

# Twelve Leadership Questions for 2010

**Start the new year by asking yourself these simple yet profoundly important questions about yourself as a manager**

By [Gayle Lantz](#)

If you're like most business leaders, you spent much of 2009 feeling down and just about out—an often-inescapable result of the worst recession since the Great Depression.

Odds are, you grappled with numerous challenges, uncertainties, and "don't want to, but have to" decisions. As one weary bank CEO confided, "We're barely hanging on, just trying to survive." He wasn't alone, either. Many executives and leadership teams shared similar sentiments with me. It was a difficult year, period.

Now, 2010 is here, and in the earliest days of the economic recovery it's time to take the bull by the horns. Smart leaders will bypass the predictable New Year's resolutions and, instead, start the decade with 12 essential questions:

## **1. What matters most?**

The good news is, there's no right or wrong answer. Yet, what was most important a year or two ago may not be the driving force in the business today. Press the reset button and, together with your leadership team, clarify priorities and commit to keeping them in focus.

## **2. What can I let go?**

Adopting new strategies and approaches can require letting go of some old attitudes, habits, or behaviors. If something isn't serving the business well, be willing to give it up. There is great power in purging, and you'll make room for better ways of working.

## **3. What is one "problem" I can turn into an opportunity?**

No need for rose-colored glasses—just view a current challenge through a lens of opportunity. Think about past successes in the business and figure out how to apply those skills to the issue at hand. Fact is, you grow by building on strengths, not "fixing" weaknesses.

## **4. What would really inspire employees?**

Be careful about sending the message that *you* need people to hear. Think from your employees' point of view—if they don't feel understood, they won't listen to you anyway—and resist the

urge to tell them how they "should" think or feel. Also, inspiration doesn't come only from motivational speeches to the masses. It starts with a leader who simply shows he or she cares.

### **5. What is our customers' greatest pain?**

Be relentless about knowing and meeting that need. Test your assumptions, but skip the complicated surveys. Instead, pick up the phone and ask. Listen and understand first—then get busy offering solutions.

### **6. What new business relationships will I pursue?**

New opportunities come from new relationships. Inside and outside your industry, seek opportunities where there is potential for mutual benefit—not just "what's in it for me?" Remember, too, that even in these boom days of social media, significant business relationships begin with real dialogue, not a tweet.

### **7. How can I think more strategically?**

Skip the SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) exercise. Strategic planning isn't an event; it's a discipline. Get serious about setting direction, always starting with a big-picture view of the possibilities. Resist the urge to discuss and deal with tactics, until you're clear on what you want to accomplish. Even then, don't check strategy off your list. Put it into daily practice.

### **8. How can I make swift yet smart decisions?**

Now more than ever, you can't afford to overanalyze. Clear the clutter—the "mind clutter" that plagues even the best leaders—and make way for swift, smart decision-making. Hint: Slow down your thinking on the front end—during the planning process—so you can make faster and better decisions later.

### **9. What leadership skill can—and should—I get better at?**

Truth is, your personal effectiveness affects the success of the business. Pick the leadership skill that most needs your attention—listening, coaching, or problem solving, perhaps—and commit to improvement. Small changes really can make a big difference. Just ask your team and others on the receiving end.

### **10. What is my role, really?**

Your success as a leader is largely based on how you view your role. Use the New Year as an opportunity to assess and adjust. If you want to raise your game, determine how you'll play differently from now on. Envision yourself performing at the highest level. What will the "new" you do?

## **11. How will I recognize success?**

You won't know whether the business is on the right track if you haven't determined some key markers or indicators. What's more, not all measures of success are quantitative, so consider how you'll know when a result "feels right."

## **12. What is my biggest fear, and how will I face it?**

Name it, and claim it. If you don't, it can be damaging, even deadly, to you and the business. After all, what you resist, you empower. Own your fear before it owns you, and decide how you'll confront it.

New year, new thinking. With smart leadership questions, you can find smart answers in 2010.

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