

The Impact of Questions

Lectures are important ways to share insights with students in a classroom or employees in a training room of the workplace. But questions just might have a bigger impact.

Bodd Wagner and James K. Harter shared this story in their book *12: The Elements of Great Managing*.

A business owner hired Pete, a 15-year-old, as part-time help. They got along well. In ongoing question-and-answer sessions, the owner gently pushed Pete to articulate his thoughts on life and plans for the future. Of special interest was Pete's stated desire to go to college – why it was important to him, what he hoped to do with his education and so on.

Their talks taught Pete how to handle pressure and to back up his answers with facts.

In Pete's senior year of high school, however, as he was preparing to go off to college, the owner's questioning took a somewhat strange turn. Instead of building the boy's confidence by telling him he was sure to do well, the owner asked him why he didn't stay there in his hometown and make a good salary in the owner's business. The owner even challenged Pete to put a specific dollar figure to college costs.

Pete had done his research and had the figure ready. At that, the owner's demeanor changed. He stopped probing and congratulated Pete for his commitment to college. Tough as it was, this had been the final test of Pete's resolve.

The owner stayed behind Pete all through college. He contributed cash and made part-time work available. During Pete's senior year, when the owner retired and sold his business to a corporation, he convinced the new owners to hire Pete.

It was a good deal all around. In Pete, the conglomerate got a good employee, who is still with the company 20 years later. Pete received help and, what's more, an example of the right way to treat people. And the owner earned one of a leader's greatest satisfactions: helping someone grow over time and being there to see it happen.

As leaders, we've all been where Pete was. Family, friends, teachers or professionals have believed in us and invested in us with opportunities, time, advice and/or money.

Now it's our turn. We have an opportunity to shape the future of our associates and those who will come after us. Let's not neglect it.

Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others (Philippians 2:4 ESV).

– Beecher Hunter