

Lead by Asking Questions

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Do you want to empower others to focus? Do you want to empower others to think through problems and achieve their goals? Do you want to empower others to get organized, prioritize, and target their strengths?

If you want to empower others, provoke them. Provoke them to reflect.

Reflection is powerful. Personally speaking, reflection helps me clarify what my goals are, increase my awareness of the progress I'm making, identify things that are hindering

my progress, and develop action steps I'm motivated to take. In short, reflection helps me get the job done.

I've seen reflection help fellow staff members. After reflecting, staff members have a better understanding of their goals, manage their calendars better, lead meetings more effectively, and stay more focused on their goals.

But don't take my word for it. I asked staff members at Christian Academy in Japan to tell me how reflection empowers them. Here's what they said:

1. "Reflection helps me get clear on what's going on so I can make effective decisions."
2. "Reflection helps me apply what I've learned. When I reflect on what I've learned about a new school policy, I can figure out how to implement it more effectively. When I reflect on what I've learned in a curriculum mapping workshop, I'm better able to create good curriculum maps."
3. "Reflection helps me organize my tasks and next actions. It helps me understand why a project is stalled. It helps me identify what I need to do to accomplish a project."
4. "Reflection helps me handle situations more effectively. For example, each year students are absent from class for athletic tournaments. I reflected on how I handled this in the fall and made some changes in how I handled winter tournament absences. Then I reflected on how it went with winter tournaments, and by the spring, I had a good system in place."
5. "Reflection helps me take stock of what's done and what needs to be done."

So, how can you provoke reflection? You *could* give suggestions. Suggestions provoke reflection, provided they

fit the situation and the person is willing to receive them. I appreciate suggestions I receive, but I must admit that sometimes the suggestions don't fit my situation and sometimes I'm not prepared to receive them. In other words, suggestions don't really provoke me to reflect. How about you?

Instead of giving suggestions, what can you do to provoke reflection? Ask open-ended questions. Why? Because open-ended questions are more likely to fit the situation. Because people are more willing to respond to open-ended questions than to suggestions and advice. And because answering open-ended questions involves reflection.

want to pay to your goals? What helps you pay attention to your goals? and What will you do?

To empower others to prioritize, ask, What are you working on? What satisfies or concerns you about your progress? What do you want to accomplish during the next month? Which of the things you want to accomplish next month would you categorize as top priorities? What can you do to ensure that you accomplish these top priorities? and What will you do?

To empower others to target their strengths, ask, What strengths has God given you? What excites or frustrates you about your

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So, ask open-ended questions like these: What's your goal? What's going on? What are your options? What will you do? What does being organized look like? What helps you pay attention to your goals? What do you want to accomplish in the next month? or What excites or frustrates you about your God-given strengths?

How can you use questions to provoke other people to reflect?

To empower others to get organized, ask, What's your primary workspace like? How do you feel when you're organized or disorganized? For you, what does being organized look like? If you were more organized, what might happen? To get organized, what do you need to keep doing? start doing? stop doing? and What will you do?

To empower others to pay attention to their goals, ask, What are your goals? What do you like or dislike about paying attention to your goals? How does paying attention to your goals help you accomplish them? On a scale of 1–10 (10 being high), how much attention do you pay to your goals? On a scale of 1–10 (10 being high), how much attention do you

strengths? How does targeting your strengths affect your work? If you were to target your strengths more, what might happen? What 2–3 strengths could you target? and What will you do?

To empower others to reduce their frustrations, ask, What are five frustrations you have? How do you feel when these frustrations are present or not present? How would reducing one or more frustrations affect your work? What's one frustration you want to reduce? What can you do to reduce that frustration? and What will you do?

How can you use questions to provoke groups to reflect?

If your department wants to increase student understanding and application of a biblical perspective, ask, How can questions help? What questions do you want your students to ask? and What questions do you want your students to respond to?

If your curriculum committee is brainstorming ways to improve the curriculum, ask, Where are we? Where do we want to go? and How can we get there?

If your administration wants to achieve your school's mission, ask, What's our mission? What's our definition of mission achievement? What's our current level of mission achievement? and How can we close the gap between current and targeted levels of mission achievement?

If your school is reviewing its philosophy of education, ask, What happens at a Christ-centered school? What is the role of a biblical perspective in Christian education? and How can we help students internalize a biblical perspective?

Remember this: To empower others, provoke reflection by asking questions. Ask; don't suggest. Ask; don't advise. Ask—then listen.

Here's the bottom line: Lead by asking questions.



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Use Peer Coaching to Help Your Students Apply a Biblical Perspective

You just finished your peer coaching session. During your peer coaching session, your peer coach helped you focus and work smart by asking questions—questions that provoked you to think. You really appreciate your peer coach's asking questions instead of giving advice, because the questions really motivate you to think and take responsibility for your goals.

You think that using peer coaching with your students might help increase student learning. And you're wondering, "Could peer coaching help my students apply a biblical perspective?"

This is your answer: Yes! Peer coaching can certainly help your students apply a biblical perspective.

For example, if you want to help your eighth graders use a relevant biblical principle in an essay, have them ask one another these five questions: What's your thesis? What principle from the Bible did you use

to support your thesis? What's satisfying or unsatisfying about this principle? On a scale of 1–5 (5 being high), how relevant is the principle? and What question do you want to ask _____ (your name [or another teacher's name]) about your biblical principle?

If you want to help your students apply a biblical perspective to an issue, have them ask one another these four questions: What social issue are you studying? What excites or frustrates you about this issue? What biblical teaching applies to this issue? and What's a biblical response to this issue?

Remember this: The real question isn't, How could peer coaching help your students apply a biblical perspective? The real question is, How will you use peer coaching to help your students apply this type of perspective?

Help your students apply a biblical perspective. Use peer coaching. Today.

How Can You Lead More Effectively by Asking Questions?

To get an idea of how you can lead more effectively by asking questions, complete the following self-assessment. Circle the number that best represents how true the statement is for you right now. Use the following scale:

4—Consistently 3—Usually 2—Sometimes 1—Rarely

Lead from your heart.

- 4 3 2 1 I trust that the Holy Spirit is working in the heart of every believer.
- 4 3 2 1 I believe that others can define and achieve their goals.
- 4 3 2 1 I target motivation, not information.
- 4 3 2 1 I empower others to take responsibility.
- 4 3 2 1 I believe that reflection is powerful.
- 4 3 2 1 I want to help staff members become better problem solvers (not solve their problems myself).

Lead by using inquiry skills.

- 4 3 2 1 I ask open-ended questions.
- 4 3 2 1 I don't ask "why" questions.
- 4 3 2 1 I don't give suggestions.
- 4 3 2 1 I easily think of good questions to ask.

Lead by asking questions.

- 4 3 2 1 I ask questions to help others.
- 4 3 2 1 I ask questions to help others reflect.
- 4 3 2 1 I ask questions to help others clarify their situation or challenge.
- 4 3 2 1 I ask questions to help others prioritize.
- 4 3 2 1 I ask questions to help others get organized.
- 4 3 2 1 I ask questions to help others focus.
- 4 3 2 1 I ask questions to help others target their strengths.
- 4 3 2 1 I ask questions to help others pay attention to their goals.
- 4 3 2 1 I ask questions to help others reduce their frustrations.
- 4 3 2 1 I lead by asking questions.

Reflect by asking yourself questions.

Now, ask yourself five questions about your self-assessment data:

1. How many 4s, 3s, 2s, and 1s do I have?
2. What's encouraging or discouraging about the data?
3. What helps me lead by asking questions?
4. What hinders me from leading by asking questions?
5. What will I do about what I've discovered?