

# 5 QUESTIONS EVERY LEADER SHOULD ASK

A free resource from The Leadership Circle · Dr. Hal Wilson

## ABOUT THIS RESOURCE

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The most powerful leadership tool is not a strategy, a system, or a framework. It is a question. Questions are how leaders surface blind spots, build trust, create accountability, and sustain growth. The five questions in this resource are drawn from three decades of coaching science, leadership research, and real-world leadership experience. Each one is supported by peer-reviewed scholarship. Each one is immediately usable.

This is not a checklist. It is a practice. The leaders who get the most out of these questions return to them regularly, in quiet reflection, in conversation with the people they lead, and in dedicated development work.

— *Dr. Hal Wilson*

## QUESTION 1 OF 5

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# 1

## Am I as self-aware as I think I am?

### WHY THIS QUESTION MATTERS

Organizational psychologist Tasha Eurich's research found that while 95% of people believe they are self-aware, only 10-15% actually are. For leaders, this gap is especially costly. Teams led by self-unaware leaders report higher stress, lower motivation, and cut team success in half.

Research distinguishes between two types of self-awareness: **internal** (how clearly you see yourself) and **external** (how accurately you understand how others perceive you). Effective leaders work to develop both. Eurich's research also cautions against pure introspection: asking "why" during self-reflection often leads to unproductive rumination. The more effective practice is asking "what" questions. For example: "What is happening here?" rather than "Why am I like this?"

#### REFLECTION PROMPTS

- *What would my team say is my single greatest leadership blind spot?*
- *When was the last time I received feedback that genuinely surprised me, and what did I do with it?*
- *Do I see myself more clearly from the inside, or do I rely on how others see me to calibrate my leadership?*

#### RESEARCH BASIS

Eurich, T. (2018). What self-awareness really is (and how to cultivate it). *Harvard Business Review*.  
<https://hbr.org/2018/01/what-self-awareness-really-is-and-how-to-cultivate-it>

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#### QUESTION 2 OF 5

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# 2

## Is my team psychologically safe enough to tell me the truth?

#### WHY THIS QUESTION MATTERS

Harvard Business School professor Amy Edmondson defines psychological safety as "a shared belief held by members of a team that the team is safe for interpersonal risk-taking." Her landmark 1999 study in *Administrative Science Quarterly* demonstrated that teams with higher psychological safety showed greater learning behavior and performance.

When people feel they cannot speak up about problems, mistakes, or concerns, organizations fail. Not because people lack information or skill, but because the culture makes honesty feel dangerous. Leaders create psychological safety not by being nice, but by inviting questions and modeling non-defensive responses to challenge. Edmondson's research found that leaders who admitted their own mistakes were most effective at creating safe team environments.

#### REFLECTION PROMPTS

- *When did someone on my team last disagree with me openly in a meeting, and how did I respond?*
- *Do my team members bring me problems early, or do they wait until things escalate?*
- *What is one thing my team is probably not telling me, and why aren't they telling me?*

## RESEARCH BASIS

Edmondson, A. C. (1999). Psychological safety and learning behavior in work teams. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 44(2), 350-383. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.2307/2666999>

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## QUESTION 3 OF 5

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# 3

## Do the people I lead know exactly what is expected of them, and why it matters?

### WHY THIS QUESTION MATTERS

Gallup's workplace research consistently identifies role clarity and clear expectations as key drivers of engagement and accountability. Leaders frequently overestimate how clearly they have communicated expectations, while team members report significant ambiguity about priorities and standards.

Goal clarity is not just about telling people what to do. Research on leadership and goal-setting shows that when followers understand both **what** is expected and **why** it matters, specifically the purpose behind the expectation, they demonstrate higher motivation, stronger alignment, and more autonomous engagement.

### REFLECTION PROMPTS

- *If I asked three members of my team to describe our top priority right now, would I get the same answer?*
- *Have I told my team not just what I need, but why it matters and how their work connects to the larger mission?*
- *Where has a lack of clarity on my part led to wasted effort, missed expectations, or confusion in the last 90 days?*

### RESEARCH BASIS

Gallup. (2026). Accountability is leadership's greatest weakness. *Gallup Workplace*. <https://www.gallup.com/workplace/703379/accountability-leadership-greatest-weakness.aspx>

Bakker-Pieper, A., et al. (2022). Let's stay in touch: Frequency of interaction between leaders and followers predicts better leadership outcomes. *PLOS ONE*. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9778566/>

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*"He did not give advice; he drew out clarity. He did not motivate; he awakened direction. He did not push; he revealed what was already within. That is rare. That is what leadership-level coaching looks like."*

Coaching Client (name withheld per confidentiality policy)

#### QUESTION 4 OF 5

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# 4

## Am I coaching my people, or just managing their results?

### WHY THIS QUESTION MATTERS

There is a critical difference between managing outputs and developing people. Managers who focus only on results miss the human architecture beneath performance. Research on executive coaching consistently shows that coaching-oriented leadership produces stronger long-term individual and organizational outcomes when leaders ask powerful questions, listen deeply, and support growth rather than simply directing behavior.

