
----- WHAT'S UP, DOC? -----

Vol. 5, No. 5; May 2005; Copyright 2005 by A. J. Schuler, Psy. D

"Creating Leadership Solutions for Profit and Growth"

THIS MONTH'S THEME: 12 QUESTIONS GREAT BOSSES ASK

I recently compiled this list to help a client, and now, all of you benefit! Great bosses get the answers to these questions and remain in close enough contact with their direct reports to know the answers and how they may change. The main point is to create an open, trusting dialogue over time with your direct reports. The value of what you learn through these questions should be obvious, but less obvious is this: by using these questions to create a trusting relationship, any boss is in a much stronger position to make corrections that stick and shape ongoing performance. At the end of the day, your effectiveness as a leader is based on your ability to help people improve performance and learn. Use this question list to guide your efforts (and please send me some new subscribers!).

SUBSCRIPTIONS INCREASE SINCE JAN 1, 2005: 23%

NEW SUBSCRIPTIONS GOAL FOR 2005: 300%

Thank you for your recommendations!

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THIS MONTH'S QUOTES:

"Iron rusts from disuse, stagnant water loses its purity, and in cold weather becomes frozen, even so does inaction sap the vigors of the mind."

-- Leonardo Da Vinci

"Pleasure in the job puts perfection in the work."

- Aristotle

"The most perfect technique is that which is not noticed at all."

- Pablo Casals

1. 12 QUESTIONS GREAT BOSSES ASK

1. WHAT DO YOU ENJOY MOST IN YOUR CURRENT WORK?
As a boss, you're not obligated to assign only work that your people will enjoy. However, it is to your advantage to know what they enjoy. They will tend to do best what they enjoy most. Peak performance is your friend.
2. WHAT DO YOU ENJOY LEAST IN YOUR CURRENT WORK?
Again, just because someone may not like a task, it may need to be done. If it's a core part of the job, then perhaps the person is not best for that job, and should be helped to find another position. If work assignments can be distributed through a team so that people can do what they most enjoy doing without sacrificing overall quality, then you win. Take note of what people dislike doing.
3. WHO INFLUENCED YOUR CAREER CHOICE, AND HOW?
You should know why and how your people came to make their career choices? By default? Out of genuine interest and passion? You also want to know the best ways to influence your people, so knowing who has influenced them in the past, and how, is to your advantage. But of course, you have a responsibility to use your understanding responsibly, not manipulatively, or against your employees' interests. Also, before you can help people move forward with their future, you need to know how they got to be where they are today. Understanding history is important.
4. FROM WHOM DID YOU LEARN HOW TO BECOME AND BEHAVE LIKE A PROFESSIONAL?
This is another in a series of role model related questions. If you want to have a beneficial influence on your people, for their good and the good of your organization, you have to know what style and type of personal influence works best for each of your best reports. Also, by dealing with your people as professionals, and talking about professionalism, even for jobs that are considered to be of low status, you can inspire your people to think of themselves as "professionals," and to act accordingly. You can also open up a continuing conversation of what it means to be and act like a professional, making job performance a matter of personal pride. Of course, to talk about this credibly, you had better be consistent and worthy of imitation in your own professional compartment.

Want to improve your effectiveness as a manager?

“99 Negotiation Nuggets for Winners,” my new book, offers quick shots of wisdom designed to help you get what you want and need in your life, work and career. This is not a book of theory. It’s a book of best practices distilled from many years of experience and from many experts in the field. The information is conveyed in quick bits, the way you might find in any edition of USA Today.

To purchase your copy of “99 Negotiation Nuggets for Winners” at a 10% Discount for “What’s Up, Doc?” subscribers, just click [here](#).

5. WHO HAVE BEEN YOUR PRIMARY ROLE MODELS? WHAT DID YOU REALLY ADMIRE ABOUT THEM?

When you learn what your people admire about the most influential people in their lives, you learn about their values. Different traits will come up for different people on your team. When you seek to understand what motivates each of your people, you had best have insight into each person’s unique values systems. A blanket corporate approach to “values” will only go so far. Great bosses motivate their people based in individual understandings of each team member.

6. WHO IN YOUR LIFE HAS TAUGHT YOU THE MOST? WHAT WAS IT ABOUT THAT PERSON’S COMMUNICATION STYLE THAT REALLY WORKED FOR YOU?

The first part of the question helps you to establish a connection with your direct employees as people, not just as workers. If you want to be a great boss, your people need to feel you respect and understand them as people, and not just as means to some corporate or organizational end. The second part of the question is key for you if you want to know how best to communicate effectively with each team member.

