you? What are you trying to achieve? How can I help you achieve that? Is this company acting in a way that's consistent with your principles? Do we have integrity between what we say and what we do with what we do with our clients, and what we do internally? Management is typically more secure in their job.

They have a better perspective of what the organization is trying to do, and they can muster more resources. They can say, “Well you want to take night school classes, then we can help pay for those. You want to take every Tuesday morning off so that you can take a pottery class? Great, we can figure out how to change your work schedule.” Management has a lot of ways of helping people and they should.

**David Marquet, President, Turn the Ship Around**

## **Is This Question Relevant in the New World of Work?**

This is a question coming from the old paradigm and it's geared at optimizing the relationship between management and employees. For all it's worth, it's a good question to ask, but it's an obsolete question in the new world of work where management and leadership are distributed among equal partners of the organization. Equal not in terms of experience or skills, but in terms of having an ability to co-create the journey that the organization is taking. From the above perspective, everything shifts. It's really a limited question. The question itself exposes the assumptions it is based on. Sometimes this leads to

an inquiry of the assumptions we are embedding in our questions. It's not a bad thing, it's just where we are today.

Dennis Wittrock, Partner, [encode.org](http://encode.org)

# What Do You Really Want to Be Doing?

I believe one of the most important questions leadership should be asking employees is, “What do you really want to be doing?” It's a question that very few leaders ask to people who report to them, probably because it's not in the organization's culture to ask that particular question. It's another one of those Least-action Pathways of corporate culture (remember, neither good nor bad – just habit – for leaders to manage from the idea that you are going to have to do what I need you to do. That is of course also essential, to make sure that the job gets done.

However, when you want to engender the highest performance, the happiest, most passionate and enthusiastic work force – you want to think in a both/and frame of mind. The business needs a certain type of task accomplished, and the question is who is the best person for that particular function. For example, “Okay, Joe

can do that, right?” But maybe Joe doesn’t want to do that—or maybe that’s not his key talent.

So I think asking this question, what do they really want to be doing on this team, to understand how they see things, is very important. You may not get every dream come true as the employee, but at least you’ll have a starting point. As the manager or the leader, your business is going to be that much more masterful and effective when you have people doing what they want to do. What they love to do. It goes back to that happiness and joy and being excited about the work factor.

**Dianne Collins, Author and Creator of QuantumThink®**

## **What Makes Sense to You?**

I think everybody—if they have an opportunity to participate and to reflect—has a sense of what would make things better, but often they’re not asked. I’ve heard that repeatedly over the years. No one ever asks me what I think we should do. No one ever asks me what I think would make a big difference. Now that’s not always true, and there are certainly very healthy teams and companies, but often people are just not asked, “What makes sense to you? I’m interested in your common sense. I’m interested in what your wisdom says would be helpful.”

# What's Working Well That We Can Continue?

What's working well that we can continue and what would you like us to change? And how can you help us to change things?

Eva Schielein, Owner, aestimat

# How Do I Get the Insight Into the Right Questions to Ask?

This question relates back to the listening part for me, so I think that's the first step. I think that sometimes you don't know where someone is. Maybe you haven't got a good pulse check on them. I feel that when you listen and you use that to create a relationship that is nurtured with trust, the person feels like they're in a safe space where they can talk about their true feelings. Then that's the point where you get a better insight into the right kinds of questions to ask. I don't think there are any one or two specific questions that are essentially important. I think

it's contextual and so you need a lot of input to understand what that is for that person, which means you need to spend a lot of time in the listening phase. Just let that person talk to you without trying to get an answer that you think they should be saying, or trying to fit them into a mold that doesn't necessarily work for them.

**Felicia Spahr, Artist & Transformational Leader**

## What Are You Noticing?

What are you noticing? What else are you sensing? What should we be paying more attention to? I realize that's more than one question, but I want to illustrate the importance of asking people to look outward and share what they're observing. What questions help them open their lens? Ask yourself, what do they see that I'm missing? Because when those kinds of conversations happen, they surface more good stuff we get to work with. It not only helps engage an individual who feels valued, acknowledged and appreciated, but more importantly, those additional perspectives generate more possibilities.

