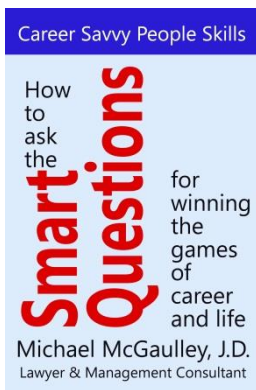# Here is your free sampler of the first of the books in the Career Savvy People Skills *Series*

Book 1

### How to ask the SMART QUESTIONS for winning the games of career and life

"You've got to be aware of the games that are being played. You don't have to play the games yourself, but you do need to recognize when they are being played against you."

Like it or not, the reality is that games, probes, and subtle competitions—and not to forget office politics! —are facts of life in most organizations. *Smart Questions* provides the tools for looking through to what's really going on in situations, on spotting the "real rules", on focusing on what really matters and staying out of unnecessary confrontations, and on selecting the best option under the circumstances–and defending it if challenged.

TO ORDER SMART QUESTIONS NOW VIA AMAZON

Book 2 in the series (not included in this sampler) is:

How to use MENTAL PICKPOCKETING to get to the truth without _seeming_ to ask questions
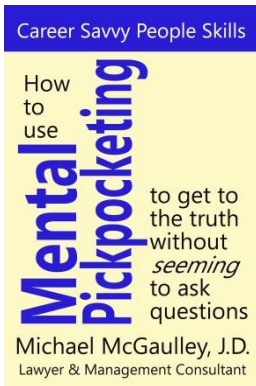
When you ask a question, *most* of the time, *most* people will do their best to tell the truth.

But not always. Sometimes simply to ask a question is to give the game away, because it alerts the other person to what you're really after, and hence raises a flag on what they may want to fudge, avoid, or distort.

(Or even tell a fib!)

Mental Pickpocketing introduces you to an array of methods of getting to the truth without seeming to ask questions.

TO ORDER MENTAL PICKPOCKETING NOW VIA AMAZON

http://www.michaelmcgaulley.net/

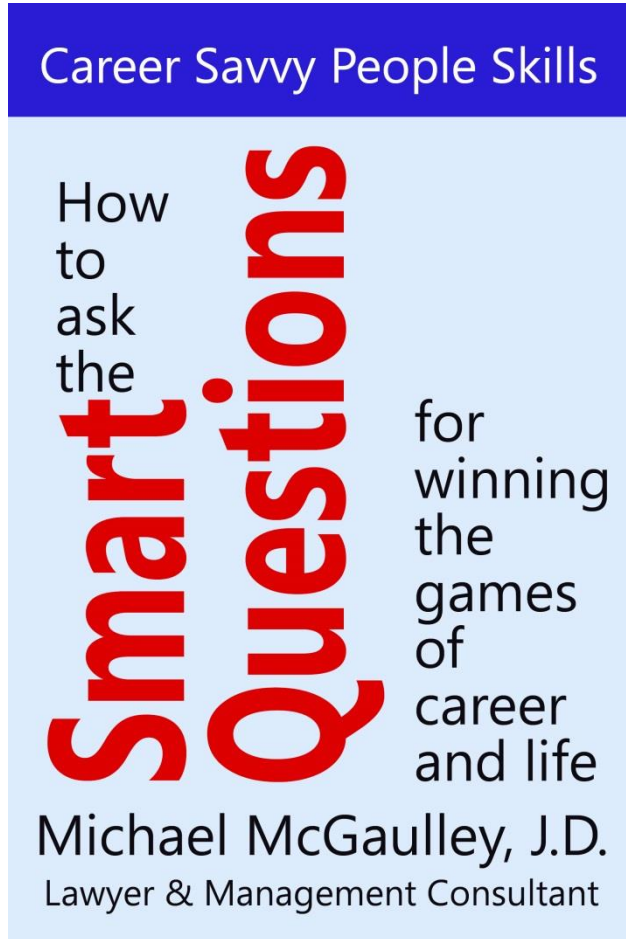https://www.facebook.com/MichaelMcGaulley.books/

P.S. These and my other books are available via various merchants in various formats. A You can find an overview—of both fiction and career how-to—at my page on **Amazon**

Apologies for any technical glitches that may have crept in in "translating" these pages from book form to this sampler edition.

