

A Simple Question That Engages Employees in Real Conversations

Description

Leaders want to make real connections with employees. We know building solid relationships with those who report to us is vital. Weâ??ve all heard that most employees donâ??t leave their job, they leave their boss. And the stronger this relationship is, the happier and more engaged employees are.

Iâ??ve always been a fan of rounding on employees. This means regularly asking them a set of questions aimed at getting information you need to make their job and the company better. Rounding has many positive resultsâ??it helps you find out whatâ??s going well, what needs improvement, and so forthâ??but mostly what it does is build those strong relationships.

Yet, while rounding works well, I find some leaders struggle with it. Sometimes they donâ??t want to ask if everythingâ??s going well or if thereâ??s anything they can do better because theyâ??re afraid to hear the answer. Other times they *do* ask but donâ??t get helpful responses.

Itâ??s not always easy to get a dialogue started. Sometimes playing with wording until you find a question that that works well for you can make all the difference. I recently got a letter from Eric Connell who is a hospital CEO. He told me that he has gotten great results now that heâ??s started saying, *â??I work for you. What do you want me to work on today?â?•*

He gave me permission to share this excerpt from his letter:

I stepped into a really challenging role a few months ago and have been feeling like a failure. It is probably a combination of pandemic (excuses) and my own acknowledgement that I am now treading water inefficiently in the deep end of the pool and have a real need to be a better leader, right now!

One thing really helped me this week, which I borrowed from Hardwiring Excellence*. Often, I ask people what I can do for them and find myself met with the common refrains, â??one million dollars!â?• or â??nothing!â?• Yesterday I had the thought to instead ask, â??I work for you. What do you want me to work on today?â?• Both times I have asked that question it has led to real and meaningful conversations that have energized me.*

First, in the cafeteria, a team member answered that I could go into the back and help unload the truck. I met the manager and another team member back there and put large cans of green beans away and

shuttled broken-down cardboard boxes. That action created a space for the manager to share a challenge that she is having with our hiring process, which is too slow, and which I was learning of for the first time.

This morning I was walking through the clinic to catch up with my practice manager. I stopped and said â??Good morningâ?• to one of the nurses. When I tried your question, she paused for a second, and then opened up and shared a frustration she had with me. We had chatted several weeks ago, and she was upset because we didnâ??t have a meeting like we had talked about having as a follow-up to our conversation. She was correct. We had talked about getting together to talk but had not followed through. I offered a sincere apology and pulled out my phone, and we both looked at our calendars and found a time for next week.

That question is golden, and I plan to wear it out as I learn to be a more effective and sincere leader.

Thank you for making a difference for me by sharing your experiences.

It is so important to find ways to start meaningful conversations. In fact, with many people still working remotely, that sense of genuine connection is needed more than ever.

Try this â??goldenâ?• question with your employees. Donâ??t be afraid to ask it. Leaders tend to worry that people will ask for something they canâ??t give, or that theyâ??ll hear really bad news, but usually thatâ??s not the case. Quite often the employee will bring up something you *can* fix and youâ??ll end up getting a quick win. If you hadnâ??t asked, youâ??d never have had the chance.

Also, if you get a lackluster response the first time, donâ??t give up. The more you ask it, the more natural it will feel.
Do you have any good dialogue starters? Iâ??d love to hear them. Send me a note at quint@quintstuder.com and I may share your answers in a future column. As always, thank you for reading!

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