

## NANO TOOLS FOR LEADERS®

# SHIFTING MINDSETS: QUESTIONS THAT LEAD TO RESULTS

**Nano Tools for Leaders®** are fast, effective leadership tools that you can learn and start using in less than 15 minutes — with the potential to significantly impact your success as a leader and the engagement and productivity of the people you lead.

**Contributor:** Marilee Adams, PhD; President and founder of the Inquiry Institute; Adjunct Professor at American University, School of Public Affairs, in the Key Executive Leadership Program; and author of *Change Your Questions, Change Your Life: 10 Powerful Tools for Life and Work*.

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### THE GOAL:

Quickly change the mindset of your team — or yourself — from being “stuck” to finding possibilities and solutions.

### NANO TOOL:

Our mindsets are determined by the questions we ask. Some questions have the potential to catalyze breakthroughs and inspire transformations. Others lead to stagnation and demoralization. The difference lies in whether you ask Learner Questions or Judger Questions.

“Learner Questions” are open-minded, curious, and creative. They promote progress and possibilities, and typically lead to discoveries, understanding, and solutions. By contrast, “Judger Questions” are more closed-minded, certain, and critical. They focus on problems rather than solutions and often lead to defensive reactions, negativity, and inertia. Learner Questions facilitate progress by expanding options; Judger Questions impede progress by limiting perspectives.

It’s natural for individuals and teams to ask both Learner and Judger Questions, but without Learner Questions, results suffer. Leaders who can effectively distinguish between the two, cultivating a Learner mindset, can improve the performance, productivity, and morale of their teams and their organizations — as well as heighten their own success as a leader. Studies by Peter Heslin, Gary Latham, and Don VandeWalle demonstrate that when managers shift to a learning mindset, they’re more likely to recognize changes in employee performance and spend greater time coaching, mentoring, and developing their employees.

Typical questions in the Learner and Judger mindsets often look like this:

#### Judger Questions

Who is to blame? Why can’t they perform?

How can I prove I’m right?

How can I protect my turf?

Why aren’t we winning?

What could we lose?

Why bother?

#### Learner Questions

What are my goals? What am I responsible for?

What are the facts and what am I assuming?

How can I help?

What do our customers/stakeholders want?

What steps can we take to improve the situation?

What’s possible?

Stanford professors Jeffrey Pfeffer and Robert Sutton argue that there’s often a gap between what we know and what we do in organizations, and this applies to mindsets. People intuitively recognize the value of a Learner mindset, but often find it difficult to enact.