7. HOW DO YOU THINK YOU LEARN BEST?

Most people don’t know how to answer this question, as they have never thought about it. So , you can offer multiple choice answers:

- a. Demonstration and observation
- b. Personal, independent trial and error
- c. Talking, asking questions, hands-on coaching
- d. Reading
- e. Audio resources such as tapes, CD’s, etc.
- f. Traditional classroom training or seminars (this is not likely to be the best option for anyone!)

If your job as the leader is to help your people learn and adapt as your organization grows and adapts, don't take a one-size-fits-all approach to helping your people learn. And guess what? It's your job to help your people learn. Great bosses are teachers, or at the very least, they make sure their people have access to the people and resources (sometimes other team members) they need to learn. It's not primarily the responsibility of someone in a human resources or training department to see that your people are learning: it's your responsibility as the boss.

8. HOW CAN I BECOME MORE EFFECTIVE IN HELPING YOUR SUCCESS?

Ask this question a lot. The first time you ask, you may get no response: not many employees really believe there will be no consequences to saying something to the boss that could be interpreted as criticism. Great bosses are more interested in being effective than in appearing to be right. Ask the question, and listen. Everyone knows you're not perfect, so get the information you need to be better, even when the employee you ask may be difficult or unreasonable. Just asking does not obligate you to agree, but you'll never learn about your blind spots as a leader if you shut your eyes and ears. Even unreasonable people can see things about authority figures that may need attention.

9. IN IDEAL CIRCUMSTANCES, HOW OFTEN SHOULD I CHECK IN WITH YOU JUST TO SEE HOW YOU ARE DOING?

One person's micromanagement is another person's support. Find out the preferred mix for each person. On balance, you should use your time as a reward for those who do well, and minimize the degree to which you are always making corrections to your weakest performers. If they are that weak, they are in the wrong job. But still, you should know what the right mix is for each team member's style, and learn to adapt your style accordingly. Some managers are more active with oversight by nature, and some like to be very hands off. Extreme styles in either direction are problematic, and the best style is to take an individualized approach.

10. WHAT DO YOU FEEL YOU DO BEST?

Always give your people a chance to brag to you. They like to have the chance to say what they think they do well. You might learn something you don't know, and your people will derive intrinsic satisfaction from your implicit act of listening to and recognizing their strengths. Besides, no one will listen to you about areas you think they can improve if they don't think you understand what they do well.

11. WHO IS THE BEST “BOSS” YOU EVER HAD? WHAT ABOUT THAT PERSON MADE HIM/HER THE BEST?

It should be obvious why this question is good for great bosses to ask. If another boss has been successful, it’s best not to have to reinvent the wheel when learning to lead each of your team members. Model your style, as much as you can, based on what you hear.

12. IN WHAT WAYS WOULD YOU LIKE TO GROW MORE?

You can break this out in a few dimensions:

- a. Technical skills or certifications?
- b. Communication skills?
- c. Language skills?
- d. Customer service skills or conflict resolution abilities?
- e. Learning how to be a better mentor or guide to other team members or new employees?
- f. Listen for, but don’t prompt for, a desire to grow in management responsibilities.

Be sure you know what your people want to learn. Compare this with what you would like them to learn. Help them get the learning experiences they need, especially if you can tie extra, rewarding learning experiences with high performance. Extra learning should be a perk you offer to your best people, to reward them, to help your organization grow through its people, and to show weaker performers that the way to get your time and attention is to deserve it through their actions.

2. RECOMMENDED BOOKS AND ENTERTAINMENT

MUSIC: “Music for the Still of the Night,” by Ruby Braff, Arbors Jazz, 2001

My latest jazz discovery, and again, a recommendation anyone can enjoy, not just jazz snobs. The late Ruby Braff plays the trumpet here with the joyfulness and maturity of a real artist, playing in the classic style he’d perfected over his six decade career. This is something like dixieland swing, but a little more given to improvisation and variation in tempo. Ken Dryden of www.allmusic.com says, “It consists of some of the most swinging interpretations of timeless standards as only the veteran cornetist can play them. Accompanied by some of his favorite musicians (all of whom are outstanding), including guitarist [Howard Alden](#), pianist [John Bunch](#), bassist [Michael Moore](#), and drummer [Kenny Washington](#) (who had not previously recorded with Braff), he makes all of the music seem

fresh no matter how familiar one might be with the song. Braff's lyricism, his ability to leave plenty of space for the music to breathe, his emphasis on the beauty of each melody, and the occasional use of interwoven solos (instead of everybody taking a couple of choruses in consecutive order) are all essential ingredients to Braff's masterful recipe for great jazz." Find out more about the disc and the artist [here](#).

