

12 Questions to Help New Leaders Thrive in a New Ministry Position

Congratulations! You made it! You're the new leader. Now what?

I know you're supposed to always look like you know what you're doing but -- truth be told -- new leaders often don't even know where to start. They drift around for a month or so, smiling a lot, ordering new stationery while they act as if they've got it covered.

I came across this all-too-familiar scenario recently while coaching a young executive at a non-profit. He had been moved unexpectedly to a new division after achieving some success in another department. The move caught him by surprise, but he threw himself into it with all the energy he could find.

When we first met, I asked the young executive what questions he had. He sheepishly shrugged his shoulders and admitted, "I'm not even sure what questions I should be asking."

I suspect he's not alone. As I thought back over times when I've tackled a new leadership position, I remembered the same uncertainty. I also recalled 12 questions I asked or -- knowing what I know now -- wish I had asked.

It's an impartial list, of course, but these 12 questions should help any new leader prepare to thrive in a new position.

- 1. Who are the key influencers on your new team?** It shouldn't take long to figure out who everyone already respects and follows. They can make or break you. By applying the 80/20 principle, plan to invest a disproportionate amount of time with these key influencers to gain their buy-in *before* getting too far into your new digs. If you don't, you might not stay long.
- 2. What exactly is expected of you?** The last few times I've started a new position, I took the time to unpack the job description in great detail. I ended up with an outline of my duties that filled 8-10 pages, typed, single-spaced. I only reviewed my outline annually after that, but the process of breaking it all down can help you be sure you're not missing anything that might surprise you later.
- 3. What exactly are you expected to do?** This question from John Maxwell is one you need to ask of your supervisor. I'm amazed at how often it isn't asked, only assumed -- until later when performance evaluations are due. Too late. Better to ask specifically up front to help you know what you are personally expected to do and what you can delegate to others.
- 4. How will your success be measured?** I am again surprised by how few leaders, especially in ministry and non-profits, ever ask this question. Most of us thrive when we know the standards being used to evaluate us and become paranoid or even resentful when we find out after the fact that we didn't measure up. Get clarity by asking clearly.

5. How are you perceived by your new team? Our own self-image seldom matches reality. Just because you think you're awesome, doesn't mean anyone else on your new team does -- or cares about your previous success. In some cases, you might even detect resistance to your arrival *because* of your success elsewhere.

6. Are you talking enough? Silence speaks. When we choose to say nothing, we're still saying something. We've simply surrendered control of the message. Your team will fill in the silence by reaching into their own insecurities. And that can't be good. The absence of intentional communication is communication.

7. Have you enlisted a coach or mentor to guide you? Let's face it. You're in uncharted waters. Your new position requires insight and wisdom you just don't have yet. If it doesn't, you're probably not in the right position. Recruit a coach -- or several -- who have been there, done that. They can save you a lot of pain.

8. Are you ready to pay the price to grow? Every learning curve requires a high initial investment of time and energy -- but the payoff can be huge. That's just part of the deal. But the curve is also the place to grow like nowhere else. The greatest potential for the most explosive personal growth is found only in the curve. Prepare to lean into it. Just for a little while.

9. Are you protecting what empowers you? As you tackle the curve, the leadership process will drain you quickly if you don't protect what energizes you. It might be family time, physical exercise, spiritual growth -- whatever it is for you, fiercely defend it or you'll burn out before your team is done with the donuts you bought them.

10. Are you leaving a margin for what you don't know? As Catalyst CEO Brad Lomenick put it in his recent post [Make Time for Margins](#), "Margin in our lives overall creates *options*. Options to pursue dreams, think, pray, relax, meditate, process, grow and ultimately live life more fully." Expect the unexpected. Plan for it. And be happier because of it.

11. Where are you going? Simple question -- or at least we'd like to think it should be. But do you know your mission and can you share it easily? Is it simple enough for your team to spread and repeat it. As Andy Stanley asked at Catalyst Atlanta last fall, does everyone on your team know what a *win* is?

12. How will my team know that I care? The tried adage is also true -- people don't care how much you know until they know how much you care. Be intentional about showing them your heart. It's especially easy for new leaders to focus instead on efficiency as a measure of success. Better to take a page from the order of Disney's guest service priorities: safety, courtesy, show, and then efficiency. Let people be your bottom line.

What questions would you suggest new leaders ask when starting a new position?

Read more from Bill [here](#).