SAMPLER:

Career Savvy People Skills

How to ask the **Smart Questions** for winning the games of career and life

Michael McGaulley, J.D.
Lawyer & Management Consultant

CONTENTS: *SMART QUESTIONS*

Question 6

Am I attuned to the "real rules" that operate here? Is "disinformation" part of the way of life?

Question 7

Am I focusing my time and efforts on the ends that matter most?

Question 8

Am I learning from the right role models?

Question 9

Am I engineering the conditions that lead to success? Or am I setting up for failure?

Question 10

Am I willing to trade my comfortable set of self-fulfilling expectations of limited success for more productive expectations that push me to risk and grow?

Part three:

WHAT'S MY BEST MOVE AT THIS POINT?

Question 11

Is a confrontation really necessary? If yes, is this the best time and place?

Question 12

Do I really need to be involved in this? Is this really *my* problem? If yes, is now the best time?

Question 13

What should I consider before taking action? Am I thinking enough steps ahead?

Question 14

What should I be considering afterward? What lessons did I learn from this?

Question 15

What's the best choice under these circumstances? Is this a decision I can defend?

Question 16

If I were to look back on this later. . .

Overview checklist: The Smart Questions

About the author

The Career Savvy People Skills Series

Legal and copyright notices continued from the front of this book

Your eyes pop open. You look around. You find that you're a pawn on a chessboard.

You're hot and tired and bruised and battered and a little bloodied from the pounding you've been taking.

You push on, you do your best, but you're still knocked off-balance time and again by hits coming from unexpected directions.

You spot an opening, a chance to go for it, to break out of the pack of other hard-working, faceless pawns, to pull off a real success.

Then bang! You're blind-sided. You fell into a trap. It's all over. You're out of the game.

"Why?" you ask yourself. "Why wasn't I smart enough to see this coming? Why didn't *I realize what was really going on?"*

As we'll be using it in this book, "smart" comes down to abilities like these:

- To be able to look at situations and take in all aspects (and potential problems)—visible and hidden, present, past and what might be coming;

- To spot and stay focused on what is most important;

- To look through confusion and subterfuge, and to spot any games that others might be playing;

- To spot any hidden or covert "players" who may have an interest in the outcome.

- To recognize or generate good potential solutions;

- Ultimately, to choose the best of the options available. . . and to be able to defend that decision.

Introduction:
SMART QUESTIONS FOR WINNING THE
GAMES OF CAREER AND LIFE

"You have to learn the rules of the game. And then you have to play better than anyone else."

Albert Einstein

There are games we play for fun, or for learning, or just to pass the time . . . and *everyone knows* that they *are* games—baseball, chess, soccer, bridge, tennis.

But then there are the *other* kinds of games—secret, covert games that are played (usually on the job), not for fun, but for keeps. Secret games that the opposing players don't tell us are under way, nor what the rules are, nor even what "winning" consists of. (*Sometimes those subtle games do have a name: "office politics").*

Like it or not, approve of it or not, the reality is that subtle games, probes, and covert competitions are facts of life in most organizations, and you are at a significant disadvantage if you fail to spot them, early-on, and respond appropriately.

This from a federal GS-14, a rising star within the Department, who I interviewed in the course of developing a career development training program:

"You've got to be aware of the games that are being played. You don't have to play the games yourself, but you do need to recognize when they are being played against you.

"One of the classic games is pushing a new person to see where they draw the line. If they're weak, or naive, they give up a lot of ground before they try to draw the boundaries.

"For example, a person might come to you and ask for something that's just a bit borderline. If you're not tuned in to the game, you might let yourself be pressured into saying yes. Then, next time, the request will be a bit further over the border, but you've already established the precedent, and so you give up a bit more.

"You need to start out alert to the game, so you push back and make them really prove their case the first time. If you do that, the chances are they'll back off and say something on the order of, 'I agree with you, but just thought I should run it past you for your reaction.'

