

# McWilliam's Wines: History In Every Bottle



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## 6 Questions to ask to enhance

### Board awareness

By Steven Bowman

Directors add value to the board not from the statements that they make, but by the questions they ask. This is where the true value of a Director lays. The questions they ask are there as assistance, to be used when required. Other Boards insist that any papers put to them for consideration have at least two viable options and two strategic questions for the Board to consider.

When Club Board members refuse to ask questions that invite curiosity, it sends a very clear message regarding the culture of their organisation. Innovation and possibility are discouraged, and blame and confusion run rampant.

The following are six of the most powerful questions I have found (and used) that can change a Board conversation into a focused, strategic exploration of choices.

1. "What's working here? What's not working? What do we need to do about it?"

This question is in three parts. The first part "What's working here" invites participants in the discussion to identify, from their point of view, what is working with the particular issue or project. The second part asks the question "What's not working here?" from a sense of curiosity rather than blame. It asks for insight from all the Directors and staff at the Board meeting, and invites them to give their point of view about what is not working. This enables a more robust analysis of what is not working rather than just one person's point of view. The third part of the question asks "What do we need to do about it?" This again asks for different points of view about what needs to be done, and invites the possibility of creative options rather than trying to come up with just one solution. These options then enable the Board to make a more informed and strategic choice from various alternatives. This is an elegant question begins to create the strategic culture that allows people to discuss what is not working without worrying about blame or retribution.

2. "What are we missing?"

This question is best asked after a robust or complex discussion where a preferred option has been agreed upon by the group. When this question is asked, participants in the discussion will either a) reaffirm the choices made as they are not aware of anything missed at that time, or b) identify an area of discussion that may have been missed. This is a powerful question to ask at the end of a strategic planning retreat or strategic plan review, where reflection and confirmation can bring a strong sense of unity and purpose to the planning group.

3. "How does this help deliver against our vision, and how can we align it more closely?"

Your Club's vision statement is one of the most powerful strategic filters that your Board possesses. This vision should extrapolate on what impact you want your organisation to have on the communities that it serves. All discussion should consider

the effect that any choices will have on achieving the intent of the vision, and consider ways of more closely aligning the options and final choices with that vision. This question allows wide ranging discussion at the same time as focusing people on what really matters.

4. "What questions should we be asking?"

When a discussion has become convoluted, confused or the participants are unsure where to take the conversation, one of the most powerful questions to assist in any refocus is "What questions should we be asking?" This is the question to ask when you don't know what question to ask. There are many variations of this, such as "What questions should we be asking that will help us look at this differently?", "What questions should we be asking that will provide clarity" etc. This question allows the participants to reframe the conversation, and short circuits any tendency to making a conversation about personalities, hidden agendas or manipulation.

5. "If we couldn't do it this way, how else might we do it?"

One of the greatest inhibitors to innovation and strategic awareness is when we believe we have got something right, and everything is working out really well. This is just as much a judgement as when we think we have something wrong. When you think you have got it right, you ignore other possibilities and stop looking for new opportunities that will arise. A great question to break out of this paradigm is "If we couldn't do it this way, how else might we do it?" This question can be used at the staff and Board level to generate innovative possibilities and highlight other potential revenue streams that might be associated with a different way of looking at that program, process or service.

6. "What are the Yes But's..?"

Many people have a "Yes But.." lurking at the back of their mind when discussing options, especially when that option does not agree with any that they had already decided should have been made. The "Yes But" can effectively shut down a conversation. Examples of this include "Yes but it's not in our budget", "Yes but we don't have the staff to do it", or "Yes but it's going to take too long". These "Yes But" statements can then lead to arguments about who is right or wrong based on the "Yes But" premise. My view, however, is that the "Yes But" can be turned into a very liberating question by taking the premise of the "Yes But" statement and reframing it as a question. As part of a Board discussion, encourage people to bring out their "Yes But", as then you can become truly creative. Acknowledge the "Yes But", and don't buy into it as a reality. **CC**

*Steve Bowman is a specialist in helping Boards maximise their potential and can help clubs improve their governance processes.*

Steve can be contacted on 95099529 or email [steven@conscious-governance.com](mailto:steven@conscious-governance.com) or check out his comprehensive website [www.conscious-governance.com](http://www.conscious-governance.com)