

Do You Know What Makes Your Staff Tick?

Use these Five Questions to Keep Them Ticking

When you download a new app, buy a new phone or acquire the latest cool technology like Alexa, you learn to use it. You explore its capabilities, you learn how it works, and over time you learn how it can assist you.

Do you make that effort with your staff? Do you learn their capabilities? Do you know how they work best? (We explored that in the last newsletter.) Do you know what they enjoy? Do you know what gives them joy? Do you know what makes them tick?

Your staff work better in an environment that values their humanness. That means working with people who know more about them than the due date for their next deliverable. Like learning a new app, it takes time, but it doesn't take THAT much time if you have a few astute questions at your disposal.

Here are five questions you can use today to give you more insight into what makes them tick.



What's new with your kids (grandkids)?

Most people love to talk about their kids or grandkids. Use this as an intro to learn about them. If the child excels in math, ask, "Did she learn math from you?" If the grandkid plays baseball, ask, "Did you enjoy baseball as a kid?" This opens a conversation that gives you more insight about your employee. For example, early in my career, as a young woman engineer, I needed to work with an older gentleman known to be brusque and grumpy. No matter the topic, it was like working with a stone wall. One day we met in his office and I noticed photos of children (see question 5). Without thinking I said, "Who are all the kids?" His demeanor transformed instantly. He relaxed, smiled and even glowed. "Those are all my grandkids!" Thirty minutes later we started our work conversation but, this time, it went smoothly and achieved results. Our professional relationship was better from then on.



What are you doing for a vacation? Why did you choose that?

One staff person tells you they went on a Carnival cruise to the Bahamas and another person says they went to Tibet and meditated with the monks (my last vacation). That information alone gives insight into what makes them tick. Your next question is, "Why did you choose that?" Or, "What was your favorite part of the trip?" This peeks into the attributes they value. The Bahamas cruiser they might say, "I loved traveling to a new place without worry." The Tibet traveler might say, "It recharged my soul to sit quietly and reflect." You hear hints of the inner clock that makes them tick.



How did you decide to work here? If you weren't doing this, what would you be doing?

The answer may tell you that this person stumbled into the job, or they had family connections, or they passionately pursued the position. In any case, there will be an interesting tidbit. Your follow-up for more information: "If you weren't doing this, what would you be doing." And if you're really curious ask, "If you could do anything, what would you do?" You may be surprised at the answers! (Broadway performer, for me...in case you're wondering!)



What's your favorite thing to do outside work?

One of my staff was an acclaimed lacrosse player in college. Who knew? I didn't until I asked about her hobbies. She coaches girls lacrosse. What do your staff outside of work? One of my clients participates in a mud run every year. It's a connection to his Marine Corp roots. This is a simple question that opens new lines of conversation and indicates a sincere interest in a world beyond work.



Tell me about these photos (or anything you notice in their office).

It looked like a black and grey lump on the corner of my bookcase. The occasional astute observer would notice it and ask, "What's that?" It was a chunk of asphalt. "Why do you have a chunk of asphalt?" It was a going away 'gift' when I left my highway job in North Carolina. In that short exchange, the guest gained insight into my background and knowledge they never expected. What do you observe in the office of your staff? Ask them about it. Even the décor will spill the beans about what makes them tick. Maybe there's a Ravens ball cap, a photo on a mountain top, a beautiful lamp positioned just so. All are conversation starters to give you more information about your staff.

People aren't that different from a well-designed, intuitive app. Clues about what makes your staff tick are in plain sight if you ask.

Ask, so that they know your interest in them goes beyond business.