

# WPO SPARK KIT: Dynamic Duo – The Art of Excellent Questions & Experience Sharing

A curated facilitator kit for WPO Chairs

## HOW TO USE THIS SPARK KIT

This kit is specifically tailored to help WPO Chapter Chairs appreciate the principles of inquiry-based problem solving, paired with experience sharing. Use these approaches to help members work through issues and opportunities at monthly meetings.

## TOPIC OUTLINE

The dynamic duo of asking great questions and sharing valuable experience (vs giving advice) ensures our WPO members learn valuable lessons from each other in a psychologically safe environment. This kit will help you facilitate wisdom-sharing for effective problem solving and innovation at your monthly meetings.

## SPARK RESOURCE SUMMARY

The chart below contains a carefully curated selection of Spark content to help you learn more about the topic. You are encouraged to read the complete articles. However, for your convenience, we've also provided **Executive Summaries and Key Points starting on page 4** to simplify your preparation.

SPARK RESOURCE SUMMARY	TIME COMMITMENT
1. <a href="#">When Not to Give Advice</a>	Video – 2 min watch
2. <a href="#">The Power of Open-Ended Questions</a>	Video – 2 mins watch
3. <a href="#">Critical Thinking Is About Asking Better Questions</a>	Video – 3 min watch
4. <a href="#">The Art of Asking Smarter Questions</a>	Article – 15 min read
5. <a href="#">The Surprising Power of Questions</a>	Article – 15 min read
6. <a href="#">How to Get the Most out of Peer Support Groups</a>	Article – 27 min read

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**WPO Chairs:** Whether you do a round table approach or other form of issue processing, this kit will help you build trust and create a safe environment for members to support each other.

Your aim as facilitator is to draw out the wisdom in the room and encourage members to learn from both the successes and failures of their peers. Use one or more the suggested activities below to encourage your members to adopt or enhance these best practices.

## **POTENTIAL LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES**

- Why advice giving can be harmful to both the giver and receiver.
- How to avoid advice giving and focus on experience sharing.
- How great questions unlock new insight and opportunities.
- The best questions are the ones you genuinely do not know the answer to.

## **OPTION #1**

### **DISCUSSION: THE RISKS OF ADVICE GIVING VS EXPERIENCE SHARING (30 – 45 MINUTES)**

Ideally share the videos with members and encourage them to watch in advance. Or show them at the meeting to help set the stage for a discussion. Ask any or all of the following questions to explore the topic:

1. Why do we feel compelled to give advice?
2. What are the risks of advice giving?
3. Other than WPO meetings, where else could you have success applying the approach of sharing experience instead of giving advice?
4. What is most challenging about this approach? And how can you overcome these challenges?
5. Encourage members to share a time in WPO where they had a round table and learned from someone else's experience.

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## **OPTION # 2**

### **ACTIVITY: MEMBER PRACTICE – EXPLORE THE COST OF ADVICE GIVING (30 – 60 MINUTES)**

Do this activity next time your chapter is processing an issue. Start by framing the activity with a conversation about the risks of advice giving.

#### **Risks of Advice Giving:**

- Advice is often a form of judgment vs support. Offering advice can imply that you know more than the person with the issue, which can make the listener feel like they are being condescended to.
- It can be a heavy burden to carry if the advice is taken and does not yield a good outcome.
- Advice giving can be a shield to hide behind vs being vulnerable and sharing a genuinely challenging situation you have experienced.
- Advice giving can become competitive amongst members to see who can give the best advice.

Next, distribute 3 poker chips or coins to each member. During the round table process, listen carefully for any language (see below) that indicates someone is giving advice instead of experience sharing. Ask the group to share the responsibility of listening for advice.

Celebrate the members who hang on to the most poker chips and be gentle with the ones who find it more challenging to avoid advice giving. Aim to coach them in the moment and encourage them to shift their approach in order to retain their poker chips.

