Do You Like Your Work?

Idea In Short

Ask every team member what they think of their own work before you review it. The answers reveal ownership, foresight and risk awareness, or hedging and compliance. Confidence must start tall because it only shrinks as work travels upward. Solicit voices early and people row the boat together.

The Go-To Question

Managers running consulting projects develop signature questions, and one earns permanent rotation:

> when a junior consultant presents an analysis, work product or presentation, ask what do you think, how do you like it?

It is not a trick question. The more a manager can trust the team, the better, and the ideal is a democracy mode of work where everyone operates as a corporate citizen who understands the destination and wants to do great work. The question hunts for three qualities: pride in the work, a sense of what good looks like and self-awareness about the gap between them.1

Confidence Shrinks as It Travels

Be proud of your work, because the alternative physics are unforgiving. No manager or client will ever hold more confidence in a deliverable than its creator does. They did not cleanse the data, remove the outliers or choose the benchmarking cohort. They did not do the research or create the footnotes. They are trusting your professionalism, full stop. Since

confidence leaks a little at every handoff, the stack must start tall, and tall confidence is earned through competence: work that is good, made by someone who knows it is good. Strong opinions, loosely held, begins with the strong part. Earning that confidence has a recipe. Scope the edges of the puzzle early. Get clear on the objective, audience, format and timeline. Ask smart clarifying questions in advance rather than after. Have people proofread, and ask for help before the deadline makes help useless.

Answers That Build Trust

Three families of response earn a manager's enthusiasm. The first is simply:

> yes, I think it is good

This shows accountability, pride and confidence, and it changes the manager's behavior immediately, reducing the urge to check every formula because the author stood behind the work. Assume good intent and reward it.

The second adds foresight:

> yes, it is good, and with more time I would extend it in these ways

This displays thinking in trade-offs, the ability to say what five more hours would buy versus fifteen. The third adds risk awareness:

> yes, it is good, and the main weaknesses are these

This is thinking like a partner, anticipating client questions, planning scenarios and making

the work bullet-proof before anyone shoots at it.2

Answers That Poison the Well

Two responses trigger alarm. The first:

> well, it is okay

This is a drop of poison in the well of confidence, perhaps not deadly and definitely not safe. It hedges, sounds like an excuse and leaves an exit, quietly saying that if the work is no good, the fault is only partial. The second is worse:

> I did what you asked

This is compliance rather than ownership, the tone of a disgruntled teenager completing chores, empty of heart, pride and enthusiasm. Neither answer is really about the work. Both are about the relationship between the person and their standards, which is exactly why the question is worth asking.

Open the Windows

The question's second function is conversational. Just as client interviews open with broad questions, asking for self-assessment opens doors and windows and lets in fresh air, creating breathing room for creativity and self-expression. Everyone wants to be heard, across every generation. Getting the team's ideas out first pays practical dividends too, because the first thing a team member says is often the most useful thing they will say, sometimes matching the point you planned to raise and often catching something you overlooked.3 Do not fear changing the agenda, and do not fear disagreement, because the best ideas should win the fight.

Coaching the Weak Answers

The weak responses are teaching moments rather than verdicts, and the manager's follow-up decides which. When someone hedges with an it-is-okay, ask what specifically would make it good, converting vague discomfort into a concrete to-do list and often revealing that the person knows exactly where the gaps sit. When someone retreats into compliance, ask what they would have done differently with full ownership of the deliverable, an invitation that separates the disengaged from the merely cautious. Junior professionals frequently hedge because previous managers punished confidence that turned out wrong, so make it explicitly safe to be proudly mistaken:

> a confident answer that proves wrong earns coaching, while a hedged answer that proves right still earns a conversation about ownership

Over a few cycles, the question stops being a test and becomes the team's shared quality bar.

Read the Pulse, Share the Oars

The answers also report on the team itself. Consulting work is contextual, woven from cross-functional nuance, office politics, pride, fear and every other human emotion, and teams run on the same fuel. Listen for whether people are tracking the mission or confused, excited or bored, engaged or distant, intellectually curious or just getting through it. The cues live in word choice, energy, volume and tone, no psychology degree required. Dwight Eisenhower defined the destination:

> Leadership is the art of getting someone else to do something you want done because he wants to do it

The final effect is ownership. Soliciting interaction and honest self-assessment puts

everyone at the oars, rowing together. Throwing stones is easy for people with no responsibility, and much harder for people who were handed a voice and chose whether to use it. One question, asked consistently, converts an audience into a crew.

- 1HBR On Leadership
- 2Accountability
- 3Active Listening

Summary

The go-to question, do you like your work, sorts pride from compliance in one sentence. Strong answers show accountability, trade-off thinking and risk anticipation. Weak answers poison the confidence well. Open conversations surface the best ideas, read the team's pulse and make ownership shared.