"At that point, you've established your credentials. You've shown you can't be fooled. Once you've done that, you won't be likely to get much more trouble."

And this from a friend on spotting and winning the interview game within a *Fortune* Top 50 firm:

"I'd been through the whole hiring sequence: the initial interview, some tests, a follow-up interview with the Branch Manager. Then they called and

asked me to come in for what they said would be a brief meeting with the person who would be my actual supervisor. I was given the impression this was just a formality before I was officially offered the job.

"When I got there, we talked a little, and then he said, 'I'm sorry to have to tell you this, but I can see that you're not quite right for us, after all. I can only apologize for our having taken so much of your time.'

"I really wanted this job, and was sure that I had it. Now I saw it all falling apart. Then I realized what he was up to, and I said, 'Frankly, I think you'd be making a serious mistake if you don't hire me. Actually, there are several reasons. In the first place . . .'

"After a bit, he laughed and said, 'Congratulations, Mary. You just passed the final test. The job is yours. We just needed to see how you'd handle it. We need people who can think on their feet, and who don't give up.'"

Your work is what puts food on the table and a roof overhead, so your career is definitely *not* just another game. Nevertheless, it's a good idea to look at your work and career as if it *were* a game.

Trouble is, in most cases it's up to you to figure out what that "game" is, along with the real rules of the game as it's played there, and how you excel at the game. After all, knowledge is power, and not all of your associates will be ready to share with someone who may soon be a competitor.

Beyond that, there may be *multiple* games under way, most of them invisible unless you know what to look for.

Double perspective

It's essential to develop a kind of double mental perspective. That is,

- One part of your awareness is down in the fray, doing your job, engaged with the others in the moment;

- But at the same time another aspect of you is the chess player sitting up above the board, viewing the larger picture, looking not just at what *is* happening at this moment, but what else *might* happen, thereby opening up other situations and options.

When you develop that kind of double perspective, you'll begin attuning to elements like these:

- the use of probes, ploys, tests;

- strategic disinformation (i.e. saying or doing things to mislead the opponent on what is really going on);

- pretexting (using cover stories to conceal hidden agendas);

- covert actions (and miscellaneous "sneaky stuff");

- phony emotions—perhaps to "friend" you, perhaps to intimidate you;

- sometimes operating through stand-ins. (Think of *that* the next time the boss asks you to sit in for her at a meeting: Maybe this isn't really a vote of confidence in you, but rather a subtle way of setting you up to take the fire . . . and the fall, if there's problem.)

- And, of course, all the forms and nuances of office politics.

These are just *some* of the types of games and game-elements, all of which you have very likely encountered . . . though you may not have recognized at the time for what they were.

The best way of spotting and decoding these games—as well as of focusing your efforts—is to develop the discipline of asking smart, savvy questions . . . smart questions like those I suggest in this book, questions drawn from my work as a lawyer and management consultant . . . both professions in which developing the ability to cut quickly through a morass of information (and sometimes intentional "disinformation") is essential to success.

The questions

The book is structured around a checklist of 16 "smart questions" that I've found particularly helpful, each in a chapter by itself, along with related secondary questions that will be helpful in arriving at sound answers to the larger questions.

The questions fall into three broad groups:

Part one: What is this "Game" About?

Part two: How Am I Doing So Far?

Part three: What's My Best Move at this Point?

You'll also find other tools, including checklists and templates helpful in making sense of the array of ideas and information. The templates are not forms that must be filled out; rather, they are tools available to use help you.

With the exception of a few items drawn from magazines and other publications (labeled as such), the quotations here are from clients, friends, and other consultants and lawyers, taken from my notes at the time.

> *"Come, Watson, come! The game is afoot!"*

Part one:
WHAT IS THIS "GAME" ABOUT?

"The first step to getting the things you want out of life is this: Decide what you want."

Ben Stein

Part one focuses on the situation you face: the "game," in our terminology. (That game or situation may be a single event, or it may be a pattern spread across months or across a whole job.)

The four questions in Part one are tools for opening through to the core issues.

Question 1   How do *we* "win"? That is, "Where" do we want or need to be afterward, and how will we recognize that we've arrived there?