**Only do this activity if you feel you can use humor and keep it light so that people don't feel punished.**

Each time someone displays any of the following approaches below, ask them to hand in one poker chip

1. **Using “You” Language** – for example “You should,” or “If I were you I would...”
2. **Generalizations** – for example “In my experience, I find it best to read a book on negotiation tactics” VS sharing specific experience such as “When I had to negotiate with my banker I successfully used these tactics....”

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3. **Second-hand Experience** – for example “I have a friend who did something similar...”
4. **Offering Reflections** – for example “I notice you are avoiding making a tough decision” (even when meant well, reflections can come across as criticism).

**Debrief:** At the end of the issue processing session, check in with the group to see how they found the activity, particularly anyone who lost poker chips. Review why advice giving is problematic. Remind them that WPO round tables are founded on trust, and that trust can erode when the habit of direct advice becomes too common place.

To end on a very positive note and illustrate the power of experience sharing, you could encourage each member to share a time in WPO where they learned from someone else’s experience.

## OPTION #3

### ACTIVITY: CROWDSOURCE EXCELLENT QUESTIONS (15 – 45 MIN)

Asking great question is truly a challenging and important skill to master.

You have a room full of brilliant and curious minds from diverse backgrounds. Tap into their wisdom by simply asking them to share their favorite questions.

**Define a "great question" as one that** *(hint – most will start with ‘what’ or ‘how’ and sometimes ‘why’):*

1. Encourages the speaker to reflect.
2. Cannot be answered with a simple "yes" or "no."
3. Helps to clarify or dig deeper into a problem or opportunity.
4. Is broadly applicable to many challenges vs narrow and specific.
5. Inspires someone to say “hmmm, that is a great question” 😊

See the reference guide in the [Appendix on pages 11-12](#) and feel free to add to it as your members share their best questions.

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## Executive Summary & Key Points for Spark Resources

*(noted in chart on page 1 – read these summaries or find the full articles in Spark)*

### The Art of Asking Smarter Questions

#### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In today's fast-paced and complex business environment, effective leadership increasingly depends on the ability to ask the right questions rather than simply providing answers. The article emphasizes the need for leaders to embrace a questioning mindset, focusing on five key types of questions: investigative, speculative, productive, interpretive, and subjective. By balancing these question types, leaders can improve their decision-making processes, foster creativity, and avoid critical oversights. All of these principles can be applied in a WPO meeting setting as well.

#### KEY POINTS

1. **Leadership Evolution:** Modern leaders like Nvidia's Jensen Huang and Citi's Jane Fraser highlight the importance of curiosity, listening, and humility in leadership, focusing on asking questions to unleash creativity and innovation within teams.
2. **Five Types of Strategic Questions:**
  - a. **Investigative:** These questions dig deep to uncover essential information, focusing on what is known and what needs to be understood.
  - b. **Speculative:** These questions explore possibilities and alternative scenarios, encouraging creative problem-solving.
  - c. **Productive:** These questions assess resources, capabilities, and readiness, ensuring that plans are executable.
  - d. **Interpretive:** These questions synthesize information and insights, helping to redefine core issues and inform strategic decisions.



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- e. **Subjective:** These questions address personal and emotional factors that can influence decision-making, ensuring alignment and addressing hidden concerns.
- 3. **Balancing Question Types:** Leaders must strive to balance their use of the five question types, avoiding over-reliance on familiar approaches and addressing blind spots by involving team members with complementary strengths.
- 4. **Practical Framework for Leaders:** The article offers a tool for assessing and improving leaders' questioning styles, encouraging a culture of curiosity and collective inquiry within teams.
- 5. **Creating a Questioning Culture:** Building a strong questioning culture within an organization can lead to better strategic decisions, greater innovation, and the ability to surface critical insights that might otherwise be missed.
- 6. **Application and Adaptation:** Leaders should continuously adapt their questioning strategies to reflect evolving roles and challenges, leveraging diverse perspectives to enhance decision-making.

