



Court Leadership and Asking Questions



Why ask questions?

Questions allow access to more information and lead to details on the “why.” Questions promote communication, facilitate uncomfortable situations, may de-escalate disagreements, provide clarification and greater understanding, and often stimulate thinking. Questions aid in assessing the challenge, increase perspectives and understanding, support critical thinking, and stimulate creativity. Questions give leaders a tool for inquiry and learning.

This issue shares examples of **questions that court leaders should consider**. These questions may help a leader obtain operational information and be proactive to enhance or improve practices.

Court Leader Questions

What is our purpose?
How are we doing?
Did we make progress in our operations today?
What changes have we made in the last reporting period?
Are we satisfied with processes?
Do our actions reflect our stated purpose and values?
What do our justice customers or stakeholders say about how we are performing?

Where do we need to revamp or refresh our operations?
Which new initiative or new way of doing business should we take?
How do we find the courage to do the right thing as opposed to the politically correct thing?
What calculated risks should we take?

What prevents us from making needed changes?
Do we have the right people in the right positions?
How do we ensure involvement of the talents and skills of our judges and staff?
Are we leveraging our limited resources and talents?

Are we continually assessing ourselves?
How do we increase the capacity to be intentional in moving from what we already know?
How do we sustain excellence?
What message do we need to give to others?
Is there anything else we should be doing or asking?

Consider:

- Using these questions to periodically assess the status quo
- Asking these questions to foster creativity and improvement
- Employing these questions to seek excellence
- Remembering these questions when considering new programs and innovations

Resources: K. Burke, Leadership without Fear, Future Trends in State Courts, 2012; K. Burke, Moving from Court Management to Court Leadership, NACM Court Manager, Vol 21, Issue 1, Spring 2006; J. Cornell, 12 Smart Questions Every Court Leader Needs to Ask, NACM Court Manager, Vol. 30, Issue 2, Summer 2015.

