

'Socratic Method': Questions first

One of the greatest philosophers ever known was a master of asking questions. Instead of lecturing, Socrates posed a series of thought-provoking questions to his Greek students. Through questions, he engaged his students in learning, uncovering assumptions and getting to the heart of the issue.

Today, Harvard Business School is among the universities that use the “Socratic Method” in their teaching.

How can you use the Socratic Method as you lead others? First, start with questions.

For example, a statement like, “We need to improve our customer service!” could become a question such as “How would you assess our customer service levels today?” or “How is our service impacting our customer retention?”

Your responses to others can be driven by questions, as well. For example, when someone talks about the need for teamwork, ask, “What do you mean when you say ‘teamwork’?” or “What does ‘teamwork’ mean to you?”

Questions can lead to deeper, more rewarding conversations that make people think. And you’ll develop the reputation of a leader who shepherds others toward knowledge—rather than forcing your views upon them.

— Adopted from *Power Questions: Build Relationships, Win New Business, and Influence Others*, Andrew Sobel and Jerold Panas.