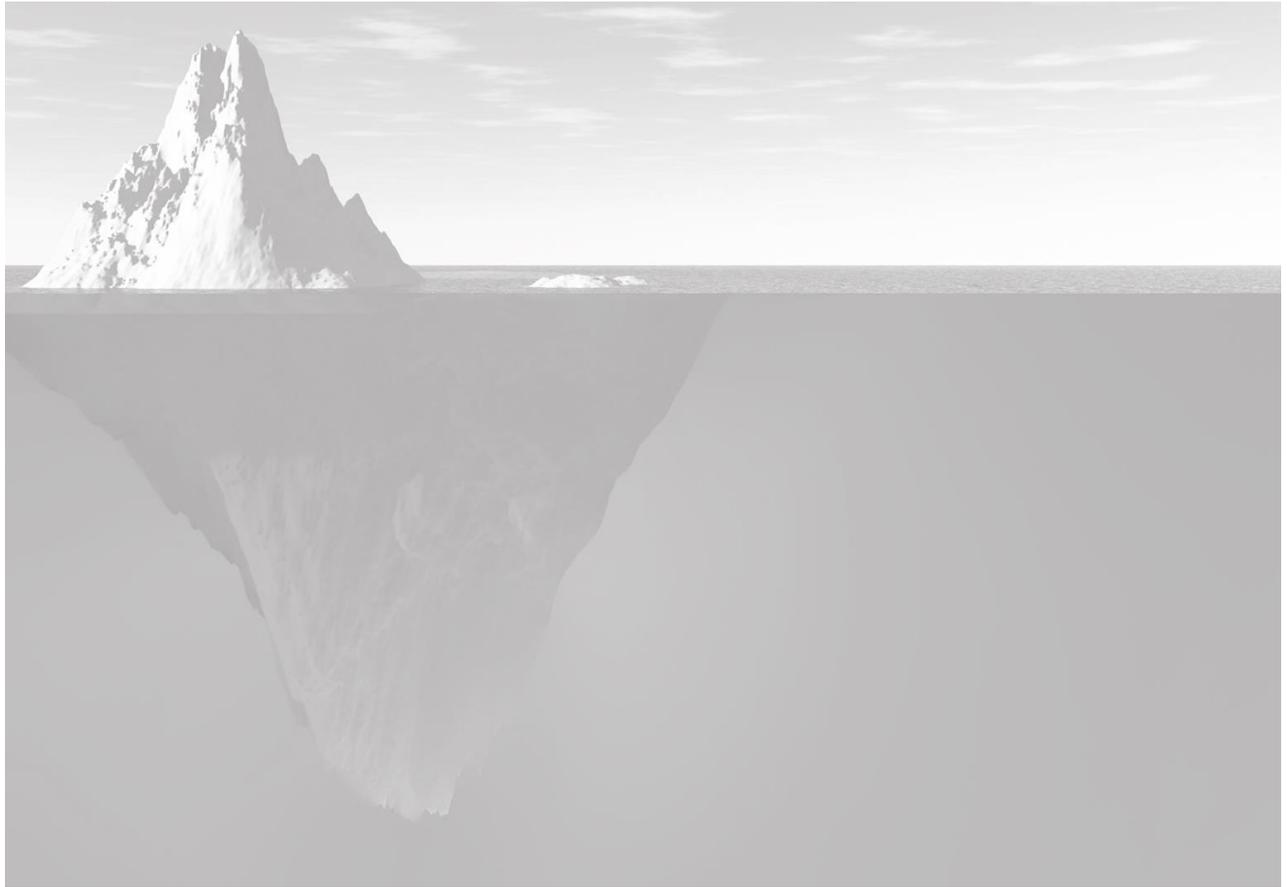


# Liberating Thinking: In Pursuit of Powerful Questions



An Inventory of Powerful Questions to play with

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## INTRODUCTION

This handout is a selection of powerful questions that I have collected over the last 15 years. Please feel free to use them, amend them, test them out and add to them. It's not exhaustive, but it's better than starting with a white piece of paper!

## SETTING THE CONTEXT

Once you have the question/s, there is a way of setting up the conversation that makes a difference. If the conversation is not setup clearly and intentionally, the old conversation will occur. To initiate a new conversation, we have to give a reason for it to guard against solution finding and advice giving. Thinking about the setup is as important as creating the question/s, as it creates the space to explore stories, relatedness, accountability, strengths and ideas.

### There are four things that can help:

- Set the boundaries, the rules of engagement. This could be no interrupting, note-taking or devices
- Give permission for silence and then don't fill it!
- Avoid advice (it's not about you; your job is to help the other person/people think better for themselves) and replace it with curiosity
- Precisely name the question and stay focussed on that question, not a different default from the old way

### Your role as a Thinking Partner

Nancy Kline once said that the role of the Thinking Partner was both essential and irrelevant and that the only function we have in this role is to help the Thinker to think better for themselves.

