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QUESTIONS THAT DRIVE CHANGE
A RESOURCE FOR SYSTEMS THINKERS

BACKGROUND: THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND AS YOU APPLY THESE QUESTIONS
See the article A powerful tool for change for guidance about the use of these questions. Please send me your favorite questions to add to this list--at neil@njbaker.net.

For promoting inquiry into ideas and problems
adapted from Argyris, Chris Flawed Advice and the Management Trap 2000
- What is it that leads you to believe this? (i.e. focus on specific observations and data)
- Have you tested your assumptions about this?
- What makes you sure your assumptions are correct?
- What data might we be missing?
- Are these proposed actions consistent with our intentions and values?
- Who has an opposite or different point of view?
- What are the weaknesses and risks we may be missing here?
- What goes on in our organization that prevents us from addressing and eliminating these problems?
- Am I seeing this clearly?
- Am I contributing to this problem in any way?

For promoting a learner stance
from Adams, Marilee Change Your Questions, Change your Life 2009
Questions from a judger stance (inhibit results)
- How can I prove I am right?
- Who is to blame?
- Why bother?
- What's wrong?
- What's wrong with me?
- What's wrong with them?

Questions from a learner stance (drive results)
- What are the facts?
- What outcomes do I want?
- What is possible?
- What responsibility do I and others have?
- Am I coming from a judger place?

For promoting a systems mindset

from Reinertson James L., et al, Seven Leadership Leverage Points for Organization-Level Improvement in Healthcare (Second Edition) Institute for Healthcare Improvement, IHI.org, 2008

Questions from a blaming mindset

- What errors of judgment and technique led to his? Who is at fault?

Questions from a systems mindset

- What were the systems factors that contributed to this problem (culture, structure, processes, as well as personal accountability)? How did I and others participate in creating this problem?

For promoting personal accountability and effectiveness

from Wackermann, Bill Flip the Script 2012

- What did I do that contributed to getting me to where I am?
- What could I have done differently?
- Do I blame others?

list of questions adapted from multiple authors

- What is really happening here?
- What am I thinking and feeling?
- What is the basis for my experience?
- What is my goal?
- What will be the most effective action I can take to move toward our goal?

For promoting a relationship-centered orientation to problems

from Suchmann, Anthony et al Leading Change in Healthcare: transforming organizations using complexity, positive deviance and relationship-centered care 2011

- Try to move **away** from the following command and control type questions:
  - What do I want to happen here?
  - What is wrong?
  - How do I fix it?
- and move **toward** relationship centered questions
  - What is trying to happen here?
  - What am I doing? How am I participating that contributes to this pattern?
  - What can I do differently that might disrupt this pattern and start a new one?
  - What can we do to reinforce desirable patterns--to help them grow and spread?
  - What are we doing here, right now?
  - What would you or I say if we let ourselves speak from the heart?

For promoting improved supervisor-employee relationships

from Crosby, Robert P. Cultural Change in Organizations: A Guide to Leadership and Bottom-Line Results 2011

- What's working well?

- What's not working well?
- What does the employee need more of from me?--or less of?
- What do I need more of from the employee?--or less of?
- What are we doing that we shouldn't?
- What should we be delegating that we are not?
- Do we have checks and balances in place for effective delegation?

For reflecting on success
from Suchmann, Anthony et al <u>Leading Change in Healthcare: transforming organizations using complexity, positive deviance and relationship-centered care</u> 2011
- What contributions to the success were made by each person?
- Who else was involved and what did they do that helped?
- What aspects of the setting or situation made a difference?
- What useful lessons could we take from this story?

For follow-up review of projects
Crosby, Robert P. <u>Solving the Cross-work puzzle</u> 2010
- What's changed in the external environment that affects our project?
- What's working well?
- What's the status of the schedule? the budget?
- What have we learned?
- What isn't working?
- What do we need to change?

For promoting open dialogue about your ideas and decisions with employees
from Crosby, Robert P. <u>Cultural Change in Organizations: A Guide to Leadership and Bottom-Line Results</u> 2011
- What do you especially agree with?
- What are your surprised or troubled about?
- What is missing?
- What's is your piece of the work and what will you do to pull this off?

