

One Useful Question™

A Short Advanced Primer for HRBPs

Part of The Partner Effect™ and the Complete Leader Operating System™

A practical field guide for one better coaching question.

Use this primer to prepare for real manager conversations, interrupt unhelpful momentum, and help a manager find a clearer next move without turning the moment into a formal coaching session.

Built for the normal HRBP day

Quick prep, live conversations, and useful follow-through.

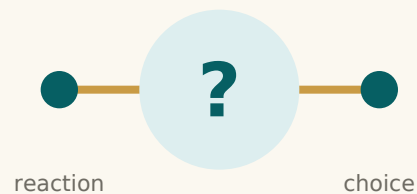
One question can change the direction of a conversation.

Not every manager conversation needs a full coaching session. Sometimes the manager needs one useful pause. One wider view. One better next move.

The promise

One Useful Question interrupts misguided momentum without taking over the conversation.

The conversation pivot



1 Manager is moving fast

2 HRBP asks one useful question

3 Manager has more room to choose

Why HRBPs are in the perfect position

HRBPs often meet managers at the exact moment when thinking is about to become action. The manager is about to send the message, make the call, avoid the conversation, escalate the issue, or march down the hallway with a full head of steam and a fact pattern still under construction.

That moment is coachable.

And in that moment, one useful question may be enough.

It can also be used as a self-coaching tool in personal reflection. This primer focuses on manager coaching.

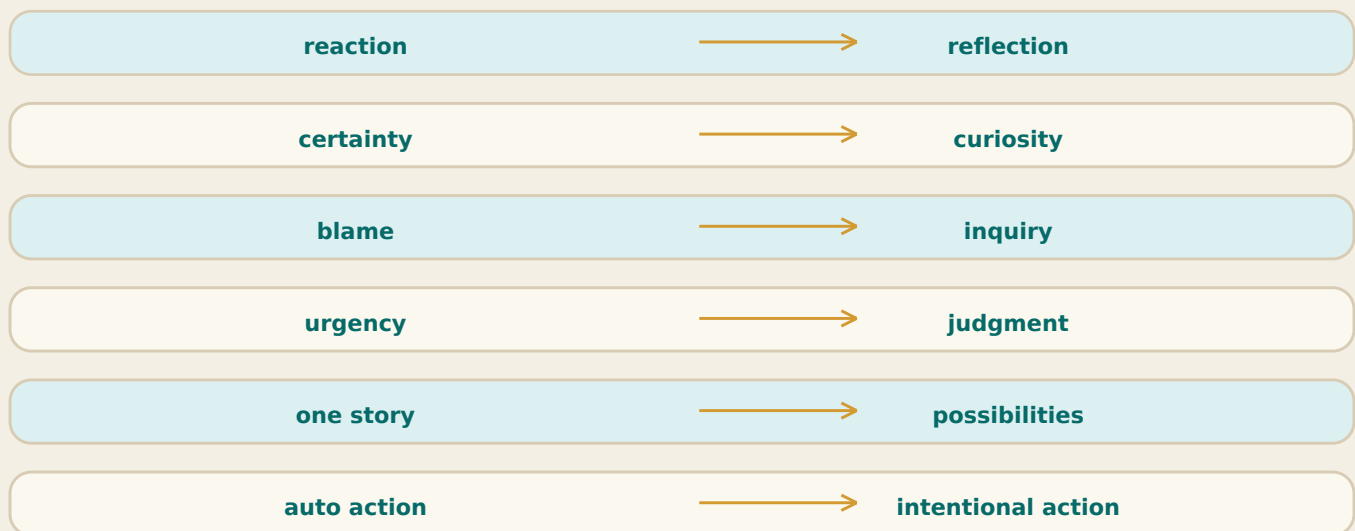
People do not see situations from neutral ground.

Managers arrive with pressure, context, prior experience, assumptions, mental shortcuts, loyalties, frustrations, hopes, and the occasional confident conclusion based on limited facts.

That does not make them wrong. It makes them human.

People tend to notice what fits the story they are already carrying. A useful question does not accuse them of being biased. It simply gives them a chance to look again.

The useful shift



The science does not say one question magically changes a person. It says a good question can interrupt the pattern long enough for the person to notice more, test the story, and choose more carefully.