### We do this by:

- Listening deeply and inquiring with genuine curiosity
- Surfacing connectedness based on listening, genuineness and not knowing
- Assuming that a positive team and personal relationships are critical to business success
- Giving structure to the emotional dimension of the work and the workplace
- Supporting the Thinker to make decisions around assumptions
- Supporting the Thinker to surface doubts and commitments, and moving the thinking, decisions and action forward
- Encouraging directness, authenticity and personal accountability

## PATTERNS OF QUESTIONS AND EASY PLANS FOR SPECIFIC SITUATIONS

Elsewhere in this toolkit, you will find patterns of questions and conversation plans for:

- Meetings, including operational meetings, project review meetings and creative innovation meetings
- 1-1 conversations, including reflective practise, coaching and development reviews
- Small group conversations

# Liberating Thinking: In Pursuit of Powerful Questions

## Questions that focus on understanding the system

- What are the invisible structures and patterns of belonging?
- What, if anything, makes the system you work in complex?
- Is your organisation becoming more complex or more predictable?
- What is good and right within the system? What is flourishing?
- What is the shared purpose for members of the system in which you work?
- Can you map the system in which you work?
- Who are the players (people)?
- What are the current changes coming from within the system or being imposed?
- Does your organisation need to boost its rate of innovation?
- What are some external influences?
- What are the key political, social and economic issues?
- Does the value of your decisions depend on the input and expertise of others within the organisation?
- Is your workforce more diverse and geographically dispersed than it was and what is the impact?
- How do you go about attracting and retaining top talent?

## Questions around Leadership

- Describe the leadership journey that brought you here?
- Honestly.....where is here?
- In the context of your leadership, what's happening that demands adaptation?
- Given your leadership purpose, what is possible?
- What is at stake if you don't change your leadership style?
- What are your intentions as a leader, and why do they matter?
- When have you faced significant new challenges, and what helped you cope with them?
- What top three challenges do you currently face?
- Who are your most important stakeholders, and why do they have significance?
- What are your intentions as a leader?
- Do you know what is happening at the edges of your leadership impact?
- In order to be successful in your current leadership role, what do you need to let go of and what do you need to learn? What capabilities do you need to develop?
- How do you influence people by giving them experiences?
- How will you develop your team? What do you need from your team and what does your team need from you?
- Why does it matter to you that your leadership leaves a positive legacy?

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## Questions around Team Cohesion

- When you think about your deeper purpose within our team, what would you like to think about and what are your thoughts?
- How do we engage in the unknown?
- Why does being part of a team matter to you?
- What happens when we think outside self-imposed boundaries?
- What if we asked at least one person for feedback every day?
- What if we were taking personal responsibility for our attitude and behaviour?
- How will your way of working send out signals about your core values?
- How does your personal contribution support customers through the system?
- When you feel proud, what kinds of things happen to you and those around you?
- Where do you think the team is stuck?
- What would it be like if we could work more collaboratively?
- If your part of the service was viewed as a model of excellence by others, what would that feel like for you personally?
- Why is it important to capture the ideas, energy and innovation that live within the team?

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## Questions for Development Conversations

- Tell me about a time in the last four weeks where you made a positive difference to the lives of people?
- How did doing this help you to deliver the best possible experience or outcomes for customers?
- How could you use what you have learned with other team members?
- How has your passion for customers 'shown up' in your work in the last four weeks?
- What if you went that extra mile for a fellow team member?
- Can you share a recent story about how you have connected to your knowledge, skills and experience to deliver the best outcomes?
- How could you share this best practice with the team?
- Thinking forward, what areas do you want to open up for development?
- What could we do as a team to improve in this area?
- How do you connect to the thoughts and feelings of the team and the people we serve?
- What could we do as a team to improve in this area?
- Tell me about a time when you had the courage and strength to do the right thing?
- How do you create space and an environment to have everyone's voice heard?
- If you were courageous now, what would you tell me?
- How do you contribute to creating a safe space for all of the people who touch our business?
- If I was to ask you to name a risk you were concerned about, what would that be?
- If you were valuing yourself and others more, what would you do that you don't always do now?
- If it was up to you, what would you do next?
- Tell me a story from the last four weeks about how your enthusiasm positively influenced change?
- What ideas do you have about how you could contribute to improvements for service users or the team?

# Liberating Thinking: In Pursuit of Powerful Questions

## Questions for Change Projects

- How do you plan to make the experience of this project positive?
- How will we demonstrate care for people and resources?
- How much risk are you willing to take, and how much commitment will you offer?
- To what extent are you invested in the well-being of the whole?
- When you think about the success of this project and the positive impact on others, what comes to mind?
- What does your curiosity tell you?
- What do we want to create together (that we cannot create alone) to make the difference?
- How will we make it OK to say no and disagree?
- How will we really hold each other to account?
- What measures have meaning for us all?
- What idea do you/we have that has game-changing potential?
- What is the crossroads with the work right now?
- How can we move into our whole potential?
- How can we work together to make this happen with more intention?
- What can you do that has the power to transform the project and inspire progress?
- Where can we make a start that will feel different, new and exciting?
- What are the first things we are collectively committed to?
- What is solid and useful in what we have achieved that could be the foundation for the next stages?
- How did that conversation go? What didn't get said?

# Liberating Thinking: In Pursuit of Powerful Questions

## Questions that are generally good for any situation!

- When you think about xxx, what would you like to think about and what are your thoughts? And what more do you think or feel or want to say?
- What assumptions are you holding that are influencing your thinking?
- What strengths could you engage to support a change?
- What if we changed from complainers to problem solvers? How would we look at this differently?
- What if we stopped thinking and started doing? What would we do first?
- What if we chose to really listen to each other with no judgement and no interrupting? What would you say first and then what, and what more?
- What if you had the courage and the confidence to move into the unknown, what would you do first and then what, and what more?
- What if you could turn your frustration into an intention? What would it be?
- What would it look/sound/feel like for you if...?
- Where is your blind spot?
- Help me to understand where you think my blind spot is?
- What is the story that you would like to be telling about 6 months from now?