

# Asking Thoughtful & Reflective Questions





## What is Thoughtful and Reflective Questioning?

Thoughtful and Reflective Questioning is the second skill set of effective communication. Questioning can serve two purposes:

- Help inform the coach of the team's knowledge and intentions
- Help the team clarify its thinking and uncover possibilities and solutions

Thoughtful questions are designed to help teams reflect on their practice. Using carefully chosen questions will allow the coach to probe for deeper complexity and encourage team self reflection. As a coach, careful thinking about the type of questions to ask is important. Considering the purpose and intended outcome will lead to choosing effective questions.

## Why is Thoughtful and Reflective Questioning important?

As coaches develop the art of thoughtful questioning, they can guide teams to be reflective of their practice. Thoughtful questioning helps build team capacity through evaluation of current status and determination of next steps.

## How does a coach help the team develop the skills and competencies to function independently?

Carefully choosing specific, thoughtful questions is a process to help a team move forward with focus and intent. As a team moves through the planning and improvement process, a coach's use of strategic, reflective questions supports team progress.

Asking the right kinds of questions empowers the team to move forward to action in powerful ways. Through questioning, the coach sends the message that the team's ideas are critical to the planning process. The team gains confidence and becomes more skilled at working through tough problems or thorny situations.

A thoughtful question does more than convey respect for the team's ideas; it develops the team's problem solving abilities. However, when a coach is overly directive, or asks questions that are condescending, disingenuous or put people on the spot, the confidence of a team is reduced and the team's performance and success are sabotaged.

The process of asking thoughtful and reflective questions supports both short-term and long-term capacity building goals: the short-term goal of helping the team to generate a solution to the issue at hand and the long-term goal of helping the team develop the skills and tools to handle similar issues in the future independently.



## Job Aid

### Thoughtful, Reflective Questions Starters

- List of question stems, grouped by intended outcomes, to facilitate the development of thoughtful, reflective questions.

## Resources and References

### **Facilitating Reflection: *A Manual for Leaders and Educators***, Julie Reed & Christopher Koliba

- This online manual helps coaches focus on helping teams build capacity through development of thoughtful, reflective questioning skills. [http://www.uvm.edu/~dewey/reflection\\_manual/](http://www.uvm.edu/~dewey/reflection_manual/)

### **The Art of Effective Questioning: *Asking the Right Question for the Desired Result***, Irene Leonard

- This website includes a variety of helpful resources including questions stems to help coaches craft specific thoughtful and reflective questions. <http://www.coachingforchange.com/pub10.html>



## Thoughtful, Reflective Question Stems

*One of the most important jobs of a coach is to ask thoughtful questions for specific purposes. As a coach, careful thinking about the type of question you want to ask is important. Considering the purpose and intended outcome of your question will help you choose effective questions. The question stems below are grouped by intended outcome. This document will provide guidance in developing thoughtful questions that will help a team move forward effectively.*

### Asking Questions That Seek *Reasons* and/or *Evidence*

- What events could have happened that...?
- Can you compare...?
- Do you know another instance where...?
- What was the turning point...?
- Can you share an example...?
- Is the evidence/data clearly linked to....?
- Does the evidence/data include qualitative and quantitative components...?
- What evidence supports.....?

### Asking Questions That Help the Team Shift from *Descriptive Conversations* (e.g., facts, information, actions) to *Interpretive Conversations* (e.g., analysis, comparison, evaluation)

- What changes would you make to solve...?
- Can you elaborate on the reasons why...?
- How would you estimate the results for....?
- What conclusions can you draw...?
- Why was this project successful...?

### Asking Questions That Require More Than a *Yes* or *No* Response

- Why do the results show....?
- What can you tell me about...?
- What happened after...?
- What differences exists between...?

### Asking Questions That Help Identify Issues within the Context of the *Bigger Picture*

- What is the relationship between...?
- Has this ever happened before...?
- Why did these changes occur...?
- What do you think are some of the motives behind...?
- Why do you think this happening...?
- Can you elaborate on the reason...?
- Why was this project successful...?



## Asking Questions That Help the Team *Set Goals and Determine Actions*

- What changes could be made to solve...?
- What would happen if...?
- What can be done to minimize/maximize...?
- What would you recommend....?
- How would you prioritize...?
- How might this look different...?
- What other ways do you plan to...?
- What would happen if...?
- What might be an alternative...?

## Asking Questions That *Direct Focus* Back to the Team

- Can you tell me more about...?
- What evidence supports...?
- What do others think about...?
- Has this question been asked before...?
- Can you help me understand...?