FILM: Hotel Rwanda, in DVD release

Okay, this is not a pleasant romp of a film, but even as we are reminded of the worst we are capable of as a species, we are reminded as well of the best. Don Cheadle's performance is excellent, and understated. Find out more about the film [here](#).

3. CHUCKLES

Are You Ready for Children?

Mess Test: Smear peanut butter on the sofa and curtains. Now rub your hands in the wet flowerbed and rub on the walls. Cover the stains with crayons. Place a fish stick behind the couch and leave it there all summer.

Toy Test: Obtain a 55-gallon box of Lego's. (If Lego's are not available, you may substitute roofing tacks or broken bottles.) Have a friend spread them all over the house. Put on a blindfold. Try to walk to the bathroom or kitchen. Do not scream. (This could wake a child at night.)

Grocery Store Test: Borrow one or two small animals (goats are best) and take them with you as you shop at the grocery store. Always keep them in sight and pay for anything they eat or damage.

Dressing Test: Obtain one large, unhappy, live octopus. Stuff into a small net bag making sure that all arms stay inside.

Feeding Test: Obtain a large plastic milk jug. Fill halfway with water. Suspend from the ceiling with a stout cord. Start the jug swinging. Try to insert spoonfuls of soggy cereal (such as Fruit Loops or Cheerios) into the mouth of the jug, while pretending to be an airplane. Now dump the contents of the jug on the floor.

Night Test: Prepare by obtaining a small cloth bag and fill it with 8 - 12 pounds of sand. Soak it thoroughly in water. At 8:00 PM begin to waltz and hum with the bag until 9:00 PM. Lay down your bag and set your

alarm for 10:00 PM. Get up, pick up your bag, and sing every song you have ever heard. Make up about a dozen more and sing these too until 4:00 AM. Set alarm for 5:00 AM. Get up and make breakfast. Keep this up for 5 years. Look cheerful.

Physical Test (Women): Obtain a large beanbag chair and attach it to the front of your clothes. Leave it there for 9 months. Now remove 10 of the beans.

Physical Test (Men): Go to the nearest drug store. Set your wallet on the counter. Ask the clerk to help himself. Now proceed to the nearest food store. Go to the head office and arrange for your paycheck to be directly deposited to the store. Purchase a newspaper. Go home and read it quietly for the last time.

Final Assignment: Find a couple who already has a small child. Lecture them on how they can improve their discipline, patience, tolerance, toilet training, and child's table manners. Suggest many ways they can improve. Emphasize to them that they should never allow their children to run riot. Enjoy this experience. It will be the last time you will have all the answers.

4. PROMOTE YOUR OWN GROWTH

You don't have to live near the Schuler Solutions main office in Alexandria, Virginia to benefit from my coaching services. Great work can be done for your own growth and development over the phone and through document review via email. To find out more about your coaching options and available coaching plans, just click [here](#) now.

5. ABOUT DR. SCHULER

A. J. Schuler, Psy. D., an expert on leadership, negotiation and organizational change, provides consulting services, keynote presentations and seminars for client companies. His trademark is highly personalized service that leads to measurable increases in productivity, profit and growth. He also provides personalized leadership education and coaching

for highly motivated clients.

Dr. Schuler, President of Schuler Solutions, Inc., has served diverse organizations in the private and public sectors, including The Ritz-Carlton Hotel Company, Sony Development, Nomura Securities and the Executive Office for Immigration Review.

A graduate of the Wharton School of Business, Dr. Schuler has successfully led the profitable growth of a dynamic, international consulting firm while serving as Operations Director, and has successfully coached over five hundred CEO's and corporate executives.

6. HOW TO SUBSCRIBE OR UNSUBSCRIBE

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7. NEWSLETTER STATEMENT OF ETHICS

NEWSLETTER ETHICS: This e-Newsletter will be sent to subscribers only upon REQUEST, though subscribers may forward this letter to anyone they wish. Subscriber identities or contact information will NOT BE DISCLOSED to any other persons or entities under any circumstances. (An attorney friend recently pointed out that, technically, I'd have to give up my list if compelled to do so by a court of law. He's technically right, of course, but let's face it: that won't happen!)

Have a great month. . .

A. J. Schuler, Psy. D.
Schuler Solutions, Inc.

"I work with leaders who want to grow their businesses, and with meeting professionals who want to create great events for their audiences."

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“Make each day your masterpiece.” -- John Wooden

P.S. - Remember to send in your comments and successes, and to forward
this newsletter to at least one friend! Thanks . . . AJS