

## Ask and You Shall Receive



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I've been a movie fan since December 1971, when I saw a film on a big screen for the first time, [Bedknobs and Brooksticks](#). So I was immediately drawn to an article titled "The man of many questions," co-written by successful movie producer Brian Grazer and featured in the May 2015 edition of *Fast Company*. Grazer is the producer of many memorable films, including *Apollo 13*, *A Beautiful Mind*, *Splash* and *Parenthood*.

In his "Big Idea" column, Grazer and co-author Charles Fishman debunk the myth that the essence of management is telling people what to do. Describing "questions" as a great management tool, Grazer and Fishman write that, "Asking questions creates a lot more engagement in the people with whom you work." They add: "It's a simple quality of human nature that people prefer to choose to do things rather than be ordered to do them."

### Risk Questions from the Silver Screen

Grazer's insights from the movie business offer memorable morsels of wisdom for leaders responsible for risk assessment, risk management and risk communication.

Grazer and Fishman write that, "Asking questions creates the space for people to raise issues they are worried about that a boss, or colleagues, may not know about. Asking questions lets people tell a different story than the one you're expecting."

An essential goal of risk management is to uncover and understand the risks facing an organization—from the relatively well understood to the fanciful and far-fetched. Yet too often risk champions arrive at meetings with program staff with a pre-determined list of risk categories or oversimplified risk framework or heat map. These pre-conceived notions about risk may limit, instead of inspire, big-picture thinking about the "what-ifs" of organizational life.

To tap the risk wisdom and insights of colleagues at your entity, ask:

- What new initiatives are you focused on?
- Why the focus on those particular programs or activities?
- What are you hoping for?

- What are you expecting?
- What are you worried about?
- What's your plan?

The last question is particularly empowering: it sends the message that you're counting on your program partners to develop a "what if" plan. By changing your mission from preaching to probing you will start to change the perception of your role. Instead of seeing you as the purveyor of inflexible, complex rules, you will be seen as a true partner in risk-taking and mission fulfillment.

In addition to being the function that asks the most questions, the risk function should be the unit within an organization that invites and actively solicits questions from internal and external stakeholders. Bombarded with questions from colleagues, remote staff and even outside contractors and partners? Stop seeing these questions as workday interruptions. Start recognizing the questions you receive as evidence of your influence and leadership, and celebrate the fact that people who ask for help are far more likely to listen and thoughtfully consider the answers you provide.

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