

## **50 Penetrating Questions**

1. How would you describe the culture at your company?
2. How clearly do you think success is defined for your entire organization (please rate on a 5-point scale, with 1 being “very few understand what success looks like” and 5 being “very clear to all”)?
3. What percentage of your workforce would you say is fully committed to the success of your company, as defined by being willing to “step up and go the extra mile”?
4. Please describe communications at your company. How is your workforce informed about your company’s plans and results? How does your workforce get answers to questions? How do they share ideas?
5. What core values do you personally bring to your work? (These should be so fundamental that you would hold them regardless of whether or not they were rewarded.) No more than six please.
6. What are the core values of your company? These are guiding principles that are buried in your history and, therefore, not aspirational. They are real. They exist today. These are the essential and enduring tenets of the organization that require no external justification – they have intrinsic value and importance to your people inside your organization, and they always will.
7. What values do you think need to be developed, nurtured and made core over time at your company? Is there anything about your company’s past in which your senior leadership might be too emotionally invested?

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8. How do you reach and persuade your consumers/customers? That is, what communication vehicles do you use to connect with them and convince them to purchase your products/services?
  9. What is the promise you make to them (in one sentence, please)?
  10. What are the top 3 reasons why they should believe your promise?
  11. What equity has your company/brand built over time with your consumers/customers? In other words, what credibility have you developed based on your performance?
  12. If your company/brand were a person, how would you describe their personality?
  13. Please describe how your sales force interacts with your customers. That is, how do they develop relationships and execute business-building transactions?
  14. How is your sales force compensated? Are there any other rewards?

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15. Who do you compete with for business?
  16. What are the parameters upon which your potential customers evaluate you?
  17. What do your competitors do well?
  18. What are their weaknesses?
  19. What does your company do better than anyone in the marketplace, or at least have a high probability of doing better than anyone in the marketplace if you focus on it and execute well (max of 5)?
  20. When your company has been most successful in the past, what were the core drivers of that success?
  21. What are your company’s weaknesses?
  22. When your company has failed in the past, what were the core drivers of the failure?
  23. What are the 3-5 biggest obstacles that keep you from optimizing your personal performance?
  24. What are the 5 biggest obstacles that get in the way of your company overall? That is, what keeps your company from achieving its full potential?

25. What are the skills and assets at your company that are relatively unique and important in creating customer value?
  26. Where else might these skills and assets add value?
  27. If every other area of your operation remained at its current level of performance, what is the one area where change would have the greatest impact on your results?
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28. What are the 3-5 biggest trends in your industry that will change the future landscape?
  29. What are the 5-10 biggest customer/consumer needs in your industry?
  30. Which 3-5 needs are met best by your industry?
  31. What are the 3-5 needs that are most unmet (list in order of the size of the need gap)?
  32. From your customers' perspective, what is the biggest breakthrough that has happened in your industry in the last few years that most positively impacted their lives?
  33. Please rate your company on its ability to swiftly progress a good idea to the marketplace. Use a 5-point scale, with 1 being very slow and 5 being very fast. Please also explain your rating with focus on enablers and disablers.
  34. What are the top 2-3 most discomfoting trends happening in your industry that you worry your company is denying or at least not taking as seriously as it should?
  35. What does your company take for granted that it shouldn't?
  36. In what ways does your organization stifle innovation and outside-the-box ideas/solutions?
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37. How well does your company differentiate between your top performers and your poorest performers? What percentage of your employees received a rating of meets or exceeds expectations on their most recent annual performance review?
  38. How do your people receive feedback on their performance?
  39. How do your people receive coaching and guidance?
  40. What does your company do to develop the talents of your people?
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41. In addition to sustaining your day-to-day operations, what is the one thing your teams could do to improve year-over-year results the most?
  42. What scorecards or metrics do you use to monitor your business and operations?
  43. What "lead" measures do you monitor (Lead measures are predictive of "lag" or after-the-fact measures, and they are influenceable)?
  44. How good are your systems at providing timely lead and lag measures?
  45. If you could change up to 3 things about your systems and operations, what would you change?
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46. What do you think your company's purpose is as an organization? Why do you do what you do as a company? Why is it important? Your fundamental purpose should not change, but it should inspire change and growth.
47. Please provide a vivid description of success 3-5 years down the road. I'm talking "knocking the leather off of the ball" success. Think big using "What if?" as a starting point, and use your words to paint a picture of what success will look and feel like when you achieve it.
48. What are the biggest opportunities that you hope your company seizes to maximize your success?
49. What are the biggest threats to your success?
50. Assuming you achieve this success, what will your most important customers say about you?