Question 2   Who else is involved in this "game"? What is likely to be their idea of winning?

Question 3   What's really going on here? Is this a real issue, or a subtle test?

Question 4   What is this situation ultimately about? Where is the crunch?

Note: I'll be using "we" and "I" interchangeably here, as sometimes you'll be operating alone, and other times as part of a team.

Question 1

How do I (my team) "win"? That is, "Where" do we want or need to be afterward, and how will we recognize that we've arrived there?

"If you don't know where you're going, someone else will get there first . . . and eat your lunch."

Unknown

What "winning" means might seem very obvious: To accomplish the objective that you have set for yourself, or that your boss, or your job description, have set for you.

But that's not necessarily all of it. For one thing, that may not be the *correct* objective. Or that objective may be too narrow in scope, not go far enough, or be inclusive enough. That objective, in short, may not really fit what is needed here.

The reality is, it's often not easy to figure what "winning" means in the subtle games within organizations. Typically, a major challenge of these games comes in figuring out *just what that game is really about*—that is, what "winning" means in this situation, to you, *and* to the others involved.

Beyond that, a major part of the "game" may be determining both *who the other players really are*, as well as in getting a sense of *what winning means to each of them*. (The *apparent* players—that is, the *visible* ones—may be obvious enough. But there may also be "hidden" players may be operating through surrogates. And each of the others may have a unique objective that may or may not accord with those of others.)

"Where" do we want to end up?

"Be very careful. If you don't know where you're going, you might not get there."

Yogi Berra

I find that most games—including those secret games within organizations—are ultimately "about" getting to some "where". Put differently, what really matters in a game is not what you DO, but rather where you want to BE at the end.

In football or soccer, your aim is to "be" across the goal line with the ball. Tennis is "about" getting the ball past your opponent more times that the opponent slips it past you. In golf, the aim is to get the ball into the hole with fewest strokes. In chess, it's to get to the position where you can check the opponent's king.

It's not really about having the perfect golf swing, or the perfect tennis serve: it's ultimately about getting to where you want to be in the end. Having that kind of a clear, measurable goal in mind helps cut through the static, distractions and irrelevancies.

That "where" you want to be at the end may be a real *physical place*, or it may be a *state of mind* ("relieved" "satisfied at a job well done"), or it may be a *situation* in which "everything works well," or "we're now in accord and ready to work together again."

Why *"**where** you want to be at the end"* rather than *"**what** you want to accomplish"*? True, in one sense they are much alike, but I find a subtle but important difference. "Accomplish" focuses on the apparent tasks to be done, while "where at the end" brings me more to envisioning what I'm really after, rather than what apparent steps lay ahead. I find I work more effectively with a clear vision of "where at the end," and am better able to cut to the core of it all.

Carry-away point: In the games of career and life, in the end, it's not really not what you want to DO, but rather where you want to BE when it's over.

- With that kind of clear, measurable end in mind, you can then work backward through what it takes to get there. It's like taking a winding route to drive someplace, then, once there, having the sense of the most direct route back.

- An aside from my experience: In some mysterious way, it seems that once I have a desired end clearly in mind, coincidences and synchronicities seem to occur spontaneously, opening channels that smooth the way to that desired outcome. Maybe it's simply that with that end-vision in mind I am more open and alert to opportunities. Maybe it is that. But I'm increasingly convinced there is more to it than random chance . . . as I've explored in my book *Joining Miracles: Navigating the Sea of Synchronicities.*

Here are some questions useful in breaking out that "where" and "when".

1.1 Is this where I ULTIMATELY need to arrive? Or is there something I need even more than that? That is, is this in fact the desired END, or just a MEANS to that end?

"Montie recalls sitting in meetings where Gutierrez [new CEO of Kellogg] would interrupt anyone who dared to give results in pounds of product sold, not in dollars. 'Volume is a means to an end — not an end.' he would say. 'What counts is dollars.' "

From *Fortune* magazine

The point was not so obvious to others who had been locked in on the old measure of success: Now the ultimate test would not be how many pounds of product are delivered to stores, but rather how many dollars are brought to the bank.

