



ACTIVITY

## COACHING THROUGH QUESTIONS: **A PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR SCHOOL LEADERS**

Use this activity to build clarity, ownership, and trust by swapping one directive or answer for a thoughtful question.

Brought to you by your pals at  
**alpaca**

# ASK. PAUSE. TRUST.

Leadership often trains us to respond quickly with answers, solutions, and direction. Over time, that can quietly turn leaders into the problem-solvers for everything. The Question Swap interrupts that pattern.

## **By asking one thoughtful question instead of giving an immediate answer, you can:**

- Reduce the pressure to have it all figured out
- Create space for others to think, not just comply
- Build confidence and ownership in the people around you
- Prevent yourself from becoming the bottleneck

This is not about stepping back. It is about stepping differently.

- Questions invite clarity.
- Questions slow urgency.
- Questions signal trust.

Even one question a day can shift the tone of leadership from doing for to thinking with.



## WHEN TO TRY IT

Try it during everyday interactions like emails, hallway conversations, meetings you are already in, or quick check-ins. It only takes 30 seconds to 2 minutes and fits naturally into real conversations, making it easy to build the habit without adding extra time to your day.

## PRO TIPS

- **Stronger thinking and decision-making:** Staff analyze, reflect, and problem-solve rather than wait for direction, leading to better judgment in complex moments.
- **Shared ownership and accountability:** Responsibility shifts from the leader to the team, building trust, agency, and follow-through.
- **Fewer repeat issues:** When people think decisions through, they learn from them and are less likely to return with the same problem.
- **Reduced leader fatigue:** Guiding thinking instead of carrying every solution conserves energy and prevents burnout.
- **A calmer, more trusting culture:** Questions slow urgency, invite respect, and signal belief in others' capability.

# ACTIVITY DIRECTIONS

---

## **Step 1. Notice the Moment**

In the moment, notice when you feel pulled to:

- Solve it
- Set it straight
- Decide for others
- Provide the answer

That pull is your reminder to pause and swap.

## **Step 2: Swap the Response**

Instead of offering a directive or solution, choose a question that fits the moment.

### **Clarity Questions:**

Use when things feel messy or rushed:

- "What do you see as the real issue here?"
- "What feels most important to get right?"

### **Thinking Questions:**

Use when someone is capable but unsure:

- "What options are you considering?"
- "What have you already tried?"

### **Support Questions:**

Use when emotions are present:

- "What feels hardest about this right now?"
- "What would be most helpful from me?"

### **Ownership Questions:**

Use when you want to build agency:

- "What do you think the next step should be?"
- "How would you like to move this forward?"

### **Step 3: Pause After Asking**

This is often the hardest part.

Resist the urge to jump in. Count silently to five and allow the silence to do some of the work. Many people need a moment to think before responding.

Optional mantra: Thinking takes time.

### **Step 4: Choose the Next Move**

After the response, decide how to proceed:

- **Affirm and step back:** Acknowledge their thinking and let them move forward.
- **Clarify with one more question:** Ask a follow-up to deepen understanding or bring focus.
- **Support without taking over:** Offer guidance or resources while keeping ownership with them.
- **Decide if it truly requires you:** Step in only if the decision or action belongs to your role.

### **Step 5: Reflection**

At the end of the day, complete this sentence:

"Today, asking instead of telling created  
\_\_\_\_\_."

Take a moment to notice how one small shift affected the conversation, the outcome, or the relationship.

# Activity Printables



# QUESTION BANK

Use this bank to guide conversations instead of jumping to solutions. Choose the category that fits and ask one question that invites thinking or ownership.

**Clarity:** Use when things feel tangled or rushed.

- What feels most important to sort out first?
- What's the real issue underneath this?
- What would make this feel clearer?
- Where do you see the biggest leverage right now?

**Thinking:** Use when someone is capable but unsure.

- What options are you considering?
- What have you already tried?
- What's your thinking so far?
- What feels like the best next step?

**Support:** Use when emotions or stress are present.

- What part of this feels hardest right now?
- What would be most helpful from me?
- What support do you need to move forward?
- What's weighing on you most in this moment?

**Ownership:** Use when you want to build agency and follow-through.

- How would you like to handle this?
- What decision feels right to you?
- What does success look like from your perspective?
- How do you want to move this forward?

**Decision-Making:** Use when choices or trade-offs are required.

- What are we solving for here?
- What matters most in this decision?
- What's the risk if we don't act right now?
- What's the smallest step that still moves us forward?

**Growth & Reflection:** Use after action or experience.

- What did you learn from this?
- What would you try differently next time?
- What surprised you?
- What's one thing you'd keep the same?

## COLLABORATION

# BUILT BY EDUCATORS, FOR SCHOOL LEADERS

This resource was created in collaboration with dedicated educators and school leaders who brought their experience, ideas, and insight to every step of the process. We're grateful for their partnership in building tools that truly make a difference in schools.



**Stephanie DeLuca M.Ed**

Coordinator of Curriculum, Instruction and  
Professional Development  
Brentwood Borough School District

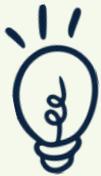
# WE'RE SO GLAD YOU'RE HERE!

Thanks for downloading this resource—at [Alpaca](#), we're on a mission to **make school the happiest place to work**.



## Tried an activity?

Send a photo or a staff testimonial to [our team](#), and we'll send you a coffee on us!



## Got an idea brewing?

We love co-creating with school leaders—[drop us a line](#) with any resource ideas you'd love to see next.



## Explore more!

Check out our [full resource library](#) for creative, ready-to-use tools to support you and your team.



## SEE HOW ALPACA WORKS

Beautiful surveys, delightful care packages, and real insights on teacher wellbeing—everything you need to lead with confidence, all in one simple solution. [Book a quick demo!](#)