

Note: Your objective in assuming a new leadership role is to establish the foundation for healthy relationships with your customers (internal and external), suppliers, and colleagues. That is, your main objective is to link with each person, finding engaging ways in which you can support his or her success. Keep this objective in mind as you go through the specifics of meeting people and gathering information.

Dennis Hooper, May 10, 2010

Note: In discussing this topic with some colleagues, I concluded that if a person needs a “shorthand” version of the questions below, these four would suffice:

- What do I need to know about you and your role to be helpful in serving you?
- What do you want to know about me and my role?
- How should we keep in contact and communicate with each other?
- How should we address obstacles and challenges with one another and our teams when they occur?

All the questions below are possible, of course, but if you have limited time, be sure you at least consider the four questions above. Their answers will empower both you and the people you are meeting.

Dennis Hooper, October 6, 2009

Assuming a New Leadership Assignment

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You’ve been transferred to a new location. Or you’ve accepted a new job. How do you quickly meet your new colleagues? How do you establish yourself as a trustworthy resource in helping your direct reports and others who you serve be successful?

Asking open-ended questions is a good way to learn about people. Admittedly, what follows is an overwhelming quantity. Prioritize your initial focus on what you believe will be of greatest benefit to the individuals you will be serving. Of course, becoming aware of the resources available to help you fulfill your responsibilities is a primary objective.

Over the first few weeks, gather additional information as each individual perceives your intentions as honorable. Share your own background to the extent that each person shows interest.

Work Context. How long have you been in your role? What led to your filling this role? What keeps you working here? What are the most satisfying aspects of your job? How are you addressing the less satisfying aspects of your job? How does your work fit into the strategic direction of the organization? What are your career aspirations? How might I help?

Your Customers. Who are your customers? If they are internal customers, how does your contribution to them ultimately benefit our paying customers? If I were to interview your customers, what would they tell me is most satisfying about what they receive from you? If they could change anything about their relationship with you, what would it be? How are you responding to that desire? In what ways might I support you in supporting them?

Your Daily Work. How do you measure your success? What improvements have you made over the past year that you would like to share with me? Do the people who need to know of those achievements actually know of them? What improvements do you anticipate making over the coming year? What obstacles do you expect to face? Considering my new role, in what ways might I help?

Your Colleagues. What are the strengths of your team? Do you and your teammates have the resources you need to perform your work to the level of excellence your customers prefer? Who are your best friends here at work? How does their friendship contribute to your success here? How can I help strengthen the relationships among your teammates?

Your Growth. What should the organization and I be doing to increase your ability to do what you do best every day? Describe your growth over the past few years. How are you currently building your skills? How open to feedback are you? How can I help? Will you please provide feedback to me?

Personal Information. Please tell me about your family members and their interests. What do you like to do in your spare time? How successful have you been in balancing your work life and your personal life? In what ways might I help?

Final Questions. What do I need to know that I've not asked? What other expectations will you have of me? What should I expect of you? What should I expect of this team? What is your advice for me as I assume this new responsibility?

I suggest you use all this information in two major ways--personal and organizational.

On a personal level, I suggest you create a file for each of your direct reports, suppliers, and customers (or customer groups). Store your collected information for subsequent one-to-one conversations. Refer to this material periodically during your initial work with each individual, so you don't overlook something that is important to him or her.

On an organizational level, look for trends and common needs. Consider what your priorities will be and to what you are willing to commit in supporting your direct reports and other major customer groups. Use the information to prepare an expectation-sharing meeting with your entire team. Identify your vision for the organization, share your anticipated contributions, and reaffirm your desire to hear their ongoing suggestions, needs, and feedback.

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