### The Surprising Power of Questions

#### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The article emphasizes the critical leadership skill of asking great questions. Questions foster learning, innovation, rapport, and trust. However many leaders underutilize the skill of inquiry, thus missing opportunities to enhance conversations and unlock organizational value. The article shares practical insights from behavioral science research on how to ask questions effectively, and how to optimize conversations for better outcomes in any setting. The insights are particularly applicable to WPO meetings.



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## KEY POINTS:

1. **Benefits of Questioning:** Asking questions can drive learning, innovation, performance improvement, and build rapport and trust within organizations.
2. **Barriers to Asking Questions:** Common reasons people avoid asking questions include egocentrism, apathy, overconfidence, and fear of appearing incompetent. The biggest barrier is often a lack of awareness of the benefits of good questioning.
3. **Improving Emotional Intelligence:** By asking more questions, individuals naturally enhance their emotional intelligence, creating a virtuous cycle of better questioning and improved outcomes.
4. **Conversational Dynamics:** The context of the conversation (competitive vs. cooperative) should guide the type and order of questions asked. The sequence in which questions are asked can also influence the responses.
5. **Transparency vs. Privacy:** Answering questions involves balancing transparency with privacy. While openness can build trust and rapport, strategic withholding of information can sometimes be beneficial.
6. **Group Dynamics:** In group settings, the dynamics of questioning can change, with individuals often following the lead of others. Group dynamics can also affect how questioners and answerers are perceived.
7. **The Power of Follow-Up:** Follow-up questions are particularly effective as they demonstrate active listening and interest, making the conversation partner feel respected.
8. **Tone and Context:** Casual, open-ended questions often yield more honest and detailed responses, but the tone and context must be appropriate to the situation.

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9. **Strategic Answering:** When answering questions, consider the implications of transparency versus privacy, and be wary of techniques like dodging or deflecting to maintain control over sensitive information.
10. **The Transformative Power of Questions:** Beyond improving performance, questions and thoughtful answers foster personal creativity, trust, and sustained engagement. And they make WPO meetings even more impactful.

## **How to Get the Most out of Peer Support Groups**

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

We have summarized this article from the perspective of WPO chapters, by sharing key points on the value and impact of peer support groups. A WPO chapter is ideally composed of 12 – 18 members with the shared foundation of business ownership. This article highlights the benefits of peer forums, including improved decision-making, enhanced trust, and emotional support. It also outlines best practices for running successful forums, such as maintaining confidentiality, focusing on key issues, asking great questions, and ensuring diverse yet compatible membership.

### **KEY POINTS**

1. **Definition and Purpose of Peer Groups**
  - a. Peer forums are small, confidential groups where members in similar roles share experiences, discuss challenges, and support each other's growth.
  - b. They differ from other groups like industry networks or employee resource groups due to their structured format and deep, confidential discussions.



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2. **Benefits of Peer Advisory Groups like WPO:**
  - a. Provide emotional support and foster trust among diverse members.
  - b. Help members clarify priorities, make better decisions, and build resilience.
3. **Best Practices for Successful Chapters:**
  - a. **Right Composition:** Groups should be diverse yet compatible, with members who can learn from and challenge each other.
  - b. **Confidentiality:** Maintaining strict confidentiality is crucial for trust and open sharing.
  - c. **Structured Meetings:** Host regular, structured meetings with clear agendas, member updates, and in-depth presentations to help members work through issues and opportunities.
  - d. **Vulnerability and Authenticity:** Members should commit to being open and vulnerable to foster deeper connections and learning.
  - e. **Ask Questions and Share Experiences (vs giving advice):** In a classic *Dilbert* cartoon by Scott Adams, one of Dilbert's colleagues tells the pointy-haired boss, "I followed your investment advice and lost all of my savings." He then asks, "How does advice actually work?" The boss's reply: "It only works for the people that give it."

