"What If We…?" A Leaders' Guide to Unlocking the Simplest Solutions

Introduction

Sometimes…OK *often*times…the biggest, hairiest business challenges are solved with and by our teams. The outside expert you need isn't the person with the answer, but rather the person who understands how to extract the answers from within your organization. A collective wisdom is there. It simply needs to be heard, seen, and actioned.

We've been designing "What if we…" sessions for leaders striving to solve big questions like:

- How can we reduce some of our known customer pain points and dial up delight?
- How can achieve our goals with greater impact and less burnout?
- How can we better collaborate and innovate?

And with this tool, we invite you to craft and facilitate your own "What if we…" session with your team.

About the "What if we…" approach

We love asking "What if we…tried, tested, simplified, changed, asked, knew…" questions because they are expansive. They move the mind into the realm of possibility. It's a concept borrowed from Design Thinking, and it allows for the prototyping of new and great ideas. It's an approach we recommend if you're feeling boxed in, constrained, or on a hamster wheel. "What if we" often becomes just the unlock a team needs to see an old thing in a new way.

Session Objectives

1) Identify a shared opportunity or pain point – what will we all celebrating solving for?
2) Get crisp on the current state – what is our shared experience, and what's underneath the hood that may be causing it?
3) Imagine a more seamless future – wouldn't it be great if…?
4) Plan your actions – what will we all commit, individually and collectively, to turn this imagined future into reality?

Note to leaders

The following provides you with a recommended flow and sequencing of key topics and questions. *How* you facilitate the discussion with your team is your choice to make. When we facilitate this discussion with clients, we use some of the following practices – but you make this your own!

- Begin with a pain point or opportunity that is known and felt by your whole team
- Kick off with an ice breaker. Because always!
- Set aside *at least* 90 – 120 minutes. Because dialog. (We've done 4 hours!)
- Make it interactive with group work and sketches and whiteboards oh my!
- Summarize, document, and share a written set of outcomes. Because it's an artifact that supports accountability. Let it become your North Star and operating manual.

The discussion

You are welcome to design your team's experience to suit your needs. But here's a sample outline we've used time and again, customized to the unique needs of the client. What if *YOU*… made it your own?!

Topic	Objective	Discussion	Facilitation Ideas
Dive deep into the *current state*	Clarify what the team is experiencing, what they're solving for and why	o What is the fundamental point of disconnect or discomfort we want to overcome? o How does it show up today? o What impacts does it have on us, on our customers? o What situations seem to trigger the negative? o What's currently working well?	Invite team members to title a memoir of the current experience. If they had to capture what the current state feels like in a pithy book title – what would it be? This often prompts LOTS of discussion
Imagine a *future state*	Get crisp, clear, and specific on what elements would look and feel different if "better" were achieved	o What tangible, observable differences would we experience if this problem were solved? o How would the customer experience be changed? o Why do these changes feel important?	Challenge the team here to be as specific as possible. Rather than "we'd be happier and more fulfilled" you might get to nuggets like "we'd stop having 9pm meetings" or "the turnaround time would be 3 days versus 2 weeks"
Prototype *solutions*	Identify a broad number of possibilities	Propose a series of prompts and have the teams brainstorm possibilities (in the box or off the wall!)	Breakout groups work great here, both because (1) more people speak up in smaller groups, and (2) you get a

		○ What if we tried… ○ What if we asked… ○ What if we broke… ○ What if we stopped… ○ What if we built… ○ What if we believed…	greater quantity of ideas and possibilities!
Prioritize *actions*	Choose 2 – 3 areas to focus on…for now	Invite all teams to present their ideas. Have someone capture on a whiteboard and then invite the team to vote on their highest priorities (for now…)	Brief team presentations followed by large group voting to establish priorities
Establish *commitment* via "Asks and Offers"	Establish individual and collective commitments to ensure action	**Large group discussion**: For each of the priorities the team has chosen: ○ What steps will we commit to taking? ○ What will we need to make this successful? ○ What impact will this have? ○ What indicators will we watch for? ○ Who will take ownership of the immediate next step? **Round Robin:** "Asks and Offers" – each team member states what they ask of the team in order to bring this plan to life, and what they offer the team in return:	Focus on simplicity, quick wins, and collective AND induvial accountability

The follow up

We highly recommend you package up a set of outcomes and commitments that emerged from the session. It becomes a tangible artifact of the plans and commitments – and it's a fabulous mechanism for long-term accountability.

And if you'd like to explore the possibility of our tailoring and facilitating this experience for and with you – please get in touch today. We can't wait to help you renew and reset with your team!