Edmondson's research on psychological safety found that leaders who invite questions, seek input, and respond non-defensively create environments where people take appropriate risks and learn faster. **Developing people is the highest-leverage activity a leader can do.** Results follow people development.

### REFLECTION PROMPTS

- *In my last five one-on-ones, did I spend more time telling people what to do, or asking questions and listening?*
- *Who on my team has grown the most in the past year, and what role did I play in that growth?*
- *Is there someone I have been managing around rather than developing through honest, direct conversation?*

### RESEARCH BASIS

Feldman, D. C., & Lankau, M. J. (2005). Executive coaching: A review and agenda for future research. *Journal of Management*, 31(6), 829-848. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206305279599>

Edmondson, A. C. (2004). Psychological safety, trust, and learning in organizations: A group-level lens. In R. M. Kramer & K. S. Cook (Eds.), *Trust and distrust in organizations*. Russell Sage Foundation. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/268328210>

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# 5

## Am I still growing, or have I stopped learning?

### WHY THIS QUESTION MATTERS

Stanford psychologist Carol Dweck's foundational research on mindset theory demonstrates that individuals who hold a growth mindset, the belief that abilities can be developed through effort, strategy, and input from others, consistently outperform those with a fixed mindset, particularly in the face of challenge and setback.

For leaders, the implications are significant. Research applying Dweck's framework to organizational settings found that a growth mindset in leaders positively impacts subordinate engagement, especially in combination with transformational leadership behaviors. Leaders who stop learning model a fixed mindset to everyone around them. The most effective leaders remain genuinely curious, seek feedback, and treat their own development with the same seriousness they apply to developing others.

### REFLECTION PROMPTS

- *What is the last thing I learned that genuinely changed how I lead?*
- *Do I seek out feedback, or do I mostly receive it when it is forced on me?*
- *What would it look like to invest in my own development with the same intentionality I ask of my team?*

### RESEARCH BASIS

Dweck, C. S. (2006). *Mindset: The new psychology of success*. Random House. (Foundational text based on 30+ years of peer-reviewed research on fixed and growth mindsets)

Caniels, M. C. J., et al. (2020). Growth mindset for human resource development. *Human Resource Development Review*. doi: 10.1177/1534484320939739. [https://scholarworks.boisestate.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1120&context=ipt\\_facpubs](https://scholarworks.boisestate.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1120&context=ipt_facpubs)

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## What Happens Next?

Most leaders can answer these questions. Few leaders consistently create the time, accountability, and honest feedback necessary to act on the answers.

*That is one reason executive coaching exists.*

If these questions surfaced something you want to explore more deeply, whether a blind spot, a team dynamic, or a pattern you keep running into, a complimentary discovery conversation with Hal costs nothing and often helps leaders see their situation more clearly.

**Schedule a free discovery call: [calendly.com/bookhalwilson/discovery-call](https://calendly.com/bookhalwilson/discovery-call)**

*"Coach Wilson certainly helped the coaches in attendance by sharing his coaching expertise."*

— Don Showalter, 10-Time USA Basketball Gold Medal Coach

### ABOUT DR. HAL WILSON

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Dr. Hal Wilson is a Full Professor of Coaching Education at Georgia Southern University, an executive coach trained through Emory Executive Education / Goizueta Business School, NCAA Faculty Athletics Representative, and 10x USA Basketball presenter. Across more than three decades, he has developed leaders in athletics, education, business, and nonprofit organizations through executive coaching, teaching, and leadership development.

His sport coaching background includes serving as a Graduate Assistant on the Men's Basketball Staff at the University of Tennessee (2000 SEC Champions, NCAA Sweet 16, school-record wins) and as an Assistant Coach for the Bulloch Academy Girls Basketball State Championship team (2015). He is the founder of Hal Wilson Enterprises, LLC.

## Ways to Work with Hal

**Executive Coaching:** One-on-one coaching for leaders ready to gain clarity, build confidence, and perform at a higher level. Engagements begin with a free discovery call.

**Leadership Workshops:** Half-day and full-day workshops for schools, athletic departments, businesses, and organizations. Research-grounded, practically focused, and built around your team's specific challenges.

**Speaking and Keynotes:** Customized presentations for conferences, retreats, staff development days, and leadership events, delivered with the credibility of a scholar and the engagement of a performing comedian.

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## What's Coming in The Leadership Circle

As a member, you will receive ongoing resources designed to help you lead with more clarity, confidence, and consistency.

- ✓ Weekly leadership insights drawn from 30+ years of coaching science and practice
- ✓ Practical tools and frameworks you can apply immediately with your team
- ✓ Priority access to leadership workshops, speaking dates, and executive coaching availability
- ✓ Additional free resources, including more tools like this one, delivered to your inbox