

GP HOSPITALITY PARTNERS

# CURIOSITY OVER COMMANDS

A Coaching Conversation Guide for Managers · The Ride or Die Leadership Circle

## THE SHIFT THAT CHANGES EVERYTHING

There are two ways to lead people. You can tell them what to do — or you can ask them questions that help them figure it out themselves. The first approach produces compliance. The second produces ownership.

Commands create dependency. Curiosity creates leaders. When a manager asks 'what do you think we should do?' instead of 'here's what you need to do,' something changes in the relationship. The team member stops waiting for directions and starts thinking like an owner.

That shift does not happen overnight. It is a practice. This guide gives your managers the language to start building it — one conversation at a time.

### GREG'S NOTE

*The hardest thing for most managers to learn is that the right answer, given too quickly, teaches the wrong lesson. When you solve the problem for someone, you have solved it for today. When you ask them the right question and they solve it themselves, you have changed how they think about every problem that comes after. Curiosity is not soft leadership. It is the highest form of it.*

## WHY COMMANDS CREATE THE WRONG CULTURE

A command-based manager has a full team and still carries everything alone. Here's why:

COMMAND CULTURE CREATES	CURIOSITY CULTURE CREATES
Team members who wait to be told	Team members who act without being asked
Managers who can never step away	Managers who can trust their team to run the shift
Problems that get hidden, not solved	Problems that get surfaced and addressed proactively
People who do the minimum required	People who own outcomes, not just tasks
High turnover from people who feel unheard	Loyalty from people who feel genuinely invested in

## THE FOUR-STEP CURIOSITY CONVERSATION

This is the structure for any coaching conversation — performance issue, development discussion, problem-solving moment. Four steps, always in this order.

### STEP 1 OBSERVE WITHOUT JUDGING

State what you observed — not what you think it means. Facts only. No interpretation, no emotion, no assumption about intent. This opens the conversation without putting the other person on the defensive.

**USE THESE PROMPTS:**

- "I noticed that the side work wasn't finished when the shift ended last night."
- "I saw that table 12 waited about eight minutes before anyone greeted them."
- "I've noticed the line has been backing up around 6pm the last few nights."

**STEP 2 ASK BEFORE YOU TELL**

Before you give your interpretation or solution, ask for theirs. This is the step most managers skip — and it is the most important one. Their answer tells you whether this is a knowledge gap, a skill gap, or a will gap. Each requires a different response.

**USE THESE PROMPTS:**

- "What happened from your perspective?"
- "Walk me through what was going on during that part of the shift."
- "What do you think got in the way?"
- "What would you do differently if it happened again?"

**STEP 3 EXPLORE TOGETHER**

If their answer reveals they already know what should have happened, your job is to hold them accountable to their own standard — not impose yours. If they genuinely don't know, teach. But teach by asking questions, not by lecturing.

**USE THESE PROMPTS:**

- "If you had to do that shift over, what's the one thing you'd change?"
- "What would have needed to happen for that to go differently?"
- "What do you think the guest experienced in that moment?"
- "What would your best version of that shift look like?"

**STEP 4 COMMIT TO ONE THING**

End every coaching conversation with one specific, observable commitment — not a general intention. 'I'll try to do better' is not a commitment. 'I will check the side work checklist before I clock out at the end of every shift' is a commitment.

**USE THESE PROMPTS:**

- "What's one thing you'll do differently starting tomorrow?"
- "What does that look like specifically — what will I see?"
- "When will you do it, and how will you know you've done it?"
- "What do you need from me to make that happen?"

## REAL SITUATIONS — COMMAND VS. CURIOSITY

Common moments where the shift from command to curiosity makes the biggest difference.

### SITUATION: A team member made a mistake that affected a guest

#### COMMAND APPROACH

*"That is not how we do things here. Next time, you need to..."*

#### CURIOSITY APPROACH

*"What happened from your perspective? What do you think the guest experienced? What would you do differently?"*

**WHY IT WORKS:** Asking first gives you real information. You might learn the team member already knows what went wrong — which means your job is accountability, not instruction. You might learn they genuinely didn't know — which means your job is training.

