

## Time-Tested Questions

Ryan Lugabihl | The Catalyst Agency | @ryanlugabihl

Questions are used in our profession for a multitude of reasons. Sometimes we want to challenge a person's way of thinking or help them process a decision. Other times we are just trying to brainstorm a topic or path to take. Questions help explore a situation and find an intended outcome.

My job affords me the privilege of working with some of the greatest contributors and minds in our field. Some of these professionals have been working with students for longer than today's students have been alive. They are giants in our industry, and I am continuously trying to find ways to learn from them. When thinking about the topic of questions, I thought it would be interesting to ask some of the great minds that are close to me about the top questions they ask when working with national boards, colleagues, and students. Steve Whitby, Dr. Mari Ann Callais, Michelle Guobadia, and Dr. Lori Hart are all professional speakers with The Catalyst Agency. Below you'll see their responses.

### Steve Whitby

*When I work with national boards and leadership teams, I ask them a simple question: "What assumptions are you making that will keep us from making progress and creating change together?"*

*One of my favorite quotes is from Mark Twain: "It ain't what you don't know that gets you into trouble. It's what you know for sure that just ain't so." This sentiment rings so true when I'm trying to lead a team of professionals, leaders, students, or board members through strategic planning processes or large projects because the biggest obstacles we face in the long run are typically the things we've assumed are true but just aren't anymore.*

*This has held true on campuses across the country and organizations of different ages and sizes. When we get confident about our set of facts, it's easy to lose sight of the actual truth that will lead us to new answers and solutions.*

### Michelle Guobadia

*My favorite questions to ask include: "What is the one thing your chapter does or provides that no other student organization can do? How are you relevant?"*

*Groups struggle to define the purpose of their membership, their chapter, and honestly, fraternity/sorority life entirely. Why this experience? Why do you pay dues? Why this organization and not another club? What is the return on the investment? I try to get them to articulate the point of being a fraternity/sorority member today, on their campus, and in their organization. The chapter, organization, and entire fraternity/sorority community should benefit all students. If they are struggling to answer these questions, then they need to start thinking about how they can build a better experience that is worth joining.*

**Dr. Mari Ann Callais**

*I find myself asking some very simple and vital questions when I am traveling: “What will this look like when I leave? How do students take this message back?”*

*I am just the speaker until someone does something with the information I share – then, I become the educator. I convey to them that we are all here to support their work, but the only people who can create change will be the members of the chapter, community, etc. Once they realize they, too, can share their passion for their organization, their ritual, their values, and their belief in brotherhood and sisterhood, then they can begin to help make improvements to their members' experiences. Sometimes they just need resources and someone to work through it with them – not to give them all the answers, but to challenge them in a different way.*

*I also find too many of us are just speaking from a stage and not offering the opportunities to not only go to dinner with a couple of leaders, but to really spend time with those in the trenches listening to them and giving feedback and support that is appropriate.*

**Dr. Lori Hart**

*In my experience, I have found a significant question to ask when talking about making change: “Are you willing to make the change before asking the chapter?”*

*Students think they want change. It sounds like the right thing to say out loud. However, when it boils down to the point when they are challenged to ACTUALLY change, it can look like something different for them. Real transformation starts from the top and the leadership. Change is difficult, especially for 18-22 year olds leading other 18-22 year olds. If a student focuses on changing the members of the group and their behavior, they will wear themselves down. They need to focus on changing what they can control – the environment the group is operating within and their own personal behavior.*

It is my hope these perspectives will help us all to be thoughtful with the questions we are asking when working with today's national leaders, students, and fellow professionals. When we work together to navigate toward answers, we are then able to focus to create real change.