Quality Questions: Inspiring Hindsight, Insight & Foresight

Help Them Grow or Watch Them Go, Kaye & Winkle, 2012

The supervisor’s role in employee development is to ask some well-crafted questions with genuine curiosity. Employees should do 90% of the talking, and these conversations should inspire reflection and employee generated action (supported by the supervisor). These conversations only take 2 minutes of preparation and can be conducted in as little as 5-10 minute chunks around other work that needs to get done (ask a question at a time, or if time allows, ask a couple of questions). Choose any or all questions depending upon your level of comfort and the nature of the relationship you have with your employee.

Questions designed to review an employee’s past experiences, jobs, positions and tasks to find themes, trends and insights:

1. Start by explaining that a solid career future is based upon an understanding of who you are and what got you to where you are.
2. With the employee, create a list of various positions, roles and jobs he/she has held.
3. For each position/role/job, ask the following questions:
   - Which parts brought you joy, energy and a sense of persistence?
   - Which parts led to boredom, disengagement, and a sense of just going through the motions?
4. What themes emerge? With the employee, start making connections. These questions might help:
   - What thoughts/ideas repeated?
   - How might your interests, values, and skills have evolved over time?
   - What will you definitely want to seek out in the future?
   - What will you definitely want to avoid in the future?

Questions designed to generate self-awareness of how day-to-day expectations can inform career decisions. Try these out three-four times a year, outside of the performance evaluation process:

- What was the best part of the last couple of months?
- What work did you find most satisfying?
- How often were you stretched and how did that feel?
- At what points did you feel your energy and engagement lagging?

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