**Gwen Kinsey, Leadership Coach, [GwenKinsey.com](http://GwenKinsey.com)**

# How Can I Support You?

How can I support you? How can I make your work more challenging and rewarding depending on what's relevant? What information do you need that can help you? Can I connect you with people who can help you in terms of meeting likeminded people or getting information that you need? Or can I elevate you somehow? How can I support you in becoming professionally strong in the work market in general, but you will still choose to work here?

**Hrund Gunnsteinsdottir, Writer & Co-director, Innsaei**

# How Can I Help?

How can I help? This is a really important question that we don't hear often enough. I try to remember to ask this question every day to at least one person. How can I help you succeed in what you're doing? How can I help you reach your goal? If you look at the model we've developed where people have autonomy to

grow in their own area of interest, the most important thing is to help them do that.

Jeff Dalton, Chief Evangelist at AgileCxO, Author & CEO at Broadword Solutions

# What Percent of Your Capability Do You Think You Get to Contribute?

I think there are many ways to answer this question, but there's one question that popped into my mind the most. If you look at high-performance executives, many times a high-performance executive is somebody who works on the business rather than in the business because you can get caught in all the minutiae. You've got to work at a higher altitude to figure out and ask yourself, "What are the constraints in our business, and if the constraints were removed, could we increase our performance?" Now, how do we remove those constraints? In order to improve, you often have to simplify or remove constraints. But how often do we think about asking, how do I remove a constraint so my people can excel? I think when it comes to our people, I would ask, "Of all that you can contribute to our organization, what

percent of your capability do you think you get to contribute?” That question would be tremendously interesting to me because whenever we ask that question, it’s a minority of what they think they can do.

**Jim Haudan, Author & CEO, Root, Inc.**

# What Do You Think We Should Do?

I believe there are two equally important questions. Question one is, “What do you think we should do?” The operative words are “you” and “we” in this question. But this question will soon become meaningless if management doesn’t act on the suggestion or at least take the time to explain why the suggestion might not be appropriate. That said, more times than not there will be something that comes out of the discussion that can be implemented or looked into. So the key to success is engagement, building trust, and inspiring the employee to be a voice within the company.

The second question is, “How can I help you achieve your objectives?” Again, this is an opportunity to engage, to better understand an employee and to determine what motivates them.

In some cases, are they motivated by career or by craft?

Everybody thinks “career” is the name of the game. I had a lot of frustrated employees who just never got past a certain level. A university professor I had a long time ago said, “It doesn’t always have to be career. Why not craft?” What do I mean by that? One of our employees was a purchasing agent and he was really good at his job, but he wasn’t the greatest when it came to leadership and mentoring. He was thinking about leaving and we said, “We’ll do everything we can to make you a specialist, the best purchasing agent in the country. What would that entail?” Bottom line, he took more courses, joined trade associations, and he’s still with the company some 20 years later... and still in purchasing!

**John Bell, CEO (Retired), Jacobs Suchard & Author of Do Less, Better**

# What’s Your Greatest Pain Point?

The most important questions (using words that are appropriate for the culture) are: What’s your greatest pain point? What is your greatest roadblock to feeling efficient and flowing forward? What

is the thing that bothers you the most? Going after those pain points once again, you could ask: What isn't working?

Or say: If you had superpowers, what's the one thing you would change? You can say it many, many different ways. But I think getting to that greatest pain point somehow would be the most important thing. Leaders are desperate to hear honest answers from their folks, which are hard to get because people probably are not going to tell you the honest answer. You're the Big Cheese, and that's a big deal to people. A client I worked with had a VP of Quality, and whenever he walked into a room, the room would change. People would behave differently.

**John Ryskowski, Chief of Organizational Transformation at Easier Way, Inc.**

# **Have We Given You the Tools, Training & Environment to Do Work That Gives Your Life Meaning?**

We often throw people into situations where they don't have any knowledge, and we expect them to figure it out themselves.

