

Examples of SFBT questions in the workplace

Author: Mike Cardus, source: <https://mikecardus.com/solution-focused-leadership-questions/>

What

An employee tells you they are losing control and the project will be late. Rather than asking 'why' – which will move the work onto your task list – you ask a series of 'what' coaching questions.

Question	Purpose
What is happening that you want to change?	To gain an understanding that a problem exists and that the person wants to do something different.
What will you (or the team) be doing when this problem is solved?	Framing areas of focus that can be measured and defined as progress-steps
What is the current condition?	Create an agreement on the current status and environment.
What have you done that has worked?	Discover awareness of what resources the person already has
What has the team (or other person) done that has worked?	Discover current team and other person resources
What is your next small step or experiment?	Define some particular area of progress and, from the discussion, build efficacy through the effort
What will you do differently?	Accept the thinking that repeating the same effort over and over will gain similar results. Defining some different steps will make progress.
What decisions do you have to make? What decisions does the team (or other person) have to make?	Creating a scope of decision making and better understanding what accountability and authority are needed.
What competing priorities support your progress or cause regress?	Understanding how other priorities of the work will help or hinder progress.
What risks have you considered? What risks has the team (or other person) considered?	Begin mapping personal and other person/ team risks so that they can be accounted for in the effort
What do you expect to happen when taking your next progress step?	Agree on areas of accountability and authority. Share in the ambiguity of learning and management.

How

Your best project manager comes to you to help with personality clashes. They share how strong personalities are getting in the way of work, and asks for your advice on how to fix this dysfunctional team. Rather than asking why – which will move the work onto your plate – ask a series of ‘how’ coaching questions.

Question	Purpose
How are these clashes causing a slowdown in work?	To frame the challenge in a way that can be discussed
How often are you noticing these clashes?	To look at how often. Is this a limited time thing, or an every time thing.
How often are others coming to you to discuss or complain about the clashes?	Explore how often others may be noticing. Also to understand the size of the challenge
How well does the team know why it is working together? How are they accountable for the team goal? How will their work be evaluated and appraised?	To determine how the essential elements of team performance are known. Also, to move the person to explore the process as opposed to personal challenges.
How have you managed to complete the many tasks the team has already achieved?	Bring attention to what they have done that is successful as opposed to what is not working.
How can you do more of what you shared that is working?	Draw a connection between past success and current progress
How will you notice that progress is being made?	Identify progress clues and support them to change how the work is done
How will you increase what is already working well enough with the team?	Show that challenges are a two-sided option. The one hand is resistance, and the other is cooperation.

When

A staff member comes to you to share that they are no longer fulfilled with their current work, and would like change. Rather than asking a series of 'why questions' you ask the following 'when questions.'

Question	Purpose
When, during your workday, do you feel fulfilled – even a little bit?	Work with the person to identify what they are doing that currently works.
When do you find yourself looking for engaging work?	Discover times that the individual can accept and change how work gets done.
When you speak with your coworkers about your job, what would they notice is different when you are fulfilled?	Reframe to have the person look outside themselves to discover progress clues.
When during your day can seek work that challenges you and makes you feel fulfilled?	Look for times and opportunities for the person to take accountability plus authority over their work.
When you find work that is meaningful what changes?	Anchor context about useful change
When can we meet again and discuss what work you believe fulfills you and how you made progress?	Develop an agreement for development and time to meet again.

Where

A team member comes to you asking for guidance on prioritizing their work, of course, you have a pile of work to complete. Instead of asking a series of 'why' they cannot prioritize, you ask 'where.'

Question	Purpose
Where do you find ease in managing your current workload?	Identify the challenge and what's working
Where is the simplest area to begin prioritizing?	Choose a progress step to start
Where in your day do you find the time, even just a little bit, to define the strategy of your work?	Discovering exceptions and seeing how they occur
Where is the work that you can complete the quickest?	Re-framing progress steps
Where is the work that you can let go of?	Determining what to stop doing
Where can you find whose work it is to complete?	Examining the project or work goals to determine what is needed
Where are you leveraging the work to create a greater return on your time?	Understand what's working and how to frame next steps
Where can you complete less than perfect quality work because the goals, at this time, do not require perfection?	Understanding what is needed within the work and what is too much
Where will you notice a difference when you prioritize differently?	Identifying a difference to start
Where are you already seeing this difference?	Using current resources to define priority
Where did that difference come from? Where can you do more of that?	Decision and progress steps