



The Inquisitive Leader

Skills and Professional Development



All too often we go through life without questioning how and why we are where we are, and what and how can we improve who we are. As executives, managers, committee leaders or whatever position of authority we hold, do we even remember the last time we wondered if there was a better way to lead than how we are currently doing it?

While some of us chart paths to power, many of us end up in our positions of leadership by chance. When that happens, we often don't put too much thought into the kind of leader we want to be, if we think about it at all.

Here are a few questions that would serve us well to explore from time to time. We don't have to ask every question. For our individual situations we may have to dig deeper and be willing to let our inner two-year old follow up with a "why?" every now and again.

1. Is my position about the people I lead or about me?
2. Do I wield my power like a tyrant or a servant?
3. If my grandmother saw me interacting with my followers, would she be proud? Or think I needed my mouth washed out with soap? Or that I needed some time sitting in the corner?
4. How will my behavior be portrayed in my biography?
5. Are the people who follow me afraid of me?
6. Are there people following me because they want to or because they have to?
7. Would I want to be one of my followers or would I be leading the mutiny?

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8. How can I improve the quality of my relationships with the people I lead?
 9. When was the last time I engaged the people I lead in conversation to help me understand what motivates them?
 10. Do I know what motivates the people I lead? Do I care? Should I care? Why don't I care?
 11. What did I learn as a follower that can help me be a better leader?
 12. If I had to sit and listen to the person I treat with the least amount of respect tell me about myself, what would I be afraid to hear? Where did I develop my theories and philosophies about leadership and are they healthy?
 13. When I look around at other leaders, whether in my organization or outside, who are the people I admire and can model after?
 14. What are the attributes of the leaders that I admire?
 15. What are the characteristics or attributes that I want to change about my leadership style?
 16. If I could implement only one change, what would it be?
 17. What am I most fearful of as a leader?
 18. What lessons am I learning from other areas of my life that I can apply to the way I lead?
 19. What perk(s) of leadership would be the most difficult to give up?

Now that you've spent some time exploring where you are as a leader, can you honestly say that you are the kind of leader you wanted to be or are even capable of being? And if not, what will you do next to become the leader you didn't even know you wanted to be?

This list is by no means exhaustive, and you should feel free to take each question and your answers down whatever paths they lead you. Keep in mind, however, the goal here is not to chastise or minimize your role as a leader, but to use inquiry as a tool toward improvement.

I am interested in hearing some of the questions you've been pondering throughout your leadership development or some that were sparked as the result of this exercise. Please feel free to send me your questions and thoughts, and I will share in a future column.

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Whitnie Wiley was a long-time columnist for the *ACC Docket*, where she wrote the Lead the Way column for more than seven years. The column provided leadership tips for in-house counsel and others as they pursue their personal and professional goals.