

PERFORMANCE ARCHITECT

**QUESTIONS ARE FOR CURIOSITY;
ANSWERS ARE FOR INFLUENCE**

**FOUR STEPS TO ELEVATING
YOUR ANSWERS**



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BY BROOKE ANDERSON AND DR BRIAN GLIBKOWSKI

As we have seen throughout the COVID pandemic, leaders are being asked a lot of questions.

Why do staff need to come back into the office?

What role can managers play in supporting staff wellbeing?

How can we help remote and hybrid teams work effectively?

These questions can sometimes be confronting and challenging. Employees are seeking not just knowledge, but greater certainty, clarity, and reassurance in relation to the work they do, how they do it and the impact they are having with their stakeholders and communities.

There is a real risk in the current climate that we place more emphasis on asking questions than we do providing effective answers. Typically, we are more exacting when we ask questions. We consider the six WH-questions (why, what, when, where, who, how) or ask open or closed questions.

However, when it comes to providing answers, we lack a framework or model that carefully and wisely guides and shapes our answers. The result is that our answers fail to engage, motivate, and influence others.

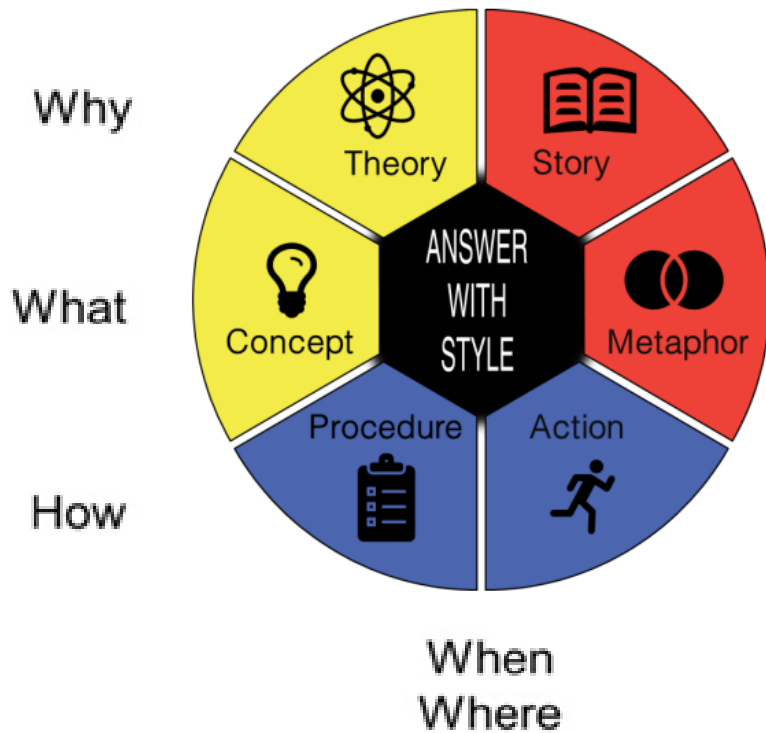
Leadership, as we all know, is all about effective communication. Every day leaders need to explain, reassure, educate, emotionally connect, and support those around them. To be an

effective leader is to answer important questions. When we think about our answers to important questions, we gain an appreciation for the reasons why others ask questions. When we reflect upon answers, we ask better questions ourselves.

To provide the answers that employees, stakeholders, communities, and citizens alike need and deserve, leaders must recognise that answering questions is both an art and science, more importantly it's a skill which we can all learn and develop.

"To be an effective leader is to answer important questions"

The Answer Intelligence (AQ)TM Framework provides an easy and practical communication framework for leaders which enables them to elevate their answers to important questions.



At its core, AQ helps us to structure and strengthen our answers. It helps leaders understand the natural sequence of questions and answers exchange in an unfolding conversation. It does this by mapping the five question types to the six answer types.

For example, if a why-question is asked, then a story and/or theory answer should be provided. If a what-question is asked, then a metaphor and concept should be provided.

By ordering answer types in a circular format, we can clearly see how answer types relate or not to each other. Their proximity to one another is an indication of complementarity whilst opposite answer types tend to resist each other. In practical terms, AQ provides a circular structure to navigate a conversation effectively.

Think of AQ as a set a golf clubs. A driver is designed for long distances, and a putter for short distances on a smooth grass surface. In similar terms, each answer is designed to appeal to different questions. Picking the right club is like picking the right answer and is important to success or failure.

There is no magical wand which can be waved which will instantaneously turn us into excellent communicators. Like anything, being able to provide answers which explain, reassure, and connect requires investment of one’s time. It does however give us hope that we all have the potential to achieve the celestial goal of going from novice to expert communicator, or at least achieve the more terrestrial, but still laudable, goal of step-by-step improvement.

What leaders can do to provide better answers?

Use these four tips to prepare for and participate in your next important conversation.

1. **Recognise the question.** There are three primary question types (why, what, how) and it is important to recognise which question is being asked before you answer. The questioner may not always use the words why, what, or how. Your first job is to interpret the question – what are they really asking?
2. **Use all six answer types.** The biggest advantage is in knowing that there are six ways to answer a question - a theory, a story, a metaphor, an action, a procedure, and a concept. Each answer type can be mapped to a question. The why-question is answered with theory and story. The what-question is answered with concepts and metaphors. The how-question is answered with procedures and actions. Each of the six answer types must respect the particular context (when, where) to be effective.
3. **Natural answer preferences.** How do you typically answer questions? Do you like telling stories every chance you get, or do you tend to provide instructions and outline specific actions, maybe you like using theories given their objective, codifiable, and testable nature. Think about your answer style and that of your team. Think how you could apply different answer types to appeal to your audience's preferences.
4. **It's a skill we can all learn.** Get started with building your bank of stories; build or borrow metaphors; read up on leadership and performance theories and concepts which you can share with your team. Practice your answers and don't forget to ask for feedback.

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Dr. Brian Glibkowski is a professor, researcher, and creator of the Answer Intelligence (AQ) model. AQ models the ability to provide the right answers, as a capability all communicators and change agents can harness to exert more influence on the world around them.

Yellow Edge is a B Corp and we welcome the opportunity to collaborate with people and businesses interested in building the capability and potential of leaders to lead to net zero.

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