

Asking Powerful Questions

QUESTIONS FOR ALL SEASONS

Here is a series of generative questions that we and other colleagues have found useful to stimulate new knowledge and creative thinking in a wide variety of situations around the world. Look at these questions to stimulate your own thinking about questions related to your own specific situation. Play. Use your imagination.

Questions for Focusing Collective Attention on Your Situation

- What question, if answered, could make the most difference to the future of (your specific situation)?
- What's important to you about (your specific situation) and why do you care?
- What draws you/us to this inquiry?
- What's our intention here? What's the deeper purpose (the big "why") that is really worthy of our best effort?
- What opportunities can you see in (your specific situation)?
- What do we know so far/still need to learn about (your specific situation)?
- What are the dilemmas/opportunities in (your specific situation)?
- What assumptions do we need to test or challenge here in thinking about (your specific situation)?
- What would someone who had a very different set of beliefs than we do say about (your specific situation)?

Questions for Connecting Ideas and Finding Deeper Insight

- What's taking shape? What are you hearing underneath the variety of opinions being expressed? What's in the center of the table?
- What's emerging here for you? What new connections are you making?
- What had real meaning for you from what you've heard? What surprised you? What challenged you?

- What's missing from this picture so far? What is it we're not seeing? What do we need more clarity about?
- What's been your/our major learning, insight, or discover so far?
- What's the next level of thinking we need to do?
- If there was one thing that hasn't yet been said in order to reach a deeper level of understanding/clarity, what would that be?

Questions That Create Forward Movement

- What would it take to create change on this issue?
- What could happen that would enable you/us to feel fully engaged and energized about (your specific situation)?
- What's possible here and who cares? (rather than "What's wrong here and who's responsible?")
- What needs our immediate attention going forward?
- If our success was completely guaranteed, what bold steps might we choose?
- How can we support each other in taking the next steps? What unique contribution can we each make?
- What challenges might come our way and how might we meet them?
- What conversation, if begun today, could ripple out in a way that created new possibilities for the future of (your situation)?
- What seed might we plant together today that could make the most difference to the future of (your situation)?

Human systems grow toward what they persistently ask questions about.

Source: The Art of Powerful Questions by Eric Vogt, Juanita Brown, and David Isaacs