

Depth Perception

ARE YOU FEELING ISOLATED AS A NONPROFIT OR MINISTRY LEADER?

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Disciplining the reactions of self

Baseline Questions

What happens in you when a challenge you did not foresee jumps into your path? How do you respond when you are asked a confrontational question? What goes off in you when you are blindsided?

How you respond to these scenarios roughly corresponds to your response when an unexpected opportunity finds you, when someone seeks your counsel, or if a well-executed project lands you in the spotlight. We are self-centered creatures and are intrinsically wired to try to look good, to want to win, to extract the most benefit for ourselves and those we love, and to want to control our circumstances, regardless of how positively we perceive it.

These natural responses can short-circuit our discernment, however, and prevent us from reflection, analysis, deep thinking and collecting wisdom. They don't help the leader lead well.

If you give this longer consideration you can begin to identify the questions that drive your initial responses to challenges/opportunities. The instinctual set of questions tend to run as follows:

- ♦ *How will this make me look?*
- ♦ *What do I get out of this?*
- ♦ *What will this cost me?*
- ♦ *Can I control this?*
- ♦ *Will I get to perform (with my knowledge or skill)?*
- ♦ *What role do I get to play?*
- ♦ *Will I enjoy this?*
- ♦ *How do I demonstrate that I understand, even if I don't?*
- ♦ *Can I kill this?*
- ♦ *What is it we are doing?*
- ♦ *How much time will this take?*

Effective leaders have to discipline themselves to a better set of baseline questions. It means wresting control of their self from subconscious flight or fight reactions in favor of conscious and mission supporting discernment.



Consider the following chart:

Rather than	Use this...
How will this make me look?	What builds long-term relationships?
What do I get out of this?	What can I bring to this?
What will this cost me?	What is the return on the investment?
Can I control this?	What am I giving life to?
Will I get to perform?	What opportunities will be created for my team?
What role do I get to play?	Who is leading this and are they good at guiding teams?
Will I enjoy this?	What are the benefits?
How do I demonstrate that I understand, even if I don't?	What might I learn?
Can I kill this?	Am I willing to be unnecessary?
What is it we are doing?	How will we know the work is accomplished?
How much time will this take?	Does this integrate with my life values and goals?

Disciplining one's self to respond with this more effective set of baseline questions involves trial, error and refinement. Many might feel there is not enough time to function with this level of deliberation. The argument against that perception is the time one consumes at the back end of reactive and rushed decision making. Reacting tends to create relationship messes, miscommunication, poor teamwork, and flawed results.

Over time, the ability to work from these new baseline questions becomes easier. They become familiar friends the leader wants to turn to. The process speeds up again as asking these questions become more natural, without the need to clean up messes.

If you doubt the benefit of slowing down enough to investigate your baseline questions and see what you might adjust, why not try the following experiment?

Pick a key challenge or opportunity. Edit a list of baseline questions you want to ask that are appropriate to the challenge. However awkwardly and stiffly it feels, work your way through them. Have them in front of you and make yourself thoroughly respond to each one. Don't take shortcuts. Then ask, *is this better than rushing, reacting, lashing out and becoming defensive?* I think you know the answer already!

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