That's unfair. I do most of my work in hospitals and clinics. The work environment in most of those places are caustic. They're full of fear, and the autocracy of the traditional healthcare management systems makes people not want to take any risks or try anything new or improve anything. That environment is just extremely negative. I think it's the leader's role to ensure we are trained at what we need to do, that we have tools at our disposal to do it the best we can, and that we have an environment that's conducive to doing good work and improving that work.

**John Toussaint, CEO, Catalysis**

## What Are You Thinking?

It goes back to the idea of strategic thinking. I think the most important question is, what are you thinking? Part of that goes to what's on your mind, which could relate to the organization or the plans or the results that the organization is experiencing at that point in time. But I think a corollary question to that too is why do you think that way? When we start to dig into why we're thinking about certain things in a certain way, we start to discover biases in our thinking as well as the mindset that we have or some of the logic that may or may not make sense. It just provides for a much more open conversation when we focus

on the thought process rather than the end result. By focusing on how we're thinking we'll get better plans and results through that process.

**Jon Mertz, CEO, Activate Leadership**

## **What Do I (The Leader) Need?**

It depends on what the leaders are trying to learn, so I don't think there's just one most important question. What's the leader trying to learn, understand, and know? Where are they trying to go? What are they trying to do? Important questions really stem from that.

There are many important questions. Start by asking oneself important questions such as what do I (the leader) need and then frame questions based on the clarity of one's own needs. What is the need or desire based on? From here create the questions that you need to ask others.

**Karen Mack, MSOD**

# Do You Feel Like You Have Freedom Here to Be Yourself?

I ask, “Do you feel like you have freedom here to be yourself? And to fulfill your personal goals? Your destiny? If not, what’s holding you back? What are we doing wrong? How can we help you connect your passions, skills, and fundamental calling to your work here?” I think that gets at a crucial question. I will say this: I don’t think it’s helpful to ask this question periodically, on a scheduled basis. This question has to be embedded in the culture. An attitude of openness and interest in an individual’s motivations has to be characteristic of the culture. And the question has to be posed again and again, in different ways. The question shouldn’t be posed by management alone; it should come up in discussions among coworkers and individuals. The goal is to influence a culture where people are not afraid to share their hearts and their relevant core beliefs. Our job is to create an environment that’s conducive to finding purpose and living out our workplace calling. That would be fantastic, wouldn’t it?

**Kent Johnson, Sr. Advisor, Religious Freedom & Business Foundation**

# If You Weren't Doing This With Your Time, What Would You Be Doing?

It's going to sound ridiculous and unorthodox, but what I would ask is this, "If you weren't doing this with your time, what would you be doing?" I think it's incredibly revealing. I think people don't let themselves ask themselves that question because they don't see it as a possibility. And I wouldn't stop there. If I was running an IT company and I said to my employee, "What would you be doing, if you weren't doing this?" and they said surfing. I wouldn't then walk away saying, "Well, ok, too bad, that's nothing related to IT. I guess you got to make a choice, either stick with this boring job or go surf." I think it's just interesting to see where people let themselves go in their thinking when asked that question. The reason I'd ask that question—not because the answer specifically matters—I'd be looking for what makes them come alive. Then I would love to find out what is it about that thing that makes them come alive. Because what I've learned in

sharing these principles with people, is that they've innocently attributed a freedom of mind to a specific activity.

**Mara Gleason, Co-founder, OneSolution**

# What Am I Not Seeing That I Should Do?

Normally in our hierarchical organizations after a time, the person who is at the top can't see what is happening in relationships to their clients, and they can't see what's happening in the organization. If leaders don't have an authentic dialogue, people will take to them only one part of the story, and normally the good part, never the bad part. Sometimes it can be as if they are in a separate cell while still having to make decisions with this lack of information about the company. The strongest question is "What am I not seeing that I should do?" It can be the case that leaders do not ask this question to those of us working in consultancies. Normally they want to hear only that which they wish to hear. When you start to say the difficult things, the reaction can be one of saying "No, it's not bad." If leaders in their elevated positions who normally take this stance were able to

ask this one question, then if they were able to discover that which they were not previously seeing, it would be very powerful.

