



Putting Active Questions to the Test

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A study carried out by Marshall Goldsmith and Kelly Goldsmith look at testing the effectiveness of active questions with employees who underwent training

In short, a passive question begets a passive answer. For example, an answer to "Do you have clear goals?" might be "My manager can't make his mind up as to what my goals should be". In doing this the employee rarely looks to him or herself to take to responsibility and assigns blame elsewhere. By using passive questions when assessing employee engagement the company is essentially asking "What are we doing wrong?" They can also, if used exclusively, give employees implicit permission to pass the buck elsewhere and to avoid taking responsibility.

So what should we do? In short, we need to use *active* questions.

There is a significant difference between "Do you have clear goals?" and "Did you do your best to set clear goals for yourself?" The former is trying to assess the employee's state of mind; the latter challenges the employee to describe or defend a course of action. A good example of an active question being asked was in John f. Kennedy's memorable call to action: "*Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country.*"

The power of active questions is that they engage the individual, they encourages the individual to think about the subject of the question, and to take responsibility for that which he or she is being asked about.