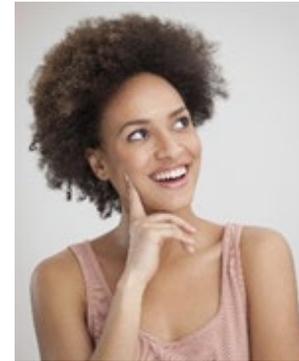


Ask the right creative questions

Before seeking to provide a creative response, you should ensure that you have formulated the problem clearly and that you are asking the right questions. It is the questions that mainly determine the reality of what you perceive and the extent to which it is possible to be innovative. These questions, which we will need to integrate, must be in a form that does not discourage creativity but rather stimulates it and encourages new forms of action to be explored.



Take ownership of the question

Deal with the problem

A creative question is often the outcome of management or customer feedback on a problem, without the request necessarily being clearly stated.

Example: Our costs are too high and, at the same time, our competitors are offering customers new services...

Our first instinct is to take ownership of the problem, to make it our own by examining it dispassionately and reformulating it if necessary, before suggesting any plan of action.

Example: What's behind my manager's remark about what our competitors are offering and our costs being too high?

Identify the question

Before seeking to provide a creative response, you should clarify the problem by reformulating the remarks and comments you have received in the form of a question. However, this stage, which is too often overlooked, plays a fundamental role in the search for new ideas. Too much time can be spent on fruitlessly searching for answers to badly expressed problems, or on inappropriate solutions or ideas due to lack of preparation and failure to ask the right questions.

Example: Ask what technical solutions can be provided for the customer who, in fact, is expressing a need for consideration and recognition.

As Peter Drucker, the eminent expert on management theory, said, "The most serious mistakes are not being made as a result of the wrong answers. It's asking the wrong questions."

Develop the question

It is essential to allow yourself sufficient time to think about the question, to take all the time you need to allow it to develop. This question is what will determine the reality of what you perceive and the type of solution you should be looking for.

Example: A question focusing on "costs" will make the financial aspect the driving force in the search for solutions.

Working on the question continuously, rather than getting locked into too restrictive ways of thinking, is fundamental in channeling creativity effectively. As Einstein said, "If I had an hour to save the world, I would spend 59 minutes defining the problem."

*Ask the right
creative questions*

Assess the question

The pitfalls to be avoided

There are a certain number of pitfalls to be avoided in formulating the question that will direct the search for creative solutions. The following in particular should be avoided:

- Negative questions that do not generate any strong desire for success.
Example: How do we stop our sales from declining?
- Questions experienced as a paradoxical requirements which cause distress.
Example: How do we suggest a new product without taking risks?
- Questions that lack imagination and restrict possible strategies.
Example: How can we lower our prices to attract more customers?
- Questions that present exclusive choices.
Example: Should we reduce our costs or offer new services?

The right steps to take

A well-framed question, on the other hand, will stimulate creativity. The following may help:

- Formulate dynamic, stimulating questions.
Example: Is there something new that we can offer our customers?
- Formulate inclusive questions (that use "and" rather than "or").
Example: How can we control costs and at the same time provide new services?
- Ask questions that introduce new playing fields.
Example: How can we rely on our customer and user base to provide new services?

Such an approach to questioning can lead to creative solutions for responding to competitors' pricing offensives, through new services at no additional cost to customers.