**Maria Morales Robinson, Author & Co-founder Holonomics Education**

# What Are the Problems to Doing Your Job?

What are the non-task related barriers to the job you do? Once again you can see a teacher speaking there. I've always taught in the city, and I've done the worst of the worst. Kids that will throw chairs at you and stuff like that. I've always worked in difficult schools, and I've never felt – and this is not me being a hero – I've never felt the children were my problem. It's always the fabric around you – all the people that are supposed to be supporting you from the top. For me, the most important question for leadership and management to be asking their employees is, "What are the problems to doing your job? Is there a better way to do what we've asked you to do? Does the company waste money?"

**Mark Ricketts CEO, ImpactRI**

# What Do You Need Me to Do to Help You Do Your Job Better?

What do you need for me to do to help you do your job better?  
Period, end of sentence. Okay, end of question.

I discounted servant leadership, when I first learned about it. I was managing my own career track, I was progressing nicely, and I wanted to be the one in charge. However, as I moved into progressively more responsible roles, my perception changed. Indeed, I was just talking to someone this morning about the promotion track that I wound up on.

My goal was to create the organization in which everybody wanted to work. I wanted to be the one who never had any vacancies in my organization, because people who worked there felt supported. They knew I had their back and together we could deliver better results. We'd all know who we were serving through a well-defined and equally understood line of sight to the customer.

**Martha Kesler, Founder of Buffalo Creek Consulting**

# Are You Happy Here?

If I as a leader or manager doesn't have happy people, then something is very wrong. But if I have a good work environment, I trust them. I don't micromanage. They are motivated, and if there's a good collaboration, they are going to be happy here. That's very important. Several years ago, I was working with a customer when an employee approached me who said, "Masa, please don't share this with my manager. I got a job offer that increases my salary by 20% (which is really nice), but I won't accept it because if I do I'll go back to the nightmares we don't have here. So, I'd rather stay here where I'm happier, stress-free and where I can go back to my family."

**Masa K Maeda, CEO, ValueInnova**

# What Can We Do Better?

It's a simple a question as, "What can we do better?," but you have to truly listen to the response. It's a simple question but oftentimes people go into it and think they know the answer, so they don't really listen to it. Or they don't create a safe container for people to give honest and open feedback. The people closest to the customer are oftentimes the least paid or least

listened to, yet they are often the people who have the true answers. A lot of times, the solutions they have can be as simple as switching around a simple process, but they cost nothing and can have great effect.

**Michael Anderson, Author & Leadership Coach**

# Do You Know What You're Up To?

I'll answer it in an idealistic sense first and then get a little more real. In an idealistic sense, the questions I think they should be asking employees are, "Do you know what you're up to?" and "Do you know what you're really capable of?" I only call these questions idealistic because for most people, "Do you really know what you're capable of?" sounds like a very loaded question. It's a self-esteem issue. It gets into personal psychology. It's a bit beyond the scope of most leaders or managers to mess with people's psychology.

**Michael Neill, Coach & CEO, Genius Catalyst**

# How Can I Help?

I think it would have to be something about, “How can I help?” What can I do as your manager to help you find purpose and autonomy? And also to a degree, “How can help you become a master at what you do?” People love it when they get better at something. It is valuable for managers to find out what they can do to create opportunities for people to find out what excites them. An important part of being a manager in my view is to create an environment where creativity and well-being thrives. This kind of environment arises from a realization of where well-being, creativity, and motivation comes from, and then helping each and every employee to have this realization for themselves. By doing so, relationships grow stronger, conflicts disappear, stress goes down, and thriving goes through the roof both regarding employee satisfaction and in the earnings of the company.

