

Why Great Leaders ask Great Questions

Steve Mostyn

Steve Mostyn is one of the leading designers of senior executive leadership programs. He is an associate fellow at the Said Business School, University of Oxford.

The best leaders I know are not the ones with all the answers. They are the ones who know how to ask better questions.

Leaders who succeed over the long haul aren't those who always lead from the front. They are the ones who make space for others.

The best part is you don't need a title to start. You can start at any level by asking meaningful questions

**You can always recognize a good question
even if you don't have the answer.**

Building self awareness is the first step to help you ask better questions

The best leaders can ask great questions if they know two things:

firstly how they reflect

second, how to build a reflective practice that works for them

‘Reflective practice’ was coined by Donal Schon. It emphasizes taking time to stop, reassess how you are practicing a behavior or action and develop a hypothesis on why you are acting in a particular way.

**Reflective leaders grow more reflective
leaders**

Being truly reflective means being open to newness.

Reflective practice involves a cycle of noticing and describing

Gallup studies have shown that workplace engagement is at an all time low in 2023/2024.

The Gallup study highlights that micromanagement is one of the reasons for low workplace engagement.

Gallup lists micromanagement as

- Boss obsessed rather than customer obsessed
- Acceptance of less than best work to pander to leadership.
- Every conversation with the boss feels like an appraisal
- Every decision must be approved by the manager
- Constant bottlenecks due to excessive meetings
- Employees are afraid to share their opinions
- A lack of new leaders coming through the ranks
- Quick turnaround of talented experts
- Stifled creativity, innovation and agility.

‘Time is the scarcest of resource and unless that is managed , nothing else can be managed’ – Peter Drucker

Managers are under pressure to appear to be busy and adding immediate value.

Time is also an energy play. Your energy is a finite resource and is not limitless. It also has a significant if not transformational effect on others simply because you are an authority figure.

The best leaders ask the best questions and seek feedback. Feedback tells us also about the person giving it rather than the person receiving it.

Pfeffer 7 rules of power

- Get out of your own way
- Break the rules
- Show up in a powerful way
- Create a powerful brand
- Network relentlessly
- Use your power
- Understand that once you acquire power, what you did to get it will be forgiven , forgotten or both.

There are 3 types of managers

- 1. Affiliative managers are interested in their popularity vs organizational goals**
- 2. Achievement oriented managers care about meeting objectives but focusses on their performance**
- 3. Institutional managers are motivated by power not for personal gain, but to influence others and get things done.**

Every organization is a contested arena and business is in the business of change.

Where does my power come from?

- My own sense of influence from early experiences
- My role in the firm
- My expertise
- My connections internal and external
- My experience of 'seen this before'
- My ability to offer tough feedback
- My persistence
- My ability to offer perspective on difficult issues.

How you grow your network is a crucial element of your success as an aspiring leader.

**The best networks are built on mutuality,
they benefit others and only as a side effect
benefit you.**

The more effective your network, the easier you can get things done.

It is a mutuality of giving and receiving.

Do not be in a negative network, this is a bunch of people who are cynics in the organization.

Networks are

strategic

personal

operational

What do I want my network to do? What is the purpose of my network?

Curiosity is a tool of self discovery and network expansion.

When you drive change, there are three types of losses for people involved

power losses

competence losses

loyalties losses

Authority figures provide

direction

protection

order

Key sources of leadership learning are:

bosses

turnarounds

increase in job scope

horizontal moves

new initiatives