### SITUATION: Standards are slipping on a team member's station

#### COMMAND APPROACH

*"Your station is not up to standard. I need you to..."*

#### CURIOSITY APPROACH

*"Walk me through your closing routine. What does your checklist look like? What's the hardest part of finishing strong at the end of a shift?"*

**WHY IT WORKS:** Commands address the symptom. Curiosity finds the cause. If they are rushing, why? If they don't know the standard, how did that happen? The answer changes the conversation completely.

### SITUATION: A team member is disengaged or going through the motions

#### COMMAND APPROACH

*"I need you to bring more energy. Your attitude is affecting the team."*

#### CURIOSITY APPROACH

*"How are you doing — honestly? I've noticed you seem different lately. Is everything okay?"*

**WHY IT WORKS:** Disengagement is almost always a symptom of something else. Curiosity finds out what. Commands make it worse. One honest question can change the entire trajectory of this person's tenure.

### SITUATION: Two team members are having a conflict

#### COMMAND APPROACH

*"You two need to figure this out. Here's what I expect..."*

#### CURIOSITY APPROACH

*"Tell me what's going on from your perspective. What do you think the other person is experiencing? What would a resolution look like to you?"*

**WHY IT WORKS:** When managers solve interpersonal conflicts, the conflict resurfaces. When team members are guided to solve it themselves through questions, they own the resolution — which makes it stick.

### SITUATION: A team member asks what they should do in a situation

#### COMMAND APPROACH

*"Here's what you do. Next time, just..."*

#### CURIOSITY APPROACH

*"What do you think the right move is? What would you do if I wasn't here?"*

**WHY IT WORKS:** This is the fastest way to build independent thinkers. Every time you answer a question with a question, you push ownership one level deeper into the team. Do this consistently and within 90 days your managers stop asking you what to do.

## QUICK REFERENCE — CURIOSITY PHRASES

Cut this out. Post it somewhere you will see it before every coaching conversation.

WHEN YOU WANT TO...	SAY THIS INSTEAD
Tell them what went wrong	"What do you think happened there?"
Give them the answer	"What would you do if I wasn't here?"
Tell them to try harder	"What's getting in the way for you?"
Explain the standard again	"Walk me through what you think the standard is."
Criticize their attitude	"How are you doing honestly — what's going on?"
Tell them what to do next time	"What will you do differently? What does that look like specifically?"
Solve the conflict for them	"What would a resolution look like to you?"
Motivate them with a speech	"What would make this feel worth it to you?"
Tell them they need to improve	"Where do you think you're at your best? Where do you struggle?"
End a conversation with hope	"What is one thing you'll commit to before we talk again?"

### PRACTICE SCENARIOS — FOR LEADERS LAB USE

Use these in the Leaders Lab or at a team meeting. Read the scenario aloud. Ask managers to write down or say out loud what their curiosity question would be. Discuss.

SCENARIO
<p><b>1.</b> A server has been late three times this month. You pull them aside before their shift. What's your opening question?</p> <p><i>My question would be:</i></p>
<p><b>2.</b> Your best line cook just did something exactly right — handled a rush without being told, stayed calm, communicated well. You want to reinforce it. What do you say?</p> <p><i>My question would be:</i></p>
<p><b>3.</b> A new team member seems to be struggling but hasn't said anything. They keep to themselves. You want to check in without making it awkward. How do you open that conversation?</p> <p><i>My question would be:</i></p>
<p><b>4.</b> Two managers gave conflicting instructions to the same team member in the same shift. The team member is confused and frustrated. How do you address it with each manager separately?</p>

My question would be:

5. A team member asks you: 'What should I do when a guest complains about their food?' How do you respond without just giving them the answer?

My question would be:

THE ONE RULE

Before you give an answer,  
**ask one question.**  
Every time. Without exception.

Part of the Ride or Die Leadership Circle — Tools & Resources Library

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