For promoting clarity of decision making and delegation
from Crosby, Robert P. <u>Cultural Change in Organizations: A Guide to Leadership and Bottom-Line Results</u> 2011
- What is currently decided by me with little or no input?
- What is decided by me only after consultation?
- What decisions are delegated?
- What changes in the decision making patterns are desirable in the next 3, 6, 12 months?
- Are there times your work is delayed because you have to check with me?
- Are there certain decisions you would like to make yourself?

- Do you need additional training, information or resources to do this?
- Are you willing to help me think through appropriate boundaries and checks and balances in delegation so that I can still be responsible as a supervisor while giving you more autonomy in your work?

For promoting a systems understanding
Oshry, Barry Seeing Systems: unlocking the mysteries of organizational life 2007
- Describe your world for us.
- What are the issues you are dealing with?
- What are you feeling?
- How are you seeing other parts of the system? Are they helping or hindering you?
- How do you think other people are currently experiencing themselves and others?
- What are the issues and dilemmas other people are facing? Do you think they experience you as helping or hindering their work?

For obtaining effective feedback from others about yourself
Delong, Thomas J. Three Questions for Effective Feedback http://blogs.hbr.org/, August 2011
- What should I stop doing?
- What should I keep doing?
- What should I start doing?

For promoting a culture that constantly adapts, learns and changes
from Heifetz, Ronald, Grashow, Alexander, and Linksy, Marty The Practice of Adaptive Leadership 2009
- How is our external environment (including government regulations, competitors' actions and customers' priorities) changing?
- What internal changes are mirroring these external changes?
- What are the gaps between where we are (for example, in terms of profit, sustainability, or the diversity of our workforce) and where we want to be?
- How will we know that we are successful?
- What challenge might be just beyond the horizon?

For challenging the status quo
Kouzes, James M., Posner, Barry Z., The Leadership Challenge 2007
- What evidence exists that we are living by our values and making decisions consistent with those values?
- What have you done in the past week to improve so that you're better this week than last?
- How useful is this in becoming the best that we can be?
- How useful is this for stimulating creativity and innovation?
- Why do we do this and why do we do that?

For promoting a scientific approach to improvement

adapted from Langley, Gerald J., Moen, Ronald D., Nolan, Kevin M., Nolan, Thomas W., Norman, Clifford L., Provost, Lloyd P., The Improvement Guide, Second edition 2009

- What are we trying to accomplish?
- How will we know that a change is an improvement?
- What change can we make that will result in improvement?
- What small test could we do today that will help us learn how a particular change will work in our system?

For developing high performing systems

Spear, Steven J., Chasing the Rabbit: how market leaders outdistance the competition and how great companies can catch up and win 2008

- What results or outputs is the system meant to achieve?
- Who is responsible for performing what sequence of steps to achieve those objectives?
- How are handoffs managed across the connections that link individual steps?
- What methods are used within a step to achieve success?
- For every level of specification, are there built-in tests to indicate when the system or process is failing?

For promoting continuous improvement of systems

Spear, Steven J., Chasing the Rabbit: how market leaders outdistance the competition and how great companies can catch up and win 2008

- What problem did you find?
- What causes did you assign to those problems?
- What changes did you make to remove the problems?
- What did you expect the results of the changes to be?
- What outcomes did you achieve?
- Did the outcomes meet with your predictions?

For promoting appreciative Inquiry

excerpted with editing from Cooperrider, David L. et al Appreciative inquiry: Rethinking Human Organization Toward a Positive Theory of Change 2000, pgs. 9 - 16

- Discovery: Focus on a high point, a time in your work experience here where you felt most alive, most engaged, or most successful. Can you tell me the story? How did it unfold? What was it organizationally that made it stand out? What was it about you that made it a high point? What key insights do you have for all of us at this organization?
- Dream: What is the world calling us to become? What are those things about us no matter how much we change, we want to continue into our new and different future? If sometime in the future all of our best qualities were magnified and extended as far as we would like, imagine what that would be like and what would be different? How do you know?

- <u>Design:</u> What would our organization look like if it were designed in every way possible to maximize the qualities of the positive core and enable the accelerated realization of our dreams?
- <u>Destiny:</u> How do we sustain what we have created? How do we empower each other to stay connected, stay involved and keep creating?