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HOP|LAB®

BETTER QUESTIONS GUIDE

A handy guide to what your questions can do.





Purpose

This guide has been developed to provide you with some practical assistance in using better questions. Human & Organisational Performance and other similar perspectives encourage us to be far more curious. More curious when things appear to have gone wrong and critically, more curious of how our people create success almost every day. Through involving and engaging the whole workforce, we can make the first steps to becoming a learning organisation that is better placed for sustainable long-term success.

The questions contained in this guide can be used as part of learning teams or in other safety assurance activities. Ultimately our goal should be to incorporate these types of questions into our day to day conversations.



A few points to remember

Our conversations and the questions we ask should be framed around the HOP Principles;

people make mistakes

blame fixes nothing

context drives behaviour

learning is vital

response matters



The questions contained in this guide should not be used as a checklist but rather used selectively to suit the context and as inspiration for generating your own questions.

"Remember, questions are never neutral, they are fateful..."

- David Cooperrider





HOP Operational Learning Questions

Operational learning question examples

- Tell me about your work
- How hard is it to get things done?
- What does a good day look like (for this process)?
- What does a bad day look like?
- Where is it easy to make a mistake?
- What near misses have we had?
- What is very predictable?
- What is very unpredictable?
- What is the worst thing that could happen in this process/area?
- Do you have the right tools?
- How far back in the process should we start for us to understand?

Event question examples

- Was there anything different before or at the time of the event?
- What did you hear/see/think?
- What else should I know?

(Baker, 2018)

Verifying critical controls and safeguards

- What keeps you safe while doing this task?
- What is essential for this task to go well?
- What would make you consider stopping this task? What needs to be in place before you would start?
- What would an outsider (perhaps management) be most surprised about with this task?

(Southpac, 2019)





Safety II – Learning From What Goes Right

Tools and Resources
What are people most dependent on to do their job successfully?
What tools would make your job easier?
Do you have the confidence to say you do not have the tools and resources to do this task?
What other tools might be helpful? What have you seen/done on other sites?
How can I help you find a better tool or resource?
Has anyone explained what tools and resources are available? Do you have enough?
Are they of the right kind? How accessible are the tools?
Do you ever have to customise your tools to fit the job?
What do you do if you can’t get the tool you need?
Do you feel comfortable using this tool?
Is this tool sometimes difficult to use?
What tools or resources do you enjoy using?

Strategies
Can you explain the method of this task and how you learned it?
What can you tell someone who is about to do this task for the first time?
How does this way of doing things impact on others?
What would happen if everybody did it this way?
How would others do this if nobody was watching?
How would you do this if no procedure existed?
If you could design your own method, what would it look like?
If you were new to this job, how could you be taught about this method?
What would make it easier for you to understand this method?
How would you describe the gap between the training you received on this task, and performing the task?
How did you overcome this gap?
What solutions have you come up with that have worked well?
Have you shared your solutions with your colleagues and supervisor?
What does a good worker do? What does good look like?
What mistakes would a junior employee be likely to make?
What mistakes are an experienced employee more likely to make?
What is important when doing this task? What other goals are simultaneously important to consider?
When was the last time you did this and it went well?
What changes have occurred here that were helpful?

Safety II – Learning From What Goes Right cont.

Conditions and Constraints
Have you been set up for success?
Is there anything in your environment we can change that would help?
If you had \$50,000 (for example), how would you invest them to make this a better place to work?
What are the worst possible conditions to perform this task? When has that happened?
What frustrates you about this work area?
What was something you enjoyed about coming to work this week?
What makes your job easy? What makes your job hard? Tell me about a situation when your work was difficult.
What makes different environments unique? What works well/does not?
Where are the bottlenecks?
Where is the next incident going to happen?
What disrupts people and processes?
What do people have to ‘tolerate’ around here? What have they done to make this easier?
When and where do you have to be extra vigilant?
How has the work environment changed here, and how has it impacted your work?

