

FIELD LEADERSHIP TOOL

5 Coaching Questions Every DM Should Ask During a Store Visit

Build the Store Manager's thinking before you give
the answer.



FIELD LEADERSHIP TOOL

District Managers are experienced problem solvers. That is an advantage, until solving becomes the default response to every business problem.

The goal of coaching is not to make the conversation longer. It is to make the Store Manager stronger.

A store visit should improve the business. It should also strengthen the Store Manager's ability to see the business, prioritize, solve problems, develop the team and own what happens next.

BEFORE YOU GIVE THE ANSWER, ASK THESE FIVE QUESTIONS

- 01** If you were the District Manager walking into this store today, what would you notice first?
Build self-assessment before giving your assessment.

 - 02** What is the most important thing this store needs from your leadership right now?
Force prioritization, not a longer task list.

 - 03** What have you already tried?
Coach problem-solving before supplying the answer.

 - 04** What are you doing for your team that they should be learning to do for themselves?
Expose dependency and build capability.

 - 05** When I leave today, what are you going to own next?
Turn the conversation into clear ownership and action.
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These questions are simple by design. Their value comes from resisting the urge to answer them for the Store Manager.

QUESTIONS 1 + 2

Help the Store Manager see and prioritize the business

Strong coaching begins before the District Manager gives an assessment. These two questions reveal whether the Store Manager can step back, see the store accurately and decide what deserves leadership attention.

1 If you were the District Manager walking into this store today, what would you notice first?

Do not tell the Store Manager what you see yet. Find out whether they can see it.

LISTEN FOR

Specific observations across the customer experience, team behaviors, selling activity, store standards, business performance and leadership presence. Strong answers distinguish evidence from assumption.

USE A PROBE IF NEEDED

- What has changed since my last visit?
- What evidence supports that?
- What would a customer notice?

2 What is the most important thing this store needs from your leadership right now?

Not the longest list. The most important leadership priority.

LISTEN FOR

The ability to separate urgent tasks from high-leverage leadership work and connect the priority to a meaningful customer, team or business outcome.

USE A PROBE IF NEEDED

- Why that?
- What happens if you do not address it?
- What are you deliberately not making a priority today?
- What should change if you get this right?

Build their eyes before giving them yours. Strong Store Managers do not just see problems; they know where to focus leadership attention.

NOTES

QUESTION 3

Coach the thinking before you give the solution

When a Store Manager brings you a problem, speed can become a trap. If the District Manager immediately supplies the answer, the issue may get solved, but the Store Manager may not become better at solving the next one.

3 What have you already tried?

Before offering your solution, understand how the Store Manager has approached the issue.

LISTEN FOR

A clear explanation of what they tried, why they chose it, what happened and what they learned. Strong answers show curiosity and adjustment rather than simply concluding that nothing works.

**USE A PROBE IF
NEEDED**

- What did you expect to happen?
- What actually happened?
- What did you learn?
- What would you do differently next time?

Follow it with: What have you not tried yet?

The goal is not to make the Store Manager guess the answer you already have. It is to strengthen how they think through the business.

COACH THE THINKING

Move the conversation through evidence, action, result, learning and next move. Do not stop at whether the first idea worked. Help the Store Manager understand why.

A SIMPLE SEQUENCE

1 EVIDENCE

What was actually happening?

2 ACTION

What did you try?

3 LEARNING

What did the result teach you?

4 NEXT MOVE

What will you change now?

When the District Manager immediately supplies the answer, the problem may get solved. The Store Manager may not get better at solving problems.

NOTES

QUESTION 4

Build leaders who do not need rescuing

4 What are you doing for your team that they should be learning to do for themselves?

Ask it of the Store Manager. Then ask it of yourself.

LISTEN FOR

Patterns of rescuing: answering every associate question, personally fixing execution misses, handling every customer issue, holding responsibilities that belong to another leader, or becoming the only person who can drive the standard.

**USE A PROBE IF
NEEDED**

- What would happen if you stopped doing that?
- Who should own it?
- What capability do they need to build?
- How will you coach them without taking it back?

Coaching does not mean never directing

**LEADERSHIP
RESPONSE**

USE IT WHEN

Coach

The Store Manager has enough knowledge and authority to think through the issue and needs help strengthening judgment, ownership or capability.

Teach

The leader does not yet have the knowledge, process or skill required to execute successfully.

Direct

The expectation is non-negotiable, risk is involved, immediate action is required, or the Store Manager cannot yet make the decision independently.

Leadership that constantly rescues creates dependency below it. Effective District Managers still coach, teach and direct. The goal is to choose the response that builds capability without creating unnecessary dependency.

NOTES

QUESTION 5

Leave with ownership, not a list

End the visit by putting ownership where it belongs. A strong close is not a recap of everything the District Manager noticed. It is clarity about what the Store Manager will own next, what success should look like and when follow-up will happen.

5 When I leave today, what are you going to own next?

The visit should end with the Store Manager clearly owning what happens next.

01 PRIORITY

What are your top two or three priorities?

02 ACTION

What will you do first?

03 OWNERSHIP

What do you personally own, and who else needs ownership?

04 TIMING

By when?

QUESTION 5

The District Manager Self-Check

- ☐ I asked for the Store Manager's thinking before giving mine.
- ☐ We focused on the highest-leverage issue, not the longest list.
- ☐ I coached what they had already tried and what they learned.
- ☐ I did not take ownership of work that belongs with the Store Manager.
- ☐ The Store Manager left with clear priorities, evidence of success and a follow-up point.

THE FINAL QUESTION

Is the Store Manager more capable of leading the business because of this visit?

Running Great Stores helps retailers strengthen Store Managers, field leadership, operating rhythms and execution systems so strong store performance can be repeated across locations.

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