

100 Plus Real Time Complacency Fighting Questions

When I put out the word that I was collecting the best questions safety professionals use to trigger critical thinking and situational awareness in their teams, I received hundreds of submissions from over 60 professionals.

After reviewing the responses, I noticed that the questions tended to fall into 5 different categories: Planning, Perceiving, Predicting, Perspective Changing, and Prioritization. Naturally, some questions could belong to more than one category. Nevertheless, it felt useful to think about what purpose a question served so that safety professionals could make sure they were covering their bases by asking questions across all the categories.

You can think of these categories as a circle. Typically, employees start with Planning questions as they take a first look at how to approach a situation or complete a task. Then they supplement and ask Perceiving questions that gather more information, Predicting questions that play the movie forward on what could potentially happen, and Perspective Changing questions that look at the situation from different points of view. With that additional information, they can ask Prioritizing questions to get clear on what's most important and what needs to happen first. Finally, return to Planning to incorporate these insights. Proceeding through these different categories of questions should occur regularly.

All together they can guide employees through a process of creating a plan, identifying weaknesses in the plan, evaluating current surroundings for hazards to themselves and others, noticing and adapting to changing conditions, and anticipating potential problems.

Below you'll find over 100 questions. While some questions are generic enough to apply to many types of situations, many questions will be more appropriate to certain types of industries based on what work is being done and the type of hazards those employees are encountering.

As you look through these questions, I hope you'll find some ideas for questions that will help your team members, too. But don't overdo it. Focus on a few key questions from each category, so that you don't overwhelm yourself or others.

1. Planning

Logistical questions depend heavily on the type of work being done. They are often well covered in your pre-job task planning process. Below are a few examples.

1. What does the policy/procedure/standard state on performing this task?
2. What are the right resources to get the job done safely? Do I have those?
3. How can we mitigate hazards through the Hierarchy of Controls? (Elimination > Substitution > Engineering Controls (Design) > Administrative Controls (Change the way people work) > Personal Protective Equipment)
4. Have you controlled stored energy?
5. Where does the waste go?
6. Can anyone surprise you during your work? And if so, what do you need to do prevent injury to them or you such as implementing LOTO?
7. Is there another way to approach this task?
8. What are three different ways we could approach this task?
9. What would we do if something goes wrong?
10. Who would we call if something went wrong?

11. Are you ready for the part to drop during disassembly?
 12. Where is the emergency shut off button?
 13. What is our specific “stop work” criteria for these (or other) tasks?
 14. What emergency procedures are needed for this activity (ex, excavation cave-in, confined space injury, fall-related injury, exposed to hazardous waste)?
 15. Who is responsible for what tasks?
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2. Perceiving

You could also call these observation questions, but I liked the symmetry of each question type starting with a P. These are questions that gather information, prompt awareness, and aid hazard identification using the senses, past experiences, and best practices. Many of these questions can be systemized into the the pre-job planning phase, job aids, or checklists.

1. Take time for the 5x5x5: take 5 steps back to take 5 seconds, what are 5 possible hazards?
 2. What do you see?
 3. What do you hear?
 4. What do you smell?
 5. What are the hazards?
 6. What can cause you to slip or fall?
 7. What can bite or sting you?
 8. What will hurt your hands?
 9. How can the weather effect you?
 10. What is happening around us?
 11. Is the impact area secure below your work? Is everything secure above your work zone?
 12. What environmental conditions such as noise, lighting, vibration, weather, or design issues could impact the task?
 13. How many hours of sleep did you get?
 14. How many hours have you worked today?
 15. When is the last time you hydrated?
 16. What task sucks the most for your body?
 17. Is this the right tool for the job?
 18. Are you “making due” with the wrong tool?
 19. Is this the right PPE for the job?
 20. Has the scope changed?
 21. Has anyone ever been hurt doing this? What similar incidents have resulted from the task we are about to undertake?
 22. What have we done in the past for similar situations?
 23. What is different today (from the last time we did this)?
 24. Do you have accurate, official, written procedures for this job?
 25. Do I have sufficient help from coworkers to complete this task safely?
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3. Predicting

Questions that prompt critical thought by identifying potential consequences of actions and thinking through how situations can develop.

1. How severe is each hazard?
2. What is the worst thing that could happen?
3. What is the most likely thing to happen?
4. What are possible undesired outcomes?
5. What are the three highest risk hazards with this task?

