

Business Questions for Thriving During Challenging Economic Times

By: Pat Lynch, Ph.D., President

Have you ever stopped to consider the importance of the questions we ask ourselves and others? The focus of our questions is critical: it literally shapes how we perceive and experience the world around us. As a result, the questions we ask have everything to do with our quality of life. Even changing the format of our questions slightly can have a transformative effect. For example, instead of asking, “Given our current circumstances, *can* we do XYZ?” ask “*How* can we do XYZ?” The first question requires only a yes or no answer, an immediate judgment made without discussion and constrained by perceived boundaries or obstacles. The second question requires us to think about the possibilities, without constraints, before rendering a thoughtful decision. Perhaps the answer to this question is that we cannot do XYZ. However, maybe we can – or maybe we can come close. The important point is that by asking the “how” question we are much more likely to implement good ideas that otherwise would have been cast aside than if we had never given ourselves the opportunity to consider the possibilities.

Here are some examples of how you might choose to ask important questions. Notice that the negative questions keep us mired in the past, stuck in “victim mode,” unable to see a way out. In contrast, the positive questions focus on the future, identify things that we *can* control and influence, and point us toward solutions. Including examples of both options highlights the extent to which the questions we ask really do shape the quality of our lives. And we *always* have the choice to shape our experiences, no matter how dire or positive the environment around us.

Negative Choices	Positive Choices
What are the things we cannot control?	What are the things we can control?
What are we lacking?	How much abundance do we have?
How do our weaknesses hold us back?	How can we leverage our strengths?
What obstacles does this challenge present?	What new possibilities does this challenge offer?
What have we failed to do?	What have we accomplished?
What can't we do?	What can we do?
What resources do we lack?	How can we use the resources we have?
How can we cut costs?	How shall we invest our resources?
How can we cut our service?	What value can we offer our customers?

In what direction will your questions lead you and your organization? The choice is yours – as always. ➡

Pat Lynch, Ph.D., is President of Business Alignment Strategies, Inc., a consulting firm that helps clients optimize business results by aligning people, programs, and processes with organizational goals.