

How to do your own blind-spot maintenance

When was the last time you asked a colleague or someone on your team, **“What am I not attentive to that would help the team be more successful?”** Or a top client, **“What haven’t we asked you that I should know about your experience with us?”**

As part of helping leaders and top teams tap their full potential, we coaches are often called to do interviews or other assessments that help these leaders identify and address their blind spots. Why? Because doing is the single most powerful tool leaders have for transformation. And, though we do this work as part of coaching, why wait for a coach to do it for you?

The best expert to clean out your blind spot on a regular basis is you

Here’s how: Ask your team and colleagues and the clients and communities you serve powerful questions from time to time, questions built on the notion that there’s almost certainly something you’re missing. I find sometimes that leaders I work with can chafe against that underlying assumption—that there is something they are missing—while more learning-oriented executives embrace the reality that we don’t perceive everything in real time and that if we don’t ask and listen patiently for answers, clients, teammates, colleagues, directs, board members, and others rarely volunteer them. It’s that simple.

So, ask, and stay silent. Make sure you offer time for them to think about it, so you’re not putting them on the spot. Suggest they let you know when they have an answer. When they do answer, don’t defend or debate. Listen more than you talk. Applaud their honesty and leave it with “Thank you.” Or, “Thank you, you’ve given me something important to think about,” even if your impulse is to reject it out of hand. Do this often enough, and they will say what you need to say, rather than what you want to hear.



Here's an extensive list of my own examples, and I invite you to create your own—and pepper one or two of them into your various conversations with those around you over time.

- ① What have you wanted to say that you've been reluctant to tell me?
- ① Where do you need help that you may be reluctant to ask me for?
- ① What feedback have you tried to give me that I don't seem to be addressing?
- ① What do I not seem to be noticing or paying enough attention to?
- ① What's the most important thing my firm/organization/team/group can do to be a better collaborator with yours?
- ① Where am I off target on opportunities to ensure we're consistently at our best as an organization?
- ① What am I avoiding that's difficult but important?
- ① How can I foster better learning—my own, and for us as an organization?
- ① Where are we hitting and missing the target of exceeding your expectations as our client/customer?
- ① Where am I over-investing and under-investing our resources?
- ① What should I know about your workload that I may not see or understand?
- ① What should I know about what energizes or de-motivates you that I may not see or understand?
- ① What question should I ask you that I haven't asked?
- ① What have you found hard to follow about something I've told or asked of you?
- ① What's one thing you and I can each do to work together better?
- ① In what situations am I overconfident or hearing what I want to hear more than what I need to know?
- ① Is there anything you've told me directly that I'm dismissing or avoiding?
- ① Where do we as an organization tend to repeat the same patterns/behavior and hope for different results?

About the author

David Peck

is an executive coach, partner, and the global coaching practice head at Heidrick & Struggles.

dpeck@heidrick.com

If you're an exceptional leader, you may already ask questions like these. Also, you may read through this list and not find it very useful. It's up to you to pick the ones that fit you, your team, and your organization. Some leaders have even asked their team(s) or customers to create a short list of questions they want to be asked. It's all good!

Bottom line: Questions expand possibilities, and leadership is about turning possibilities into realities. If you're doing more telling than asking/listening as a leader, then you're missing something of what you need to know to lead effectively.