

## Well? Better?

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Sometimes a new client will ask, “What’s something simple that we can start doing immediately? We need a new technique that will deliver improved results quickly.”

I pause, thinking through the many potential concepts I intend to share. There are so many possibilities! Where do we start?

I usually recommend the subject of this article. If you are a long-term reader, you’ve seen these two questions perhaps a dozen times over the past eleven years, but always as an ancillary concept to some other topic. With a recent client, I needed the concept in a stand-alone format. Here it is.

“What did we do well?”           AND           “What could we do better next time?”

These two simple questions will immediately start to move your culture and your processes in the direction of excellence, and you’ll see the effect very soon in your organization’s results.

Simple? Yes. Easy to introduce? Yes. Done routinely? Regrettably, no.

Understanding a concept and executing it well are very different animals. I have often heard, “Oh, we know that already.” That statement is a reliable indicator of a leader who is a bit deceived. Outcomes manifest not from what you know, but from what you do with what you know!

### What did we do well?

Despite the cliché, success does not necessarily breed success. If you did something well, assumptions were probably involved. An assumption is an unexamined supposition. Without understanding the contributors to the success, the likelihood that you’ll improve next time is low.

Further, without examining what worked, the contributing input that drove the achievement might be overlooked next time. Articulating the elements that contributed to the success improves the likelihood that you’ll intentionally incorporate those characteristics next time.

### What could we do better next time?

Here’s where whatever didn’t go well comes into play. Notice that this question doesn’t point any finger of blame--no criticism or complaining. The focus is on imagining better performance in the future. Essentially, you are conducting the planning for the next event well in advance.

These questions foster collaboration, since they invite everyone to offer their perspectives. By evaluating the effectiveness of your systems and processes, you are guiding your organization to seek genuine excellence.

As the leader of your organization, it is imperative that you role model the use of these questions. If you don’t use them, don’t expect that others will. They will observe and naturally follow what you do.

Finally, keep asking that second question, even if the initial answer is “I don’t know.” The request is an open-ended, non-defensive invitation that invites creative thinking. Have you surrounded yourself with individuals who are willing and able to reflect and imagine? Encourage them to do so!

If you have been using these questions routinely, they tend to lose effectiveness due to repetition. Use the questions, then, to find creative replacement questions! Only through the creative evaluation of everything you do will you successfully generate a culture of continual, intentional improvement.