



## Ask the Right Questions

“Do you need help?” was often a question I would ask my wife in the first year of our marriage as she put away the dishes, and as I sat comfortably on the couch two rooms away. What I didn’t realize was to my wife, this question wasn’t helpful at all. This was the wrong question to ask, and what I should’ve asked was, “How can I help you?” Offering my assistance in this way took more of a burden off her and indicated that I was ready to help. The way we phrase our questions often indicates our true intentions behind them. Part of being a great teammate or leader is knowing what type of questions to ask.

Here are some examples of how to rephrase four common questions in the workplace for better outcomes:

1. Instead of **“What’s the problem?”** ask **“What is working well, and what can we improve?”** Rephrasing the question in this way focuses on the positive and allows for dialogue on what specific enhancements are needed. Another option is to begin your question with **“How might we…”** to build creativity, suggest that improvement is possible, and establish ownership.
2. Instead of **“Have you thought about…?”** ask **“What have you already thought of?”** or **“What options have you considered?”** This shows confidence in the person and doesn’t automatically assume they need your advice. If they are needing advice, don’t hesitate to offer it, but demonstrate trust first.
3. Instead of **“Why do you think that?”** ask **“How did you arrive at that conclusion?”** There is something about the term “why” that puts people in a defensive mode. The alternative question is less demeaning and allows the individual to track and explain their process.
4. Instead of **“What don’t you understand?”** ask **“Is there anything specific that has been challenging for you?”** A question like this shows support rather than coming across as dismissive and critical.

Language matters, and although there might not be any dumb questions, there are ways to rephrase our questions to make them more effective and create more of a positive team environment.

-Josh

Blanchard, M. (2024, May 13). *5 Questions Professional Coaches Should Never (Ever!) Ask*. blanchard. <https://resources.blanchard.com/blanchard-leaderchat/5-questions-professional-coaches-should-never-ever-ask>