

What Is Your Desired Outcome?

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I am on the phone daily, conducting coaching calls with clients. It doesn't take them long to learn that early in the conversation, I will say, "What is your desired outcome for today's call?"

May I suggest that you start using that question with those you influence?

I have a client who complained that "People are always interrupting me. They knock on my door and ask if I have a minute to talk. Believe me, it often takes longer than a minute! They often ramble, not clear about what they want. How can I break them of this habit?"

This person has a heart to help! I know his motive is honorable. With the advice I offered, he is now more helpful than ever, AND he reduced the length (and number) of interruptions!

I suggested that he answer the "Can I have a minute?" question with this response: "Sure, what is your desired outcome?"

Not allowing the conversation to start without a clear response was a hard change for him to make. Some of those he serves gave him a hard time about it, asking what had gotten into him.

I suggested he say, "Oh, I'm just working on using my time better. I find that if I'm real clear on the outcome I want to achieve, I stay focused in my actions. So, what do you want to accomplish?"

Very quickly, my friend realized that many interrupters are not clear on what they want to achieve. The question stumped several of them. They stammered and wanted to get on with their question, but my friend would not let them proceed until they identified what outcome they sought.

Most folks now start thinking about their answer to the question before they knock on his door. With those who don't catch on so quickly, he is patient and he asks them to sit down and think. He helps them find their own answer by asking a few additional questions.

"What is it that you want to be different after we finish talking? Whatever that is, that's 'your desired outcome' of this conversation. Maybe you want to obtain some information. Maybe you want to explore the advantages of options you're considering. Maybe you need a decision from me, so you can take the next step in a project you're handling."

With that kind of nurturing dialogue, folks quickly learn what he means by "What is your desired outcome?"

My friend has reported an interesting and beneficial side effect of asking this question. He finds that as he starts on a new task, he asks himself the same question.

"What is my desired outcome in the next ten minutes?" He used to get distracted just by looking for something in a file, for example. He'd read something there that reminded him that he should make a phone call. He'd make the phone call, and that would lead to something else. He found himself doing things he never intended, which resulted in delaying the objective he initially had in mind!

This is a very simple yet intentional change you can make! Try it for a week, and if you find it to be helpful, continue it for a month. When you make those unexpected interruptions more effective, you'll want to make "What is your desired outcome?" a habit!

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