

Ask Four Questions Daily

Reflect on your leadership impact.



by Steve Arneson

LEADERSHIP IS ALL about people. If you're a manager, you don't lead budgets, real estate, technology, raw materials, or even projects. You lead people—period. Everything you do as a leader should be about the people you have the *privilege* to lead. The leaders who understand this are the ones everyone wants to work for—these are the managers who annually get the highest engagement scores, have the lowest turnover, and get the best results. It's because they "get it"—they know it's not about them, it's about their people.

You are striving to be such a leader. That's why you read this publication, solicit feedback on your style, and experiment with new techniques to raise your leadership game. You realize that *you can always improve*—that you're never too *established* to try something new to achieve even greater results. You understand that if you get better as a leader, everyone benefits.

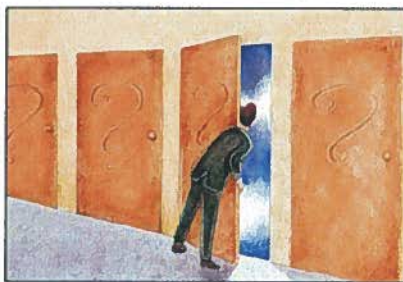
Reflect on Four Questions

With that in mind, here's a simple reflection technique to remind yourself that it's not about you. Every night, on your commute home, ask yourself four questions. That's it—nothing complicated, just an honest conversation with yourself about how you performed that day as a leader. This daily exercise requires no budget, is easy to remember, and only takes a few minutes.

How did I show up as a leader today? The first question gets at how others experienced your leadership. How did you "show up" in your leadership role? How did you walk the halls or participate in meetings? Did you conduct yourself in a poised, professional manner? What was your mood or attitude? Did you work on the right big things? Did you spread optimism, inspire confidence, and engage people? Or did you hide in your office, destroy confidence, complain about external forces or cultivate a negative environment? What was it like to be around you today? As the

leader, you're always on stage; people are watching what you do and say, and they take their cues from you. So, you need to be aware of your behavior and attitude. Ask yourself, *how did I show up today?* Be honest, and give yourself a grade or a score; imagine that someone is keeping track of your daily leadership performance. Take the time to hold up the mirror on your own leadership with this simple exercise.

What did I communicate today? Since communicating is such a big part of leadership, ask yourself every night: *What did I communicate today?* Frankly, if you're like a lot of leaders, there's a good chance you're *under* communicating. Yet every day is an opportunity to communicate with your team, even if it's just to touch base on a personal level. But beyond the normal interac-



tions, did you provide any new information today? Did you share something about what's going on around the company that increases people's sense of ownership or engagement? Did you translate strategy, explain a recent organizational move, or pass along communications from senior management? How did you connect your people to the company's mission today? How did you inform, educate, or explain? This might not be an everyday occurrence, by the way. Some days there just isn't a lot of "new news." But by keeping track of what, how and why you're communicating, you can get a real sense of whether you're communicating often enough, and whether it is having the desired effect. Again, reflect on your specific communications, and give yourself a grade or score on this important leadership behavior.

Who did I develop today? The third question is: *Who did I develop today?* In many ways, developing talent is your

primary job, and it's something you should be doing all the time. Who did you coach or mentor today? Did you provide anyone with an opportunity to present to senior management? Did you give someone a new task or a stretch assignment? Did you send anyone a book or an article to read? Did you meet with anyone to review a project and push their thinking? Did you challenge anyone's point of view, and make them better for it?

The point is this—if you think about development as something you can do every day, chances are you will. This isn't limited to your direct reports of course; you have an obligation to develop people on your extended team as well. Take stock every evening of who you developed today, and how. You'll find that the simple act of reflecting on this question will increase the frequency with which you coach and develop others.

Who did I thank today? This question reminds you that you're not alone in producing results. You have a team of people focused on moving the organization forward—people who work hard for you every day. Ask yourself, each night: *Who did I thank today?* Are you saying "thank you" regularly? Are you recognizing people's efforts, encouraging them with positive feedback, and telling them you appreciate their contribution? As the leader, you should be setting the tone of a positive work environment—one where people feel good about putting in the extra effort that makes the difference between good and great. Again, take the time to assess how well you maintained an appreciation rich atmosphere within your team today.

What Are the Patterns?

Try asking yourself these four questions at the end of every work day. See what patterns or trends emerge, and where you have opportunity for improvement. Are you practicing servant leadership? Are you communicating useful information regularly? Are you consistently developing your team members? Are you expressing your gratitude? Use the data as a baseline to track your progress and assess your behaviors, and step up your efforts to lead more effectively. If leadership is all about the team, make sure *your* team is getting your best every day. **LE**

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ACTION: Reflect on these four questions daily.