**Natasha Swerdloff, Author & Owner, The Principles Institute**

# How Can I Empower You?

The most important question is, how can I empower you? How can I help you? If leaders can ask, how can I help you be more successful? That's a great question. Leadership is there literally to impact someone's life positively and help them be more successful because if we can do that, then we are more successful. That's how the pieces fit together in the right way. As a leader, you are helping others achieve their goals and be more successful. That's what you need to do. Help those individuals achieve their goals rather than, "You're here to serve me and make me better." No, that's not the right way for leadership.

If a leader can ask the employee, how can I best serve you and help you be successful then the equation is better. It works better because if that employee is more successful that leader it will be successful.

**Nick Hughes, Founder, Founders Live**

# What Do You Need to Learn, and How Can We Help You?

At Calsoft, we help employees identify their life purpose by assisting them in defining what they want to do. For example, they may say, “I want to be a senior consultant.” Maybe they don’t know their life purpose itself, but at least at this time, they know that they want to be a senior consultant. So then we ask them. “Okay, if you wish to be successful as a consultant, what does it take for you to get there?” Then we specifically ask them, “What skills do you need to master?” in three categories: People, Innovation, and Entrepreneurship.

**Nem Bajra, CEO, Calsoft Systems, Inc.**

# How Can the Organization Serve You Better?

Very simple. Number one, how can the organization serve you better? Number two, how do we give you the right tools? And number three, how do we give you the right opportunities so that you grow? Because if you grow, the company grows. The other important thing is that we want to give people challenging work. We don't do that. We try to simplify it.

**Norman Bodek, Lean Leader & Author, Owner PCS Press**

# What Obstacles Exist That I Can Clear for You?

The key question I would always tell managers to ask and that I would ask myself is, "What obstacles exist that I can clear for you to help you better do your job?" Because there are always obstacles. It could be an individual blocking things. It could be

organizational. Or it could be a lack of training or awareness of the employee or even understanding what's expected. A manager's job is to clear obstacles, because as you're higher up in the org chain, you're probably going to have more authority and ability to do that. You can also with your better vantage point find solutions. You might recognize that "We can't move that roadblock, but you know what? There's a path over here that we can put you on."

**Patrick Ross, Entrepreneur, Marketing & Communications**

# What Have You Improved Today?

If you want to keep it simple, it's "What have you improved today?" If you want to go philosophical, it's "What have you done to improve the quality of someone else's life today?"

**Paul Akers, Author & President, FastCap**

# How Do You Intend to Do This?

I think they need to ask them how they intend to do the things they are doing, mainly the things that are new and beyond their existing capabilities. It's important to ask why—people need to understand the why and the mission. Most leaders ask what. I want you to do this and this and this. Most employees will say, “Well, ok, boss,” but they may not know how. So later on if they fail, you get into a disciplinary conversation. The three questions are why, what and how. How do you intend to do this? Then you can start to explore their capabilities whether they know how to do it or not. If they don't know how then that conversation becomes clearer, then you can help them or find resources to help them learn how.

**Paul David Walker, Author & CEO, Genius Stone Partners**

# What's Getting in Your Way Keeping You From Getting Stuff Done?

Who is management? I think most of us have a good idea what is meant by “management”. It’s the people way above our pay grade who are running the company and telling everyone what to do. Right? But is that really the best way to think about management—especially in today’s fast-paced rapidly changing high technology world? First, I believe a lot of people confuse management and leadership. This may be ok in certain situations, but it is important to keep the distinction clear. Simply put, we manage “stuff”, and we lead people. By stuff, I mean artifacts like requirements, test procedures, design documents, code, user guides and so on. One reason it is important to know the difference is because the best solutions to people problems are different from the best solutions to “stuff” problems. If you accept my distinction on management and leadership, the most important question “management” should be asking employees

is something like, “What’s getting in your way keeping you from getting your “stuff” done?”