**Don't forget to watch the videos as well. They are short and informative:**

- |  |                      |
|--|----------------------|
| 1. <a href="#"><u>When Not to Give Advice</u></a>                            | Video – 2 min watch  |
| 2. <a href="#"><u>The Power of Open-Ended Questions</u></a>                  | Video – 2 mins watch |
| 3. <a href="#"><u>Critical Thinking Is About Asking Better Questions</u></a> | Video – 3 min watch  |

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## **How to Access and Use Spark**

**Q: How do I log in to access HMM Spark?**

**A:** The HMM Spark login page can be accessed online [HERE](#). You can also access it from the WPO Homepage: [www.women-presidents.com](http://www.women-presidents.com) > Login (top right) > Login under Spark.

**Q: What is my username and password?**

**A:** Your username will be the email you have on file with the WPO. You will be prompted to create your own password prior to logging in for the first time.

- f. Please select the “Forgot Password” link under the HMM Spark portal login.
- g. Enter your email, and the system will prompt you to create a password.
- h. Once you have created a password, you may log in using your email address and newly created password.

**Q: I am being prompted with "What skills would you like to develop?" Are my skill selections permanent?**

**A:** After the initial account setup, you **must** select at least one skill in order to receive personalized learning pathways and full access to the HMM Spark portal. Please note that the skill selections can be updated at any time by going to **Your Profile > Skills**.

**Q: I forgot my password. What are the steps to reset my password?**

**A:** To reset your password, please select the “Forgot Password” link under the HMM Spark portal login.

**Q: Am I able to adjust the frequency at which I receive emails from HMM Spark?**

**A:** Yes! Each member is automatically set up to receive a daily digest email with information that is relevant to their interests (based on their initial selections). Members can adjust the frequency of the digest emails at any time by going to **Profile Settings > Communications**.

***If you are still having issues, be sure to reach out to Tomi Jane.***

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## **Appendix: Open-Ended Questions to Use at WPO Meetings** (print pages 11-12 to share with your members)

The following list of excellent questions will encourage reflection, creativity, and self-directed problem-solving, helping WPO members uncover insights and solutions. Please add your own excellent questions!

### **Clarify the Issue:**

- What's the core challenge you're currently facing?
- What's the biggest obstacle standing in your way?
- What do you think is the root cause of this issue?
- What impact is this having on your business right now?
- How are the key player impacted?
- What is most important to you about this situation?
- Are you looking to make a difficult decision? Or have you made the decision and are looking for validation or help on execution?

### **Explore Opportunities:**

- What opportunities do you see in this situation?
- How could this challenge become a stepping stone for growth?
- What strengths can you leverage to move forward?
- What would success look like for you in this scenario?
- What will matter at this time next year, or in 5 years or 10 years?

### **Shift Perspective:**

- What are some potential solutions you've considered?
- What ideas have you not explored yet?
- How could you approach this from a different perspective?
- What advice would you give to someone else in your situation?
- If you weren't constrained by resources or time, what would you do?
- What has to change to create the desired outcome?

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## **Decision Making:**

- What's the most important factor in deciding your next steps?
- How do you prioritize the options you've identified?
- What's preventing you from making a decision?
- How will you know when you've made the right choice?
- What's one small step you could take to move forward?

## **Overcome Obstacles:**

- What's holding you back from taking action?
- What risks are you concerned about?
- How can you mitigate those risks?
- What support or resources do you need to move ahead?
- How can you turn this challenge into an opportunity for learning?

## **Reflections and Feelings:**

- How are you feeling about .....?
- What scares you or excites you about this challenge?
- What have you learned from this situation so far?
- How does this challenge align with your long-term goals and / or values?
- What strengths have helped you navigate this issue so far?
- What's your biggest takeaway from this experience?

## **Future Focus:**

- How will addressing this challenge impact your business in the next six months?
- What's your vision for where you'd like to be after resolving this issue?
- How can you maintain momentum once you start making progress?
- What would success look like one year from now if you solve this issue?
- How will you hold yourself accountable for taking the next steps?
- How can your chapter help hold you accountable?