



“What Worries You Most?” • A Question Every Leader Needs to Ask

Description

What people want and need from us can be different from what we think. We can make assumptions, but until we ask, we can’t truly know.

Recent research from the University of Colorado School of Medicine shows that while healthcare professionals might think they know a patient’s biggest worry, very often they don’t. I read about this in the book *Wonder Drug: 7 Scientifically Proven Ways That Serving Others Is the Best Medicine for Yourself*, written by Dr. Anthony Mazzairelli and Dr. Stephen Trzeciak. When researchers asked Emergency Department patients, “What worries you most?” they received all sorts of answers they didn’t expect.

In fact, researchers found patients’ big worries matched the complaint that brought them into the ED only 26 percent of the time. For example, a pregnant woman came in showing signs of miscarriage, but it turned out that her biggest worry was falling into depression again. This is a good example of why if patients aren’t asked about their biggest worries, then dangerous underlying conditions like addiction or depression can go undetected and unacknowledged.

It’s important to realize that research like this can help us not just in specific areas like patient care, but it can also transfer to other industries. It has far-reaching possibilities.

Think about people who are in supervisory roles in any kind of business in today’s environment. They are in a really difficult spot right now. Many are young and new to their positions because they were promoted during a pandemic when a lot of more experienced people retired or resigned. They are having to deal with all kinds of financial challenges, staffing issues, etc. As leaders, we might assume we know what the new managers are worried about. But do we really?

It’s so important to create the type of culture where we can ask new managers, “What are you most worried about today?” We don’t know what the answer will be. But when we’ve created conditions where they feel comfortable enough, they might tell us they’re worried about failing. This opens the door for us to be able to talk to them about how we’re going to support them and help them so they don’t fail.

We might talk about a particular skill set the new supervisor is concerned about. Maybe they've never really budgeted before and are struggling in this area. We can respond by providing training on budgeting. This is an example of Precision Leader Development™, which is a customized development plan based on the individual's experience, work setting, learning style, and natural talents.

Again, this depends on how successful we've been at creating a culture where people are willing to tell us what's inside them. Many times, we compare somebody's outside to our own inside, and we feel less than. The more we ask people about their biggest worries, the less stigmatized they feel about being open and vulnerable. It also helps them learn to pinpoint what's bothering them, rather than just feeling generally anxious.

This works well not only with middle managers but also with new employees. We might ask them, "What are you most concerned about right now?" When we do, we might hear that the hours are more than they thought, and they're concerned that they won't be able to keep up their work schedule and also go to school. We just don't know until we ask.

When we don't know what people are really thinking and feeling, we might interpret their actions the wrong way. I've really learned a lot from Management By Strengths (MBS). If I'm a red, I might be anxious to get going on a project. And if I'm working with someone who's a yellow, I assume they're not engaged and don't care. So if I ask, "What's your biggest worry about this?" it gives them the opportunity to say, "How are we going to implement this?" We have to get more to the core issue, and this question helps us do that.

Finally, "What is your biggest worry?" works really well for customers. Let's say you host events and you're helping a customer plan a wedding. When you ask the bride what she's most worried about, she might say, "I'm worried the event space won't be ready in time," or, "My nephew has a severe peanut allergy, so I'm worried about cross-contamination with the food." Then it gives you a chance to talk about your procedures and protocols. The more information people have, the less anxiety they tend to feel.

I invite you to try this question at work, or even in your personal life, and see if anything changes. Do people seem more confident and less anxious? Do they start doing better work? Does it improve your relationships? Please feel free to write to me at quint@quintstuder.com and tell me about the results you get. As always, I would love to hear from you.

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