



Four Questions to Debrief and Learn

Four key questions by which to learn from your experiences!

by [Andrew Cooke](#), [Blue Sky GPS](#)

We often get so involved in doing the work, that we rarely make the time to review how we are doing in a structured and creative manner that allows us to extend our curiosity into what has happened, and to learn why. In short, we rarely take the time to debrief and when we do so, we generally do it poorly.

Debriefings can help you accelerate projects, innovate new approaches to problems, and hit difficult objectives. More than a casual conversation about what did and didn't work, a debriefing digs into *why* things happened.

"Two things are infinite; the universe and human stupidity; and I'm not sure about the universe" -

ALBERT EINSTEIN

A debrief should review four key questions:

1. *What were we trying to accomplish?* Start by restating the objectives you were trying to achieve.
2. *Where did we hit (or miss) our objectives?* Review your results, and ensure the group is aligned and has a shared understanding of what has happened.
3. *What caused our results?* This should go deeper than obvious, first-level answers. You need to go beyond the symptoms and get to the underlying causes of your results. A good way to do this is to use the Five Whys Tool. Here you take the first-level result, and ask "Why did we achieve this result?" This exposes a second-level item. Ask the same question again. You normally do not need to ask this question more than five times.

Example:

Results: Sales down by 25% compared to the same time last year.

Why? #1 – Because the market is more competitive.

Why is the market more competitive?

Why? #2 – Customer demand for our products is down

Why has customer demand reduced?



Why? #3 – The market price has come down and we are charging a high price.

Why are we unable to sell our quality products for a higher price?

Why? #4 – Because the sales force lacks the skills to sell the value of our product.

Why is the salesforce unable to sell on value?

Why? #5 – Because we don't hire the right people with these skills, or develop these skills in our existing sale team.

Solution: to address the fall in sales we need to train, equip and incentivize our sales people to sell on value, not on price.

4. *What should we start, stop, or continue doing?* Given the root causes uncovered, what should we do next, now that we know what we know?

Debriefing provides you and your team with a structured learning process that allows you to continuously evolve plans while they're being executed in the light of your experience and results. This helps you to learn quickly in rapidly changing situations and to address mistakes or changes quickly and effectively.

Remember, no plan goes to plan – never. We need to learn to adapt, and we need to adapt to survive, and we need to survive if we are to thrive. Debriefing is an on-going process that needs to be built in as a core part of your work, not something that is ancillary to it.

About Andrew Cooke and Blue Sky GPS (Growth & Profit Solutions)

Andrew Cooke

An experienced executive coach, business facilitator, and management consultant Andrew has more than 25 years' national and international experience, working across a range of industries and businesses. He is passionate in helping people, teams and companies to unlock their individual and collective potential, enabling them to achieve their personal and business goals and, in turn, to help them unlock the potential of others.

Andrew has extensive experience in dealing with both blue-chip and start-up companies, and has had extensive international experience in the UK, the Middle East and Ireland across a range of industries.

He has post-graduate business qualifications with a Master's in Business Administration (MBA) from the London Business School. He is an accredited associate coach for Marshall Goldsmith Stakeholder Centered Coaching in coaching executives and leaders.



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Andrew runs [Blue Sky GPS \(Growth & Profit Solutions\)](#), working with individuals, teams, groups and corporate so they can unlock their potential, that of others, and create a life and a job they love and choose to lead.

Through customized development programmes using experiential learning, backed by group workshops, individual one-to-one coaching and on-going support the individual and group development needs are addressed, the skills and capabilities are unlocked and the people can grow and achieve both personal and business outcomes on a sustainable basis. His blog, Growth and Profit, can be found at <http://growthandprofit.wordpress.com>.

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