(Hummerdal, n.d.)





Generative Questions

What Your Question Can Do	Examples
Elicit information, stories, ideas, and perspectives	<i>Alisha’s question to the staff: When are patients satisfied?</i>
Tap experience	<i>You’ve done something like this before. What was your experience? What worked well for you?</i>
Allow strengths to show up	<i>How might each of you contribute to the success of this venture?</i>
Surface best practices and elements of success	<i>What best practices in the industry are you familiar with?</i>
Move toward solutions or to information and data that inform possible solutions	<i>Jerry’s wonderment” What are mothers of healthier children doing?</i>
Identify new ways of thinking, new possibilities, opportunities, and aspirations	<i>As you think about thriving digital communities, what do they have the we need if we are to develop a thriving digital economy?</i>
Inform what you might do, the results you might want	<i>Monica’s question: What can we do that allows you the car and me my sense of peace?</i>
Make room for new knowledge, creativity, and innovation	<i>Forget completely about how we have done this in the past. If you were designing it today, what would you do?</i>
Deepen connections	<i>How do you see it? What’s important to you about this project?</i>
Strengthen relationships	<i>Can you say more about what you mean when you say there’s no opportunity for you here? What are possible opportunities you are seeking?</i>
Engage those on the side-lines	<i>What do you think, Elizabeth?</i>
Generate understanding	<i>Can you say more about what you are thinking? Help me understand your perspective.</i>

(Stavros et al., 2018, p. 61)



Questions to Help Story Development and Exploration

Categories of Questioning or Question	Examples of Explanation
Contextualizing questioning	<i>So how come this is so energising for you? Where does that passion come from?</i>
Appreciative questioning	<i>Tell me about a recent experience when you found your- selves in agreement about something.</i>
Questions to connect meaning and action	<i>If you see that there can only be one winner here, how does that make you act?</i>
Questions to widen the context	<i>If we asked your other colleagues about this, what would they say?</i>
Hypothetical questions	<i>If you believed you could to this, what would you do next? If we weren’t talking about this, what would we be talking about?</i>
Questions that embed a suggestion	<i>If you decided that the most helpful thing you could do would be not to do what they have asked, what might you do instead that would be helpful?</i>
Tracking questions	<i>So when X did that what did Y do and when Y did that what did Z do?*</i>
Ranking questions	<i>Among your colleagues, who would be the most likely to think that you could do this?</i>
Episodic questioning	<i>Give me an example of an interaction with your manager where you didn’t get frustrated.</i>
Questions to connect thinking and feeling	<i>So when you think that way what do you feel? What would you need to feel to think that they were on your side?</i>
Questions to encourage difference	<i>How would your description of what is happening differ from what we have just heard?</i>
Dyadic questions	<i>How do you think they made sense of what you are doing?</i>
Triadic questions	<i>If I were to ask John to describe Janet’s attitude to Dimple, what might he say?</i>
Temporal questions	<i>How far back do we need to go to get to when this wasn’t a problem?</i>
Historical questions	<i>When did you first begin to notice that things were chang- ing?</i>
Position questions	<i>If you were leader of this organisation, what is the first thing you would do to resolve this?</i>
Questions to explore untold accounts	<i>What story would you like someone to tell about this?</i>
Reflexive questions	<i>What could I usefully ask you at this point?</i>
Questions to explore contradictions	<i>How do you make sense of this...?</i>
Questions about emotion	<i>If the emotion could speak so that it could be heard, what would be the signs that it had been heard?</i>

(Lewis et al., 2016, pp. 90-100)

* Use tracking questions with caution, like timelines, they have a tendency to lead towards linear causality and oversimplification as discussed with the HOP masterclass.



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Whether you're looking for HOP familiarisation, Learning Teams training and facilitation, or simply advice on getting started, our HOP team can support you through any phase, from interest to integration. Contact us for a discussion at any time.

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