Joanna, in the midst of a divorce, is venting to friends about her ex-husband. "I tell you this: I am going to do every possible thing I can to make his life as miserable as possible. Everything."

After a long silence, one of the friends asks, "Are you sure this is what you really want to do with your life? Do you really want to go on churning up the old hurt and anger? Wouldn't you really prefer to move on from this, and live in peace?"

Joanna was focused on what she wanted to DO: to get revenge. The friend's question prodded her to look

beyond that to the ultimate outcome: where she wanted TO BE when all was said and done. That is, to be getting on with a new life, unencumbered by anger and revenge.

Nora is filling in for her boss, the project manager, who's on extended sick leave and may not be coming back. That boss' boss is away on assignment, so she finds herself meeting with the Regional Manager, visiting the office for the day.

When the Regional Manager asks how things are going, Nora tells him that her greatest difficulty has been in getting the team to work together.

"How can I help?" he responds.

She goes into more detail on some of the issues, wanting to give him a better sense of the difficulties she has been facing these past few weeks. She's hoping that if she can make him aware of all the details, then he can tell her the best way of handling the situation.

He asks again, "How can I help?"

She vents more, hoping that he will see how hard she's been trying, and hoping, too, that he'll have a solution for her.

After a couple of minutes, the Regional Manager's eyes seem to click shut. A couple of days later, he sends in someone from headquarters to head the project.

Nora's objective was to make the Regional Manager aware of just how tough it was to take over the project so he would understand the challenge. He tried to open her

up to the broader possibilities, by asking, "How can I help?" That was another way of asking, "Tell me where you want to be, and what you need from me to enable you to accomplish it?" But, focused too narrowly on the problems, she passed up the opportunity to go beyond.

 A story from a very long time ago:

I'm in Ealing, a leafy London suburb, a million or so years ago. It's the first morning of my first independent project as a management consultant. I am there to train the staff of a British consulting firm in a new technology.

I am ushered into the Managing Director's office "to say hello and have a cup of tea." (Nothing seems unusual about that: this is England, after all, and tea is a British tradition.)

Cyril, the Managing Director, has the stuffy manner of an Oxford don . . . which he had in fact been.

But, as I will learn, he had also been an British commando officer.

After the preliminaries, Cyril sits back in his chair, steeples his fingers, peers over the top of the steeple at me, pauses, then says, "Now tell me, what is this project of yours all about?"

The question surprises me. After all, the contract had been negotiated by Con, his second-in-command, who is sitting in on our meeting. I look over at Con, assuming he will handle the question. Con looks back at me, an expectant look on his face.

What the project is about? Of course I'd thought that through, back when I was starting to prepare the training program. I quote what I'd written then. "Upon completion of the training, your people will be able to . . ." And so on.

After a bit, Cyril raises his hand: Stop. "Very good," he says. "You're telling us the training objectives. Very important to plan in advance what our people will learn, of course. But what I'm asking is a somewhat broader version of that question."

I wait, puzzled, while he lights his pipe. Wasn't training the point of this training program?

"What I want to know," Cyril continues, "is what we are ultimately trying to accomplish through this project. It seems to me that your focus is focused solely on the training objectives—what our people will learn."

He lights the pipe again and draws on it before adding, "I accept as a given that our people will have learned all that you say. But now I'm asking you to look beyond to the broader issue: Specifically, how will this project assist our firm in achieving its broader objectives?"

Before I can respond, he adds, "Also, specifically how will we assess—in that larger context—whether it has been successful? How will we measure that success?"

Con finally speaks up. "Your training objectives tell us what our people will learn, and that's important, no question of that. But Cyril is asking you to look beyond that, and put the purpose of the training in

context: As you view this, what are we ultimately trying to accomplish through this project? That is, how will we recognize that it has been successful?"

Post-script: I managed to survive that first meeting, and my training program was later used by that firm in training several hundred of their clients in Africa. I was even invited back a couple of years later for another longer consulting project. But that had been a very difficult first hour, fumbling as I was to come up with an answer to a question that for which I had not prepared for.

1.2   On what time-frame am I working: short, mid, or long-term?

- This immediate moment, including the next thing I do or say?

