



How can leaders use questions?



Small Questions Can Be A Start

Siddharth Watwe on Quora: What are

1. Where are you from?
2. What do you like to do in your spare time?
3. Do you like your job?
4. What's your most eventful travel?
5. Which cuisine do you usually prefer?
6. Are you a cat person or a dog person?
7. **Any thoughts on calculus?**
8. Do you play Candy Crush?
9. Are you on Quora?
10. Do you like vampires?
11. **Nice phone. How much RAM does it have?**
12. Gryffindor, Hufflepuff, Ravenclaw or Slytherin?
13. Can you swim?
14. Do you smoke?
15. Do you prefer thin crust pizza over thick crust?
16. Which would you choose between Venice and Paris?
17. Want to go for a walk?
18. What's your reaction to mendicants, in general?
19. How would you pronounce, 'g h o t i' ?
20. The book is always better (than the movie). Right?
21. On a scale of 1 to 10, how scary are cockroaches?
22. You have been horribly cheated by a phony friend. What is your first reaction?
23. Pasta with/ without sauce? If with, white/red?
24. Why does the earth go round the sun?
25. Why was 6 afraid of 7?

[Source](#) of the 25 questions

[48 more small talk questions](#)

But, Quality of Questions Determines Quality of Life

Who are my people?

How can I love them more completely?

How can I love myself more?

How can my life become a shared search for wisdom, goodness, and beauty?

Is exploring those questions enough for a complete, high quality life?

One Option: Questioning and Assuming Motives

Politicians question each other's motives

Business people make assumptions about ours - vanity, greed, ease, comfort.

Humane leaders question their own motives

Another Option: Inquiry Into Infinities

“Yes, if you're looking for infinity, just close your eyes!”


— Milan Kundera, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*

- Love is an interrogation of a second infinity*
 - The infinite unfolding of another's values, experience of life, learnings
- Humane self leaders explore the infinite truth of the world and themselves
- And become more curious about the humans around them, the second infinities

*Novelist Milan Kundera, speaks of a loved one as a “second infinity” to be explored, in *Book of Laughter and Forgetting*

Questions Direct and Shape Consciousness

- Questions are invitations to explore
 - The world
 - Our own experience



What did you have for
breakfast today?





Was your breakfast today:

Enjoyable?

Healthy?

Beautiful?





Was your choice of breakfast today influenced by:


Recent learnings?

Habit?


Family of origin?

Your larger culture?





Are you asking questions that
lead you toward the life
you need and want?





The

quality of our questions

also determines the

quality of our leadership



Drucker's Core Functions of Leaders as Questions

- Setting objectives → “What are we doing?”
- Organising the group → “Who will do what, when?”
- Motivating and communicating → “Why does this matter?”
- Measuring performance → “Where are we vs our goals?”
- Developing people → “How can I help you grow?”

Questions Serve Basic OODA Loop Functions Too

Observe

- What is our fact base? What can we see, hear, etc? What data is available?

Orient

- How do we make sense of this data?
- Where are we? What is our current status? Where are we relative to plan?


Decide

- What are our options? How shall we reach the best possible decision?

Act

- Who will do what, when?

Wonder = Wisdom



“I am better off than he is... for he knows nothing and thinks that he knows.

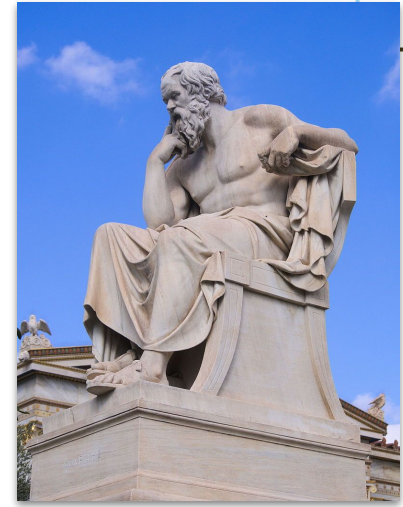
I neither know nor think I know.”

— Socrates, *Apology*



Socratic Method

Socrates (470-399 BC) was a Greek philosopher who sought to understand people's' views by **asking continual questions.**



As a philosopher, Socrates asked until a contradiction was exposed, thus proving the fallacy of the initial assumptions. This can be useful in organizations seeking to understand first principles or root causes.

As leaders, we are often looking to quickly gain insights to decide next actions.

Socratic Leadership

Good questions help leaders gain trust and information

Information & Accountability

- How many of X have we completed today?
- When will Y be completed?

Trust

- **Transactional**
 - How can I help you?
 - Do you have everything you need?
- **Relational**
 - How are you, really?
 - How can I support your career goals?

Truth

- **Shared Search for Truth**
 - How do we create value?
 - What can we learn from this?



Relational trust & a shared search for truth

are at the heart of

Humane Leadership



Relational Trust & Psychological Safety

- Are earned over time by genuine curiosity and care
- There is not short cut, there is no scaling
- This is one reason that frontline leaders retaining healthy, long-term relationships with their team is such a driver of firm profitability.
 - The cost of building relational trust with a new employee is huge and largely invisible to senior leadership
 - Unless they are doing root cause analysis on low productivity gains.

Questions Help Us Connect & Learn

Be genuinely interested to learn:

- What are your top goals?
- What are your key projects?
- What challenges do you face?
- Who are your inspirations?
- Where did you grow up?
- What was your path here?
- How is your plan going so far?
- What's next for your project?

“To be interesting,
be interested”

— Dale Carnegie

Curiosity and CLEAR Persuasion

Being curious about a person's needs and perspective is a great way to earn influence with them:

- **Connect**
 - **Learn**
 - **Earn** - actions that earn influence, trust = shared search
 - **Astonish** - exceed expectations
 - **Roots** - request next-level collaboration
- Authentic presence, intentional attention and curiosity connect us as humans

Questions Help Us Earn Influence

Questions can help us understand what is

- Relevant
- Unique
- Visible
 - Current visibility that's appropriate
 - How to gain next-level visibility

CLEAR
RUV

Good Questions Are Openings in a Quest for Truth

Good questions create openings between the asker and the people asked because they:

- **Equalize** everyone - no one knows the answer, yet
- **Encourage** humility and thoughtfulness
- **Create** opportunities to step in
- **Energize** our curiosity
- **Engage** us in a shared search for truth



Weighted Questions Create Distance

Examples from a list of dating questions online that are freighted with values assumptions and insensitivity to the life experience of the other:

- What's the coolest thing about science?
 - Implies a value judgement based on their response
- Do you like to cook?
 - Assumes shared values
 - Yes or no question that can quickly tie into
 - Gender stereotypes
 - Potential eating disorder or body image triggers

Questions: Quest for Power or Shared Truth?

Poor questions are closed, rhetorical, or build on assumptions that may not be shared as they seek power for the inquisitor.

- Is this supposed to be some kind of a joke?
- Do you want this or not?
- You didn't think I would say yes to that, did you?
- Do you want to be a failure for the rest of your life?
- There's no point, is there?

Good questions are open, curious, and explore assumptions as they seek a shared understanding of reality.

- What can we learn from this situation?
- How is this important to us?
- What are the values we are aligned on?
- How can we make this great?
- What good can we help happen today?