**Paul McMahon, Principal Consultant, PEM Systems**

# What Do We Need to Subtract?

One of the most valuable questions you could ever ask is, what do we need to subtract? It’s really easy to add and sometimes easy to multiply. The really hard stuff in business is division and subtraction. This is part of 80/20. Another thing that you should be asking employees is for honest feedback. Now the culture of the company will determine whether you actually get honest feedback or not. People know whether they can be honest or whether they have to make up a story their boss will accept. In most companies, you don’t actually have a culture of honesty.

**Perry Marshall, Bestselling Author & World-Renowned Consultant**

# Who Would You Be and What Would You Do If You Had 100% Freedom?

My response is completely linked to your first question: Who would you be and what would you do if you had 100% freedom? Maybe this question goes with a subset of questions. For example: How can I help you to express your full potential? I believe our role as leaders is to help people develop themselves. When you do that, they will be satisfied. They will generate results and perform. Everybody wins.

This question is put within a context made of a vision, a dream and a culture. When you give freedom without any context then after that you need to address it. To avoid an intervention, you have to prepare and then ask this question, having set the context: “Just imagine you have full freedom. Who would you be and what would you do?”

**Pierre-Boris Kalitventzeff, Founder, Enthalpies**

# What Can I Do for You Today?

There's a trend right now of servant leadership. Basically, looking at leadership as a service role which is there to empower and enable the rest of the team. The "rest of the team" can be engineers or it can be a more cross-cutting team with its own product, quality assurance, and project management.

Being a servant leader means my role is to empower them all to do the best job they can. Often that is merely providing context and information from other corners of the organization they may not be privy to.

It's also taking my project experience and shaping it so they get the benefit without having to make the same mistakes. It's making sure they have training opportunities they can take advantage of such as conferences and what not, as well as making sure they're comfortable and productive in their work environment.

Only by asking and interacting with the folks on a daily basis will you understand what it means to that person or what that person requires to help them feel fulfilled.

# Are You Happy?

The most important question management should be asking employees is, are you happy? Now this question opens a huge can of worms because unhappiness can come from personal issues, organizational issues, or both. It is hard for management to differentiate those from each other due to their interconnected nature. However, it reflects the paradigm shift in leadership we see happening. Leaders will only have value in future organizations if they transform into coaches for their teams. Only if management is able to help and train employees to become better at understanding themselves and become better at decision making and problem-solving. Hence, when employees are learning and growing, they will stay engaged and happy.

Robert Fuchs, HappinessGroup.eu

# What Do You Think?

Very simple, “What do you think?” Employees are also customers. Every one of your employees is a customer of a lot of

other different companies. As customers, they are probably more in touch with the rapidly changing world than they are in their role as employees. So this is a tremendous resource that management has in getting insight into the mind of customers. In this rapidly changing digital world in which we suddenly find ourselves in—because we are in a hyper-connected world thanks to the digital revolution—the customer’s voice is far stronger in terms of influencing the market than it was two or three decades ago. So by tapping into this rich resource within the organization and asking employees to share their customer view of the world, we could give tremendous insight to management on how they need to adapt to remain successful in these rapidly changing markets.

**Rod Collins, Strategy & Innovation Expert, Optimity Advisors**

## **What Do You Think?**

I believe the most important question to ask is, “What do you think?” But I would suggest that it needs to be done in a style that fits the employee and the organization. Now it gets harder to do that with the scale of the company, but you have to do it within the confines of us being human beings. For me, it’s not about taking people out for dinner and gathering them to talk or

taking them to an environment that's not theirs, it's sitting down at the canteen or sitting by their desk and saying, "Hey, you know about this, what do you think?"

**Russell Dalglish, Managing Partner, Exolta**

# How Can We Ask More Questions?

I can't say there is a most important question. I just think management should be asking questions. I don't think we ask enough questions. We make a tremendous amount of assumptions. We forget that we live in a thought created reality and nobody thinks exactly the same thing at exactly the same time, so we are going to live in different realities. Truly we live in separate realities. But we forget this. It's easy to forget it because our reality looks so clear and obvious to us.