- The course of today, or in the course of my next meeting or phone call?

- This specific project?

- Over the course of the next few months or year?

- The job I now hold?

- The course of my overall career and life?

1.3   Given that time and resources are always finite, why this over all other possibilities?

There's never energy, time, or budget enough to do everything we might like to accomplish . . . or that others

are pushing to get done. Inevitably, some goals must be sacrificed.

Beyond that is the issue of "opportunity cost". Whenever you set out to achieve one objective, you do so at the cost of failing to achieve (or even attempt) other potential goals. Therefore, better make sure that what you set out to do is *an end that really matters* —to you, your boss, or your client.

Life is short, but especially short in managerial jobs. You may have only a few months to make your mark before moving on . . . or before becoming vulnerable. It's shorter still if you're a start-up entrepreneur, where "life" may be only as long as your beginning capital permits.

If you're in business, it may seem that the most important objective is to increase sales. But there's usually *an even broader objective: to increase profits, not just sales*. If your focus is too narrow, you could end up adding customers that cost more to service than they add to the bottom line.

If you're an employee, your objective may seem to be to win a certain promotion. But there may be an even broader objective: to enhance your overall career growth. If you look from that broader perspective, you might see that this promotion might turn out to be a career dead-end.

- Is this what I really, ultimately want to accomplish? Why?

- Why this over all other possibilities?

- If not this, then what?

1.4 What elements do I NEED as part of this goal? What elements do I NOT want, or are not essential?

When setting the objective, sometimes it's at least as important to pare away what you don't really need as it is to determine what you *do* need.

The template below is a simple tool for sorting out your insights on the "must-have " factors from those that are only "nice-to-have" or " do not want / need".

Elements that must exist	Nice but not essential	I do not want or need

1.5 Suppose I DO accomplish this, then what?

Trevor pushes hard to have the new marketing initiative brought in his section. He wins. Then he realizes he doesn't have the staff or expertise to handle it. Beyond that, upper management has largely lost interest in this, and is not going to give him what he may need. He's on his own. If it flops, it falls on his back.

Remember the old saying about being careful about what you pray for . . . because you just might get it.

What if you do get what you set out to accomplish, only to realize it brings a new set of complications? So, better

ask, early-on, Will achieving this goal yield what I *really* want or need?

- If I do achieve this goal, will that in fact give me what I need?

- If I do succeed, will the present problem situation be resolved in a satisfactory way?

- That is, will it solve the problem that's at the heart of the "game?" Will it bring on new complications?

- Will accomplishing this goal likely turn out to have been worth the cost in factors such as the time and effort expended, time it took to implement, and the like?

- How serious are the risks that achieving (or even just working toward) that objective will bring about unintended consequences, good or bad? (For example, if you undertake this, what are the risks of alienating others, of squandering "political capital," and the like?)

- What are the "opportunity costs" of achieving this objective? That is, what other possible objectives will I have to give up or cut short in order to work toward this?

- What is the *best* thing that can come from achieving this goal?

- What is the *worst* thing likely to come from achieving it (or from investing the time and effort to make the attempt)?

1.6 Is pursuing this really how I want to be spending my energy, creativity, and time? If not, what can I do to change the situation?

We all know people who spend big chunks of their energy—and often their credibility, as well—fighting the system, trying to change the status quo, trying to right what they perceive as wrongs.

The world needs fighters and advocates . . . in *some* cases. They are the folks who bring about change.

But they pay a price — in energy spent, in frustration, in bruised friendships, in the time that could have been used more productively in other ways. You *can* fight City Hall . . . but there's definitely no guarantee that you'll win. Or that it will prove to have been worth the struggle, as well as the ancillary costs to friendships, good-will, and such.

Hence, it's important to recognize from the start that, win or lose, the fight is going to cost time and aggravation. Beyond that, it will distract you from the other things that you could be doing — "opportunity cost."

So, before getting in too deeply, ask questions like these:

- How much is pursuing this going to take out of me personally, and out of my productive hours?

- Suppose I am successful in this: In the end, will it really have been worth the struggle?