6. What do you think is possible vs. probable?
7. What is the best case scenario and what can change that outcome?
8. How are changing conditions or stored energy impacting my safety?
9. When I am most likely to make a mistake, where will it be and what time will it be?
10. When that "thing" goes wrong, what protects you from injury? Is that enough?
11. Who is someone, who if I said they were injured, your response would be "oh yeah, I saw that coming." What caused the injury?
12. Where are your knuckles going to land when the wrench slips?
13. Where is the next injury going to happen?
14. If something in this process or room was going to kill me what would it be?
15. If we did a pre-mortem (talking about a hypothetical situation where this went horribly wrong), what factors likely would have caused it?
16. If something breaks, can we keep everyone out of the way?
17. What could be interpreted in the wrong way?
18. What is my gut telling me?
19. What or who else could this impact?
20. Has anyone left or joined your team in the past month?

4. Perspective Changing

Questions that prompt looking at a situation from different angles in order to bring to light unanticipated consequences, easily over looked hazards, or missing components.

1. Devils Advocate: How do you know that?
2. Devils Advocate: Where are you getting that data?
3. Devils Advocate: What if that isn't true?
4. Mental State: What's changed since we first started looking at this?
5. Mental State: Are we overconfident?
6. Mental State: Do we feel rushed?
7. Mental State: Is my attention divided with other tasks or personal items?
8. Mental State: Is anything incentivizing the opportunity to NOT work safely? I.e. Is production and scheduling prompting short cuts?
9. Mental State: Is this the first or last job of your day, shift, or week?
10. How does this other team's work effect us or our work area?
11. How does my work effect others?
12. Am I creating a hazard that could cause someone to be injured? How could you hurt someone else doing this?
13. Have job planners and supervisors effectively communicated this work scope with the work crew?
14. Are all members of the team on board and understand what needs to be done and when?
15. How can we verify this plan/procedure/policy has been effectively communicated?
16. Who do we need to communicate with prior to performing task (foreman, supervisor, safety representative, general contractor, other tradesmen or workers not in our crew, do we need prior approval for high hazard work)?
17. Do all employees understand clearly what the hazards are?
18. If your 17 year old son or daughter got a job here and they were assigned to this job that you're doing right now, what would you warn them about before you turned them loose?
19. If you observed your son/daughter doing this, would you approve? Are the hazards reduced to a level of risk that is acceptable for someone I care about to be around?
20. What would someone need to know to not get hurt doing this?
21. Do you think there's a better way?
22. What is the most difficult thing we ask you to do and why is it difficult?
23. What is the dumbest thing we ask you to do and why is it dumb?

24. Am I trained to do this?
25. What is the skill level of each team member?
26. Are they trained to do this job?
27. How long has it been since you last performed this task?
28. Why are you doing that way? Can you help me understand your task?
29. Why do we do it like that?
30. Why is the workstation set up in this spot?

5. Prioritizing

Questions that identify the most important pieces of information and the time frame in which they are important.

1. What is most relevant/important?
2. What hazard is most likely?
3. What hazard is most dangerous?
4. Given risk is severity times exposure times probability, what do you think is/are the approximate risk rankings of the existing hazards?
5. What is the probability of each of those hazards resulting in a mishap? (Using a Risk Matrix to assign a Risk Assessment Code known as a RAC can assist with this process)
6. What is the cost-benefit analysis for each control measure?
7. If not eliminated, is there any residual risk? Is the risk acceptable? Has the risk been accepted at the right level?
8. How long do you expect this will take?
9. How much time do we have?
10. Can we operate faster than conditions are changing?

Contributors

Please join me in thanking the following people.

Adedolapo Odutola
Alex Booth
Allison Short
Angela Ray
Anthony Bowers
Ashli Sturgill
Barry McCarty
Beatrice Denning
Bonnie Blueford
Brad Simpson
Brandon Wylie
Brent Charlton
Brian Stiles
Bud Couch
Camille Oakes
Carol Jadzia Beauchemin
Carol Vitro
Chad Hockenbury
Christopher Court
Clint Fritz
Dave C

Dave Ruddy
David Boyce
Dick Flynt
Dmitry Grigorenko
Doug Burgess
Garrick Milkeris
Gina Vanderlin
Gordon Haxton
Jeff Citrone
Jeff Olson
Jennifer Rous
Jeremy Sienko
Jerry Salgado
Jess Robbins
John McDermott
Jonathan Klane
José Rodriguez
Karl Delooff
Ken Peck
Kevin Seaton
Kim Cameron

Lance Murray
Larry Harvey
Lori Frederic
Michael Hall
Mike Leonard
Mike Rounds
Mike Santos
Mike Wolf
Nathan Braymen
Nick Sellarole
Raymond Sonnier
Richard Lobinski
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Sean McBride
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Tim Laursen
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Tony Maccioli
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Vicky Olvedo