

The Boardroom Report

Think before you ask

Directors often ask questions in the boardroom to flush out information that could help them in decision-making or advising management. But with a bit of skill and thought, they could also use their questions to empower management.

So says Lindsay Tighe, CEO of Inspirational Coaching and author of *The Answer – Improve your life by asking better questions*.

“While there are many situations when there is a requirement and expectation that we will advise, there is certainly scope to reflect on whether the approach is as balanced in favour of a more empowered approach, particularly given that this role modelling will have a flow on effect on the executive’s style of leadership,” she says.

She notes research shows that 60 per cent of people’s potential does not get used in the workplace and the largest contributory factor creating this is the workplace culture and leadership style adopted.

“When using a questioning approach, it is essential that we think about the purpose of the question. Very often we use questions to gather information to enable us to make decisions. The approach I am talking about is using questions to empower the other person to make their own decisions, which then requires a very different skill set.”

When questioning to empower, she says directors should ask more solution-focused questions, which enable the person to develop their own ideas and solutions. “When we ask these questions, there needs to be a willingness to let go of your way and an openness to listen to and accept the other person’s ideas, even if they are different to your preferred approach,” she says.

“By asking questions we enable the other person to build confidence and capability and start to fulfil their potential. In addition, it has been proven that when someone gets their own idea or insight from a question, it releases chemicals into the brain like adrenalin and endorphins. This means the person will feel more motivated about the idea because they own it and are far more likely to get the job done with an enthusiastic approach.”

Tighe says asking questions to empower executives doesn’t mean letting go completely. “As board members you are still there to guide and provide advice – the real skill is in deciding what approach to use at the right time with the right person. We know generally that human beings have a real tendency to take a more directive and advisory role and it can be a challenge to become more of an ‘asker’.”

By role modelling using questions to empower people, Tighe believes directors will support the executives in building confidence, feeling more engaged and motivated with the decisions made, given that it is they who are making the decision. “This will in turn enable the executives to build a more empowered or questioning culture in their teams, which releases the potential of staff throughout the organisation.”

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