

## The Power of Questions

By Daniel Ellenberg, Ph.D.

Questions are never objective or impartial. Answers emerge naturally from the type of questions we ask. In fact, the when we ask ourselves questions, it is as if we are doing an internal internet search. For example, when we ask ourselves what's wrong with us, we are typing in a command to search for responses that focus on how we are flawed and unworthy. It is as if a host of web sites then appears which reinforce all of our flaws. That's because when we request a computer search, the computer will only output information based on what we ask or program. For example, if we are looking for birds in the Northwest, cave dwellers in the Middle East, or early developments in automobiles, we will receive information specific to each of these requests. If we view the mind as that specific, which it is, then it's easy to understand the importance of feeding positive questions that will stimulate growth and not despair. We have the power to do this!

Therefore, it is important to ask questions that assume greater possibilities and do not focus on limitations. The bottom line is that if we ask lousy questions, we will receive lousy answers. If we ask empowering questions, we will receive empowering responses. Empowering questions can open doors that were previously locked. "Why do I always screw up?" or "What's wrong with me?" carry implicit assumptions that you are screwed up or that there is something wrong with you. How could you possibly come up with positive or helpful answers with a question like "What's wrong with me?"

Therefore, it's important to frame our questions around desirable outcomes. For example, if you are wondering about your level of accomplishment, consider how different your responses will be to these two different questions:

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- 1) Why can't I ever thrive?
- 2) How can I thrive more?

Responses to the first question will inevitably be disempowering and likely lead to depression: “I don't have what it takes.” “I'm too lazy.” “I'm just plain stupid.” Now consider responses to the second question. “I can make daily lists and check off whenever I accomplish each task.” “I can learn from people who have created the kind of thriving lives I want to experience.” “I can remember times in my life when I felt successful and follow my own recipe.”

Imagine the difference between asking these two different types of questions in your work and personal relationships. Which category does this question fall into? “Why can't my relationships be more fulfilling?” How about this question: “How can I help make my relationships more fulfilling?” It's rather obvious. Which questions do you typically ask about yourself or your relationships? Either write them down or just articulate them to yourself. The answers you receive are only as good as the questions you ask.

How about some stimulating questions? Consider these when you contemplate work relationships:

- How can I create more fulfilling, productive relationships with my workmates?
- How can I express more appreciation with my workmates?
- How can I/we make my relationships at work better, more creative?

Of course, we can only ask good questions when we give ourselves permission to ask questions in the first place. We must be willing to ask if we truly want to receive. Most of us are waiting to receive what we are unwilling to ask for. Then we get hurt and angry that other people have not delivered the goods that we ourselves did not request. Drama develops, conflicts emerge, and misunderstandings abound.

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Consider the following questions as guides to help you discover any obstacles to asking:

- What has stopped me from asking until now?
- What am I afraid of finding out?
- What reactions do I expect?
- Am I afraid that I will not be able to cope with other people's reactions?

By learning more about your fears, you will not be so driven by them. Then you are freer to ask and to receive or, if your questions do not lead to satisfying responses, you have more material with which to work. You at least know what's not working, rather than being left to your imagination only. So ask questions and be open to new levels of learning and creating.