Management lives in their own reality and they forget to talk to their people. I can't tell you how many times I've worked with an executive, and they'll be so perplexed or so confused about their team's behavior. I'll say, "Have you asked them?" And they'll say, "No." It's just a surprise to me. I don't know that there's a magic

question, but I really think that being curious, asking questions, and having an open dialogue is a critical factor a team's success.

**Sandra Krot, Human Dimension Consultant, Insight Principles**

# How Can I Make You Look Good?

I think the best leaders understand that when they manage well, it makes them look good. One thing I've seen especially in the public sector after working there nearly 20 years, is that leaders are threatened by the success of their employees. They miss this whole huge opportunity.

When your employees are doing a great job and you acknowledge that, you look good. If you have a good leader then you can say this is what I want to do in my job. This is how I want to make an impact. This is how I can make you look good. Is that what you want? Is this how I can make you look good? Is this your ultimate goal as a leader?

**Sarah Elkins, Communications Coach, Storyteller at Elkins Consulting**

# How Could We Come Together in Service of Something Greater Than Ourselves?

I think it would be something along the lines of how could we come together in service of something greater than ourselves? To put it in its most simple terms, I think that's what teams and organizations are ultimately all about. It's about creating something that's greater than the sum of parts — a reflection of individuals working alone could never achieve. I also think the service part of the above question, bringing something new and more valuable to the world, is an important part of that question of that mission. My observation on a personal level is that what truly motivates people at a deep level, is that sense of being part of something larger that goes beyond my little life and needs. I think to the extent that any of this can move us out of self-absorption and into an orientation that is about serving the greater whole, that's the degree to which we feel fulfilled. We're willing to go the extra mile.

**Sarah Rozenhuler, Author & Dialogue Coach, Bridgework Consulting**

# What Drives You Most?

I think it's important for any leader to ask their employees what drives you most? What are you here for? That motivation is going to be different for everyone and actually that motivation will change for the person over a course of their career too. It's important to understand what drives them most at that very particular point in their life.

Then I'd ask, what do you need to be successful?

Thirdly, how can I best support you? That last question I'm super passionate about. I don't hear enough people leaders ask it or, what can I do to unblock certain things for you?

**Sesil Pir, Industrial/Organizational Psychologist, HR Expert**

## Why?

“Why?” That's the absolute most important question an employee can ask a leader. “Why are we doing this?” And that question can get applied at a whole host of different directions. “Why is the strategy what it is? Why has the organizational

restructuring happened?” The questions can be big picture why questions or they can also be on the day-to-day matters. But I think that we should be asking the people around us why? Why are we meeting? Why is this the strategy? Why are we doing what we’re doing? When people get an answer to that question, it gives them a) a sense of engagement and a sense of belief in what they’re doing, and b) it empowers them to make good decisions.

**Simon Heath, Executive Communications Coach**

## **What Is It That I’m Not Seeing?**

I would say the most important question a leader can ask their people in an organization is “What is it that I am not seeing?” Half of our book, *Holonomics* is dedicated to what we call the dynamics of seeing. Unless you can open up someone’s way of seeing, they’re just not going to see the problem. They won’t see, be mindful of the impact of their words. You can’t instigate profound change without changing the way of seeing. What’s different and what’s quite powerful about *Holonomics* is that we’re also very inspired by certain philosophies, phenomenology, and hermeneutics. What’s listening? It’s all

about the way of seeing and the way of understanding meaning in the world, how are you going to have meaningful experiences?

**Simon Robinson, Author & Co-founder Holonomics Education**

# What Do You Bring to the Table That I Don't Know About?

It is my profound belief that somewhere in your workforce is the answer to everything that you need to succeed beyond measure in your business. But due to managers who knowledge hog, they keep the knowledge to themselves. Sometimes it's ineffective management that is top heavy, or sometimes it's management that never gets to know your team. Quite often for me, it's differing communication styles — there is a massive effect from this. So often people feel undervalued, underutilized, and undermined. How frustrating to be sitting there with the solution and know that your boss — due to ego, dismissiveness, or lack of appreciation of your qualities and attributes — will never hear what you have to say.

