



Being in the Question

-Mark Haeussler, CEO

In school and early in our career, we are asked questions and are expected to have quick answers. As we progress, we show mastery of a subject, solve problems, and move tactical issues forward. As leadership roles are earned, the nature of our questions shifts to deepen understanding, explore new and contrary ideas, and pierce new thinking.



One of the richest and most overlooked places for a leader is to *be in a question*. This involves framing an issue as a weighty question, knowing that simmering in inquiry will allow greater insights to emerge. Contrary to what we did in management, leadership is more than expecting swift answers to problems. It requires us to suspend the impulse to find quick solutions and, instead, focus forward.

Being in the question is a talent to be mentored among all executive leaders and beyond. Strong questions encourage us to imagine beyond the current *knowing* and to explore the realm of *possibility*. Once a decision to a question is made, we should be mindful that it closes other possibilities. Should we discover that the decision made is not the best one, it is useful to go back to the *question* and not just look at the decision; it is possible that you were in the wrong question.

Do not *explore questions* just at the annual planning retreat; make it a regular practice. Spend hours, half a day, or even a full day away from the office each month, working questions. Walking (by yourself or with others) often helps, as this opens horizons of thinking. Join a roundtable group that explores new concepts and perspectives. When you drift into problem solving (a typical habit in so many of us), just tell yourself, "Not now, I am in the question." Give yourself permission to engage in this meaningful exercise; one moment of clarity or new insight through mulling a question will pay multiples of the value of that time commitment.

A leader's role is to sit in weighty questions, and it is incumbent on the leader to help frame questions. Tell people in advance the topic and the terms of the meeting. Explain the meeting terms, that may include: shift focus away from problem solving, suspending judgment, never saying, "but we tried that before" (now is a different moment in space/time), inviting people outside of the normal group, and encouraging lateral thinking. The only way to find the best answer is to ask the best question; wonder is, after all, both a noun and a verb.

Alpine Leadership hosts regular roundtables; email MarkHaeussler@AlpineLeadership.co to join.

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