



Going Forward by Looking Backward: Four Ways Nebraska's Leaders Can Grow

Focusing on the constant demands of the present moment while planning the future keeps us from fully understanding what we've done in the past and why. An inability to reflect wastes our experience and all the hard work that went into that experience!

When we reflect on what has brought us to this point, we ask ourselves four questions:

What did we intend to have happen?

What happened, specifically?

What caused the difference?

What can we learn?

Many business owners will stop with those questions. But in order to turn intention into action, four more questions remain to be asked:

1. Who am I being? Most leaders have a blind spot. It could be their assumptions about the customer. It could be their reaction to stress. Perhaps they don't really 'know themselves' so they lack self-awareness. By ignoring these things, they inadvertently send out mixed messages when managing teams and running meetings. Nobody in the room wants to point this out to them, so the resultant problems continue and drag down morale and productivity.

When leaders can look clearly at who they're being — or, in the case of a past event, who they were being at the time — something interesting happens: Observation changes outcome. "Asking who you are being changes who you are being," said an expert in behavioral psychology. "And when you know who you are being, you have the ability to change who you're being."

If we find it hard to answer this question, ask a simple, related question: "What do I want?"

When this question is answered honestly, we can move to the next big question: "

“Who were we being?” This is a related question that helps us understand if we are in sync with the mission and vision of the company.

2. **“When were we at our best?”** This question encourages each participant to articulate what “best” looks like and, implicitly, to consider the less-than-best moments. Teams that reflect on their best state will often realize that it was the attention to fostering relationships and defining situational roles that made it possible for them to function so well together.

3. **“What did we anticipate well and what surprised us?”** Leading is also about looking to the future. This third question stimulates discussion of how well a team was able to see the horizon out the corporate windshield — and whether anyone was even looking.

In a crisis, it's common for no one to perceive the deeper malady. The answer is to “surround the problem with the right people” — those accountable for each of the component pieces — so they discover interconnections and interdependencies.

4. **“What will we do differently going-forward?”** The final question stimulates action. Neuroscientist Srini Pillay has noted that making a decision and carrying it out engages two different networks in the brain. He advises asking explicit “What will it take to...?” questions to turn intentions into actions.

Business today is so vast and complex that no one has been perfect in their response to Covid-19 or the industry turbulence that comes out of it. Everyone's strategy is different and rightly so. We have a time in history in which teams can adjust behavior, attitudes, and practices. True leaders put aside personal biases and time worn procedures to rapidly evaluate those behaviors, attitudes and practices.

We've been warned: the strategic and economic risk of settling for “steady as she goes” is too high for complacency. These eight questions will help the state of Nebraska anticipate the next crisis and move forward.

This is a distillation of an article entitled “Four questions for a rapid leadership reset” written by Eric McNulty for [strategy + business](#). The summary is written by Lynn Hinderaker, Growth Dynamix.