

ASKING BETTER QUESTIONS: A GUIDE

1. Start with Broad, Open-Ended Questions

- Encourage people to **describe the situation in their own words** before narrowing down.
- Turn closed questions into open-ended questions.
- **Examples:**
 - *"What's going on here?"*
 - *"How would you explain this challenge to someone unfamiliar with it?"*
 - *"What do you think is the real issue at play?"*

2. Clarify Assumptions

- People often assume certain factors are **true without questioning them**.
- **Examples:**
 - *"What assumptions are we making about this situation?"*
 - *"If we couldn't approach this problem the way we originally planned, what would we do instead?"*
 - *"What might we be missing?"*

3. Ask About Stakeholder Perspectives

- Complex situations often have **multiple perspectives** that need to be considered.
- **Examples:**
 - *"Who else is affected by this situation?"*
 - *"How would different stakeholders describe the problem?"*
 - *"What tensions or competing priorities exist?"*

4. Separate Symptoms from Causes

- Encourage people to **differentiate between what they're experiencing and what's driving it**.
- **Examples:**
 - *"Are we solving the right problem, or just reacting to symptoms?"*
 - *"What's happening versus what's causing it?"*
 - *"If we removed this one obstacle, would the problem still exist?"*

5. Explore Alternative Views

- Broaden the conversation by **challenging conventional thinking**.
- **Examples:**
 - *"How would an outsider or competitor approach this?"*
 - *"What if we had to solve this with half the resources?"*
 - *"What if we had to start over—how would we design the solution from scratch?"*

6. Look for Patterns & Trends

- Complex situations are rarely **one-off events**—they often follow patterns.
- **Examples:**
 - *"Have we seen this problem before? How was it handled?"*
 - *"Is this part of a larger trend or systemic issue?"*
 - *"What does historical data tell us?"*

7. Focus on What's Within Control

- Help teams **distinguish between what they can influence and what they can't**.
- **Examples:**
 - *"What factors are within our control?"*
 - *"What constraints do we have to work within?"*
 - *"Where can we take action right now?"*