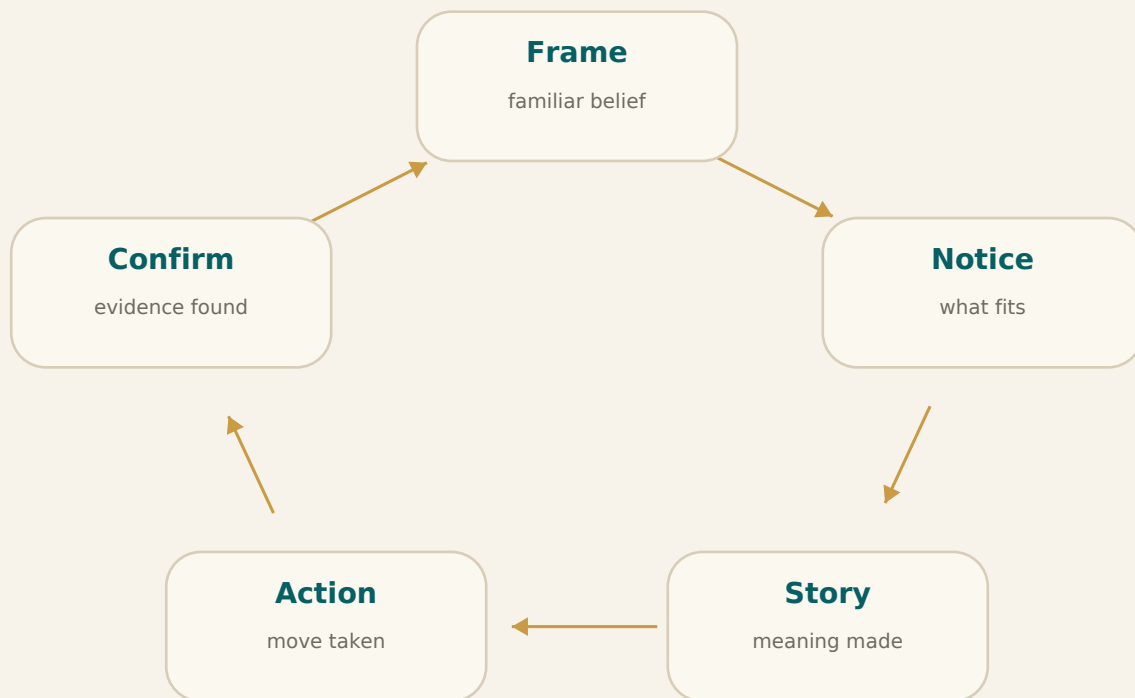
The Default Frame

The familiar lens a manager uses to interpret what is happening.

Default Frame: the familiar set of beliefs, assumptions, attitudes, past experiences, stereotypes, and shortcuts a person uses to interpret what is happening.

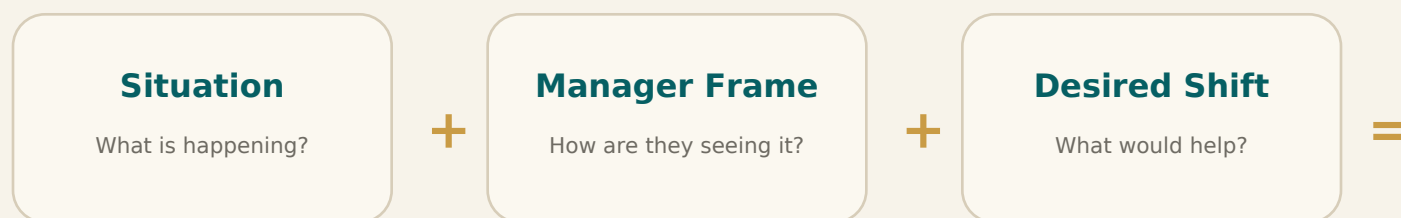
The Default Frame is like a pair of glasses you forgot you were wearing. You are not lying about what you see. You are seeing through a lens.

The Belief Loop



Under pressure, a manager may see resistance where there is confusion, attitude where there is overload, or a performance problem where the system is quietly wearing a performance-problem costume.

