



Asking Thought-Provoking Questions

As a wellness practitioner, you're a subject matter expert in the field. But since you're not a mind reader, it's impossible to understand the full context of your organization, the politics involved, and individual stakeholders' viewpoints without asking questions. Questions have the potential to unlock new knowledge, build connections, and understand the bigger picture.

Not all questions are created equal. This toolkit is designed to help you ask not just any questions, but thought-provoking ones.

Before we get into the tactics of asking good questions, you have to be prepared with a beginner's mindset (outlined in the mindset section). This will help you start the conversation with genuine curiosity and interest in the person or people on the other side of the conversation.

Starting with a beginner's mind will help you get in the right frame of mind to not just ask your questions but LISTEN to their answers. With our short attention spans and competing priorities, it's easy to tune out what is happening right in front of us. Think about the last time you were truly listened to. Chances are it made you feel special and think fondly of the person who listened to you.

"Most people do not listen with the intent to understand; they listen with the intent to reply."

—Stephen Covey

There are many barriers to listening. Read through the list below and select a few common barriers that get in your way of listening.

TEN BARRIERS TO LISTENING

1. No capacity (mentally overloaded or short on time)
2. Waiting to respond/formulating your reply
3. Having an emotional response
4. Holding a preconceived idea or bias
5. Judgment about the person
6. Preoccupied with other thoughts
7. Commiserating
8. Problem solving
9. Multitasking
10. Not interested



Asking questions instead of “telling” builds trust and connection with others, avoids confirmation bias, and is a gentle way to challenge current assumptions without putting others on the defensive.

Before you start firing away with questions, it’s important to plan in advance. Here are some considerations for before, during, and after the meeting.

1. Identify what you want to know. What’s the No. 1 thing you want to take away from the conversation?
2. Aim for open-ended questions (meaning they can’t simply answer yes or no). These questions generally give you the most insightful answers.
3. Brainstorm your questions. Take a few minutes to list all of the questions you want to know.
4. Prioritize your questions. You may start with a list of ten questions but you won’t have time to ask all ten. Asterisk the top three questions that you would be disappointed not to ask. Ask yourself: What answers would I like to have versus what answers do I need?
5. Don’t ask something you already know or can easily research.
6. You may want to give the interviewee(s) questions in advance. Some people need to think through their responses before speaking them out loud.
7. Before you start asking questions, remind them why you are asking them. Also, tell them how their responses will be used.
8. Warm people up for a couple of minutes before you dive right into it. If possible, try to connect with them and their interests.
9. Don’t be shy about probing their responses if you don’t understand their initial answer. A few ways to do this are, “Tell me more,” “Help me understand what you said about y,” or “I’m not sure I’m tracking. Can you clarify x?”
10. Notice if a question is causing someone discomfort. If you notice it and they can’t seem to get to an answer, change your line of questioning.
11. Be okay with silence. This means no interrupting!
12. After the meeting, write a few notes about what you learned.
13. Depending on the context, it never hurts to email the person and thank them for their time.
14. Practice, practice, practice! Nothing helps you get better at asking good questions like practice.



THOUGHT-PROVOKING QUESTIONS

- » What is the company trying to achieve this year? Next year?
- » What are the most important results that drive profitability?
- » How do you see wellness supporting those results?
- » How does our approach to wellness fit into the bigger picture of the organization?
- » How can I reflect the company's vision, values, and strategy within my role?
- » Why is focusing on wellness important to the company?
- » What are you hoping to achieve?
- » What does success look like? Feel like?
- » At the end of the year, what would you call a success?
- » What comes up for you when you hear the word "wellness" or "well-being"?
- » What are you trying to accomplish this year? Long term? How can I better support those objectives?
- » What's working well within your team or department? What challenges are you having?
- » From your perspective, how could someone in my role be most helpful to you?
- » What do we need to do differently with employee wellness to help you (or the company) be successful?
- » What's working about our current wellness approach that we should continue?
- » What do you think isn't working very well about our current wellness approach?
- » What are the indicators of success? How can we monitor progress?
- » What's the smallest change we could make in the overall wellness of our employees that would make the biggest difference?
- » I'd love to get your feedback on an initiative planned for this year. How do you see it working or not working in your department?