**Steph Holloway, Founder, Elemental Potential**

# Why Do You Come to Work Every Day?

Ask why do you come to work every day and really dig into it. Don't settle for the politically correct response. The essence of that question should become a cultural norm that the leadership should adopt and adhere to at all levels. But don't just ask this question but follow up on it to try to cater to the needs of the individual in as much as is possible in the business competitive environment. Figure out how to use the inner forces that each one of us has or the things we care about so that driver goes in the direction of where you want to go with the company. Align people and the company in one direction.

**Steve Tendon, Managing Partner, TameFlow**

## What Don't We Know?

Obviously, front-line employees know more about what's going on in the day-to-day aspects of a business than anybody else. At

every level, there's a certain amount of information that gets lost as it moves up. So what don't we know? is a great place to start.

Other great questions are:

How can we help you accomplish your work and your purpose?

Do you have the people and the tools you need to accomplish what we're asking of you?

Are we doing things—or asking you to do things—that don't match up with our mission, our purpose and our core values?

Where are we out of alignment?

What unintended consequences are possible from what we're doing? How many times do change initiatives fail because the front-line people know: If I do this, THAT is going to happen, so there's no way on Earth I'm going to do this! Often, our people know what the unintended consequences are going to be. So how about if we ask them that question way before we've rolled out the initiative and printed all the collateral materials?

**Sue Elliott, Founder, Easier Way Inc.**

# What Can I Do to Help You Grow?

The most important question is, what can I do to help you grow? What can I do to help you be you in our organization? What roadblocks do you see that prevent you from being who you want to be? You are yourself in the rest of your life, so why should you switch off at work?

Some leaders and managers in the organization are key players because we are hierarchically organized in most organizations. It's up to those key players to open those spaces of security, freedom and opportunity. When we ask questions like this, this can help hammer away roadblocks, open spaces, and get one step further to what the organization and employees could be. It's the same level. Meet people where they are.

**Tobias Theel, Founder, INNOVERSITY INSTITUTE**

# How Can I Make You More Effective?

I think the most important question is, “How can I make you more effective?” The reality is if we want leaders to lead, we want them to be looking for ways of unlocking the maximum value from people. So I think they have to ask this question. They have to be looking for how they can unlock that potential. Furthermore, just looking isn’t enough. Asking is critical. How can I make your life better, so we deliver more? We can phrase that any way you want, but that’s what it boils down to. How can I unlock your abilities?

**Tom Cagley, President, Tom Cagley & Associates**

# About Bill Fox



Hi, I'm Bill Fox, and I help build forward thinking human workplace cultures.

I lead a growing global conversation with 75+ forward-thinking leaders to help you discover new and better ways to achieve your most important strategic objectives. My work will help you discover new pathways, make better decisions, and help solve today's most vexing workplace challenges.

I'm the author of *The Future of the Workplace*, the *Be a Workplace of the Future NOW Series*, and *5 Minutes to Process Improvement Success*.

## **Connect with Me:**

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# What others are saying...

*“Stepping into the future looks a lot like this. I applaud the direction you are taking with this initiative.”*

—Gwen Kinsey, Leadership Coach

*“This conversation invites and allows whole beings to show up; like whole food, whole beings are more nutritious to the system they exist within.”*

—Anonymous

*“Your questions are more important than our answers! Why? Because every leader ought to be asking him/herself those questions and implementing the forward-thinking insights that will create meaningful purpose, and superior performance.”*

—John Bell, Former CEO at Jacobs Suchard

# The Forward Thinking Approach

“The forward-thinking approach creates an opening in the fabric that’s built from each person’s deep desire to live a life that matters — and a knowing that much more is possible.

In this ever-changing world we find ourselves in, it requires each of us to enter into a quest to transform ourselves and learn new ways of living and working together that elevate everyone.”

— Bill Fox, Co-founder, Forward Thinking Workplaces