The Anatomy of One Useful Question



One Useful Question

Four useful shifts

Shift	What it does	Example question
Pause	Slows the automatic reaction	What might be worth slowing down for here?
Widen	Expands what the manager is noticing	What else may be contributing?
Test	Examines whether the story fits the facts	What evidence would change your mind?
Choose	Moves toward a better next action	What would a fair first step look like?

Why this works

One Useful Question is not a hammer. It is more like a flashlight. A good question creates just enough distance for the manager to notice the pattern, test the story, and choose with more care.

Three Ways to Create One Useful Question

Use the move that fits the moment. Start simple. Go deeper when trust and timing allow.

The Polarity Move

Restore range in the moment.

Too fast

What is worth slowing down for?

Too certain

What might you not know yet?

Too avoidant

What gets harder if this waits?

Default Frame Question

Examine the pattern over time.

Pattern

Are you applying a rule of thumb here?

History

What past experience may be influencing this?

Evidence

What evidence would change your mind?

Productive Identity Tension

Advanced move

Use when:

- The manager is avoiding ownership.
- The manager is moving without urgency.
- The moment calls for courage or judgment.

Try asking:

- What version of you does this moment require?
- If your team were watching, what would you want them to see?
- Where might comfort be slowing down the leader you intend to be?

HRBP in Action

When the manager is comfortable but the moment needs movement, do not attack their capability. Invite them to compare their current response with the leader they want others to experience.

Simple distinction: Polarity restores range. Default Frame examines patterns. Productive Identity Tension helps a manager step into the leadership identity the moment requires.

Useful questions for familiar situations

Use these as starting points, not scripts. The best question sounds like you, fits the manager, and respects the moment.

Situation	Likely frame	One Useful Question	Shift
Already decided	I know what this is.	What evidence would change your mind?	Test
Overreacting	This needs action now.	What might you see differently tomorrow?	Pause
Avoiding action	This may work itself out.	What gets harder if this waits another week?	Choose
Blaming employee	This is a people problem.	What else may be contributing besides the person?	Widen
Status-threatened	This makes me look weak.	What would strong leadership look like if no one's credibility were at risk?	Identity
Overwhelmed	Everything is urgent.	What is the one decision that matters most right now?	Choose

What good looks like

Manager: "I'm done. We need to put him on a plan."

HRBP: "Before we move to a plan, what do we need to understand about what's getting in his way?"

That question does not block accountability. It improves the quality of accountability.

Use Lila when you want a prep partner

You do not need Lila to use One Useful Question. But when a conversation is already on your calendar, Lila can help you prepare a few options before you are in the moment.

Simple use

Give Lila the situation, name what the manager seems focused on, and ask for a few One Useful Question options. Choose the one that sounds most natural for you.

Example prompt

Use #OUQ if your Lila setup recognizes it. Otherwise, the plain-language prompt works.

Lila, I'm preparing for a manager conversation about missed deadlines. The manager seems ready to move quickly to a performance plan. Help me create three One Useful Question options. Ask me up to three clarifying questions first. #OUQ

What Lila can help with

Need	How Lila helps
Prepare	Generates a few question options before the meeting.
Simplify	Turns a clunky question into something you might actually say.
Practice	Helps you rehearse the moment before you walk in.

Keep it simple

The point is not to learn a new technology workflow. The point is to walk into the conversation with one or two better questions than you would have had on your own.

One Useful Question Builder

Use this page before a real manager conversation. It combines the worksheet and field card into one quick prep routine.

Build the question

Situation

What is happening? _____

Manager frame

What are they focused on or assuming? _____

Desired shift

Should it help them pause, widen, test, choose, or step into stronger leadership identity? _____

What is one question that creates enough space for better thinking?

Useful stems

"What might you not know yet?"

"What else may be contributing?"

"What would be worth slowing down for?"

"What evidence would change your mind?"

"What gets harder if this waits?"

"What would a fair first step look like?"

"What would strong leadership look like here?"

"What version of you does this moment require?"

After the conversation

- ☐ Did the question create a pause?
- ☐ Did it widen the manager's view?
- ☐ Did it help them test the story?
- ☐ What would I ask differently next time?

One Useful Question does not need to be perfect.
It just needs to create enough space for better thinking.