

Asking Better Questions: A Professional Guide

Introduction

In today's fast-paced work environments—especially in executive-assistant partnerships—communication is more than just exchanging information. It's about clarity, trust, and momentum. One of the most powerful tools for achieving these is asking better questions.

This guide distills practical strategies to help you ask questions that not only get faster, clearer answers, but also strengthen relationships and reduce friction. Whether you're an executive, an assistant, or part of a high-performing team, these principles can transform the way you work together.

Why Better Questions Matter

Asking better questions isn't just about efficiency. It's about respect. Every question you ask is a request for someone's attention and mental energy. Poorly framed questions create confusion, delays, and frustration. Well-framed questions, on the other hand, build trust, protect focus, and keep work moving smoothly.

A good question functions like a well-designed interface: it makes the next step obvious.

When you consistently ask better questions, you:

- Reduce unnecessary back-and-forth
- Speed up decision-making
- Build stronger partnerships
- Increase trust and influence

Three Core Tips for Asking Better Questions

Tip 1: Eliminate Thought Requirement

Executives and team members are constantly making decisions. Every extra ounce of mental effort you demand can feel like a speed bump. Your goal is to make answering effortless.

Ineffective: "Where should we take Bob to lunch next week?"

This triggers multiple hidden decisions: location, food preferences, scheduling, reservations.

Effective: "Bob is free for lunch next week. He's open to Chili's, Cheddar's, or Rocky Mountain Brewery. Do you have a preference?"

By narrowing the options, you remove mental clutter. The response can be immediate.

Practical Formats: - Yes/No - Multiple choice (3–4 options)

Remember: Don't ask your leader to decide *what to decide*. Instead, prepare decisions and let them choose.

Tip 2: Ask One Question at a Time

Bundling multiple questions into one message may feel efficient, but it creates confusion. The more asks you pack together, the more likely you'll get partial or vague replies.

Ineffective: "What time should I schedule the meeting? Who's attending? Should I order lunch, and if so, what kind?"

Effective (separate asks): 1. "What time works best for the meeting—11, 1, or 3?" 2. "Do you want the full leadership team there, or just a smaller group?" 3. "Would you like lunch included?" 4. "If so, Thai, Chipotle, Ivy's, or Torchy's?"

Each question becomes a quick decision, easy to answer in seconds.

Pro Tip: In live conversations, give a heads-up: "I've got three quick questions for you—starting with meeting time. What works best for Friday?"

This avoids overwhelming the listener while still covering all topics.

Tip 3: Prioritize

Not all questions are equal. Don't bury your most urgent ask in the middle of a message. Lead with what matters most.

Rule of Thumb: Lead with urgency.

Examples of clear labeling: - **[Urgent]** – Needs action today - **[FYI]** – No reply needed - **[Learning]** – Just for context

By flagging importance, you allow the recipient to triage effectively. Over time, this builds trust: when something is marked urgent, it truly is.

The Emotional Side of Questions

Communication isn't just logical—it's emotional. Vague or unclear questions add invisible weight to someone's day. They can make assistants feel overlooked or executives feel mentally overloaded.

But a well-crafted question communicates care: - "I'm thinking about your time." - "I've done the prep before asking you." - "I respect your focus."

Over time, this habit positions you as someone who adds clarity, not chaos. It increases influence and strengthens working relationships.

The A.C.E. Framework

To consistently ask better questions, use the **A.C.E. framework**:

- **A — Anticipate the Decision**

Strip the issue down to the one clear choice that needs to be made.

- **C — Curate the Context**

Provide only the relevant details so the other person doesn't have to hunt for information.

- **E — Eliminate Friction**

Make it easy to respond—use yes/no or limited-choice formats.

This framework requires no special tools—just intention and a few extra seconds of preparation.

Putting It into Practice

Here are a few ways to apply these principles immediately: 1. Before sending a message, pause: is it clear and easy to answer? 2. Reframe open-ended asks into specific, limited choices. 3. Break apart stacked questions into separate, focused ones. 4. Label urgency so people know what matters most.

Challenge: Over the next week, notice how you frame your questions. Each time, ask yourself: - Is the question clear? - Is it easy to answer? - Have I done the thinking before asking?

Small shifts will compound into smoother communication, faster decisions, and stronger trust.

Conclusion

The quality of the questions we ask shapes the quality of the work we do. Better questions: - Save time - Reduce friction - Build trust - Increase influence

Asking better questions is not about efficiency alone—it's an act of generosity. It shows respect for others' time and creates space for better thinking.

So remember: **Anticipate, Curate, Eliminate**. When you make it easy for others to respond, you not only get better answers—you build better relationships.

"The way you ask questions matters. Every time you take a moment to do the mental lift yourself, you're not just being efficient—you're being generous."