

Transforming Why to What

Often, when we are stuck, we are asking ourselves, or our colleagues, “why” questions: Why is it so hard? Why am I uncomfortable? Why can’t we seem to....? Why is there so much resistance to...? Why don’t I want to...?

“Why” questions tend to move us into resistance, rather than out of it – they ask us to explain or justify our feelings or actions. It is far more effective to ask “What” questions if you want to move forward.

- “Why is it so hard?” becomes “What about it is hard for you?”
- “Why am I uncomfortable?” becomes “What is it about this that makes me uncomfortable?”
- “Why can’t we seem to?” becomes “What is in the way of our...?”
- “Why is there so much resistance to...?” becomes “What is it that we are resisting?”
- “Why don’t I want to...?” becomes “What is it that I don’t want?”

“What” questions are much easier to answer and they tend to both move us out of judgment and into curiosity, and to provide far more concrete information.

Once you have done the most direct translation, look for more what questions that will illuminate the challenge you are facing. If the first answer feels self-evident, or like a dead end (i.e. you answer “what is hard about this?” with “it’s scary”) ask a “what” question about that answer (“what is scary about it?”) and see where that leads you.

Powerful Questions: Here are a few “what” questions to try out when you feel stuck.

- What do I/we want?
- What would make it easy?
- What am I/are we resisting?
- What am I/are we tolerating?
- What do I/we want to say yes to? No to?
- What does my body know?
- What am I/are we assuming?
- What do I/we want to let go of?
- What am I/are we compromising?
- What would make it fun?

Stay curious. See where these questions lead you.

What Else?

Perhaps the most powerful question is “what else?” When we invite our minds to give us information by asking a “what” question, our minds will generally start by offering us the answers they know best. These are sometimes just what we need, but they can also be quite limited. Try asking “what else?” and continuing to ask it until you completely run out of possible responses – let yourself be wildly impractical at this stage; this is where the creativity comes from. Later you can go back and decide what you want to act on.

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