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'The Four Questions' helps start the new year

Ed Brenegar

Question: I read and hear so many negative predictions about the coming year. Is there any way to see something positive ahead?

Answer: Each year since I started writing this column, I've provided a guide for how to think and prepare for the new year. This year the questions are more critical, and how we conduct ourselves as leaders has become even more significant to our businesses, community and families.

Last year I wrote about "The Four Questions That Every Leader Must Ask." The questions are:

1. What is our impact?
2. Who are we impacting?
3. What opportunities do we now have?
4. What problems have we created?

Each question helps us to focus our energies on actions that make a difference.

Many people have used these questions and have gained fresh focus and passion. One of those who did so was Galba Bright, an emotional intelligence coach and consultant in Jamaica. By focusing on the four questions, Bright developed the world's leading emotional intelligence Web site.

A few months before his untimely death last spring, Bright called to share his news and to tell me how he used the questions. Every Sunday evening, he sat down for a few minutes to set his priorities for the week using the four questions. Bright told me that he taped a copy of the questions above his computer to provide a constant reminder of his goals for the week.

The four questions can be used in a variety of ways. They can help analyze past performance or craft a vision for the future. They also can be helpful as a customer relations tool during hard economic times.

Try asking the questions this way:

1. Of my customers, who has had the greatest impact on my business?
2. What is the difference they have made for our business?
3. What opportunities do we now have that we should work on together?
4. What problems do we create for our customers?

This approach helps us gain an appreciation for our customers. Once you see the impact that your customers have on your business, it is important to thank them. They need to know they make a difference in your business. This provides them a renewed sense of confidence that they can make it through hard times. In the process, we gain confidence, too.

This year, commit yourself to create a revolution of thanks and welcome in your business. If you do this, you and your customers will share a deeper level of commitment to the success of your businesses than ever before.

This will force many leaders to change the way they relate to customers. However, as they do this, new opportunities will emerge. Find someone every day to whom you owe a debt of gratitude and say thanks. Do this, and success and happiness will be returned to you.

This is the opinion of Ed Brenegar, president of the Community of Leadership, a leadership development and transition planning consultancy. He writes a blog at <http://edbrenegar.typepad.com>. Send questions to him at ed@edbrenegar.com.
