



Donald Cooper, MBA, HoF
Certified Speaking Professional

Donald Cooper is respected by clients in over 40 industries as both a “thought leader” and a passionate visionary in the areas of marketing, service and business excellence.

Drawing from his real life experience as a world-class manufacturer, award-winning retailer and business speaker, he has helped thousands of businesses throughout the world to add more real value to their customers’ lives...and more dollars to their bottom lines.

To receive Donald’s thought-provoking **free** monthly management **E-Newsletter**, email us at newsletter@donaldcooper.com.

His website, www.donaldcooper.com also offers outstanding Free Articles.

Four simple questions that will make you a world-class manager!

A client recently expressed great frustration that a number of his managers weren't running their part of the business as he thought they should. He gave me endless examples including deteriorating financial performance, missed deadlines, customer service issues, the shabby treatment of front-line staff and generally slipping standards of performance, appearance and behavior in every part of the business.

He had no idea what to do and came to me for help. I told him that his first job as the leader of the business is to be absolutely clear in his own mind what the business is committed to deliver in four key areas...

- 1) What the business commits to become in the next 3 to 5 years. This is the commitment to the **business itself and its owners** to create a growing, sustainable, profitable and, ultimately, saleable entity. A commitment to create something that fulfills you, challenges you and creates the lifestyle that you want for yourself and that you've promised to the people that you've invited into your life through marriage, birth or employment.
- 2) Your commitment to **customers** regarding the value and experience that you will always deliver and the values and standards that you'll always live by. These are the key elements of your compelling Brand Promise that must 'grab' your target customers and clearly differentiate you from your competitors.
- 3) Your commitment to your **staff team** to create a business environment in which they are physically and emotionally safe, effective, energized and fulfilled....and finally,
- 4) Your commitment to give back to the **community** in which you make a living and the **planet** on which we all journey.

Then, I told him, that his next job is to make sure that every conversation he has, every memo he writes, every decision he makes and every action he takes communicates and supports those four commitments so that everyone in the organization understands, supports, lives and breathes them. This is called “focus”...and you're dead without it.

His third job is to look for behavior to praise. What gets praised gets repeated. He can praise any behavior, anywhere in the organization, that is moving the business to where it's committed to be.

His fourth job, I told him, is to look for behavior to correct. This would be any behavior that is preventing the business from delivering any of its four commitments. While, as a leader, you can praise anyone in the organization, criticism needs to go through channels. Trust me on this one!

When you see anything in your business or department that's contrary to the businesses commitments, values or standards, sit down with the person or group responsible, who reports directly to you, describe what you've observed and ask these four simple questions...

Question #1: *“With regard to (whatever the situation is) that has come to my attention, do you **understand** our commitment with regard to that?”* Here are just a few examples of what a **"do you understand"** question might be...

- *"Do you understand our customer service commitment regarding on-time delivery?"*
- *"Do you understand our commitment to treat all employees with trust, dignity and respect?"*
- *"Do you understand our commitment to grow our domestic sales by 8% this year?"*
- *"Do you understand our commitment to generate a profit of \$450,000 this year?"*
- *"Do you understand our commitment to maintain our buildings and property in a safe, clean and attractive manner so as to be appealing to customers, safe for our staff and responsible as neighbors?"*

Four simple questions that will help make you a world-class manager! (Cont'd):

Bonus tip: Note that all of the above questions refer to your businesses "**commitment**" to do something. Not your "goal", or your "aim", your "target" or your "objective"...but rather your "commitment". If you want your people to be truly committed to specific outcomes, use the word "commitment". Get them to agree to specific commitments and then hold them responsible to those commitments. When we change our language, we change our culture!

Their answer to your specific "understand question" should be pretty straightforward. Either they understand what the business is committed to...or they don't. If they don't understand, find out what specifically they're unclear about and provide whatever information they need to understand. But be careful. In my experience, at least half the time that our people tell us they don't understand what they were supposed to do, they're lying. They're just being weasels. They're trying to get out of taking responsibility for their failure to perform by blaming you for not communicating. Get rid of weasels...they're killing you.

Question #2: Next ask, "*Do you **embrace** this particular commitment? Do you believe in it and fully support it?*" Once again, the answer should be pretty straightforward. Either they embrace and support it...or they don't. If they do embrace it, move on to Question #3. If they don't, they have three possible courses of action...

- a) If they genuinely believe that you or the business is wrong about this commitment, they can engage you in respectful debate to try to get you to change your mind. A healthy business culture will encourage "respectful debate".
- b) They can change their mind and "get with the program" by wholeheartedly committing to and supporting the item being discussed...or,
- c) They can resign and move on to another company that has standards, values and performance commitments that they can embrace.

Question #3: The third question is, "*Can you make it happen? Do you have the ability, the commitment to this organization and the attitude to make it happen?*" Depending on the circumstance, a sub-question under this Question #3: could be, "*Is anything preventing you from making it happen? What information, resources, training, equipment, policy or process changes or cooperation from others do you need to make it happen? But, ultimately, if I'm prepared to support you in getting what you need, can you make it happen?*"

If they say that they can make it happen, move on to the final question below. If they confess that they just can't make it happen, the universe is speaking to both of you. It's time to part company.

Question #4: The fourth and final question is, "*When will I see it happen?*" Note, if the change that you're looking for requires a number of steps, activities or changes in process over time, Question #4 is better asked as, "*When will I see a Plan outlining specifically who will do what, by when, to make this happen?*" Always document the time commitment and follow up each step of the way. That's a big part of your job.

Then, reward success and deal promptly with non-performance. Failure to deal with non-performance is one of the biggest problems in most businesses today.

So, for each and every thing that isn't going the way you'd like in your business, asking the person or group responsible these four simple questions will make a huge difference in the effectiveness of your leadership...and the success of your business. This simple process will also make it clear...

1. Who is and who is not in sync with the commitments and culture of the business.
2. Who can and will perform...and who can't, or won't perform.

So, there they are...four simple questions that will create clarity of purpose and deal with non-performers. I'll be interested to hear from you as to how this has helped you to come to grips with the specific issues that need to be dealt with in your business.

For more information on how Donald Cooper can help you rethink and reinvent your business to create compelling, customer value and long-term profitability, visit our website at www.donaldcooper.com, email us at sharen@donaldcooper.com or contact us by telephone in Toronto, Canada at 1-(416) 252-3704.