- Suppose, when all is finished, not much has really changed. Will I still feel it was worth pursuing this?

- Will I make enemies who may have long memories?

- What else could I be doing with the time, energy and other resources I invest here?

- Which use is likely to be more worthwhile—this use, or pursuing those other ends?

- Which has the best chance of succeeding?

1.7   Check: Is this something that really matters, or am I going for it for trivial reasons, such as to make a report or resume look better?

"Peter's in trouble, but I've seen it coming for a long time. His problem is an insatiable curiosity. He wants to be in on everything, to be copied in on every memo, to attend every meeting. This scatters his energies and cuts into his productive time. As a result, he hasn't got a shelf of products and point to and say, 'There, that's what I've accomplished. That's my track record."

Manager, large tech firm

It's essential to keep in mind that there will never be time or energy enough to do everything well. Before committing precious time and energy to a project, better make sure that an end that really matters to you or your group.

- Ultimately, is this objective (or task) what really matters?

- Is this something that really matters? To me? To the organization?

- Am I just going through the motions, doing what is expected of me or this department?

- Suppose I chose not to pursue this outcome— what then? Would I lose the job? Would Mom disapprove?

- What is the likely worst-case if I do not pursue this? For that matter, *is* there a "worst case"? Is there a chance that what seems worst might turn out to be best?

1.8   If you find it difficult to choose among alternative possible goals, which has ultimate priority? Why?

What if, the more you think about it, you find that you're torn between two apparently incompatible goals? Like choosing whether to vacation at the seashore or the mountains? Or whether to buy a new car or save the money? Or to go into business for yourself, or to minimize risk?

The template below is a tool to help you sort out some of the key factors that often come into conflict in setting goals: possible pay-off, risk, cost, likelihood of success, effect on your relations with other people or departments. Add other factors specific to the unique situation you face.

Factors to consider. Add others specific to your situation.	Goal A	Goal B	Goal C
Which offers the **highest payoff** if I am successful in accomplishing it?			
Which entails the **greatest risk**? **Least risk**?			
Which has the highest costs—both direct and indirect?			
Which in my present judgment, based on what I now know, seems most likely to work out **best in the longer term**?			
Which offers the likelihood of the best and smoothest **relations with other people and departments**?			

Summary

Question 1

How do I (my team) "win"? That is, "Where" do we want or need to be afterward, and how will we recognize that we've arrived there?

1.1   Is this where I ULTIMATELY need to arrive? Or is there something I need even more than that? That is, is this in fact the desired END, or just a MEANS to that end?

1.2   On what time-frame am I working: short, mid, or long-term?

1.3   Given that time and resources are always finite, why this over all other possibilities?

1.4   What elements do I NEED as part of this goal? What elements do I NOT want, or are not essential?

1.5   Suppose I DO accomplish this, then what?

1.6   Is pursuing this really how I want to be spending my energy, creativity, and time? If not, what can I do to change the situation?

1.7   Check: Is this something that really matters, or am I going for it for trivial reasons, such as to make a report or resume look better?

1.8   If you find it difficult to choose among alternative possible goals, which has ultimate priority? Why?

Question 2

Who else is involved in this "game"? What is likely to be their idea of "winning"?

A manager on the headquarters staff of a high-tech firm I worked with in London had the reputation of being "the smartest guy in the company." I asked him about that; here's how he responded:

"That's flattering to hear, but my secret is simple enough: I do my homework.

"What IS my 'homework?' It's making a practice of constantly asking myself 'What if this occurs?' And, 'What if that occurs?' And, 'What if things fail to go according to plan?' And, 'What if there's more going on in this meeting than seems apparent on the surface?'

"At night, when I'm on the way home from work, I replay in my mind one or two key events of the day. I try to break away from the emotions I may have felt at the time, and ask myself what was really going on. As I drive along, I ask "What was really going on? What were we ultimately squabbling over? Was it just today's issue, or were some people positioning themselves for the future? Or were they re-fighting old battles?"

"I look for decision points where the meeting branched one way or the other. I try to figure why it went the way it did. Maybe there's something I can learn from that about how to win people over. Or maybe it was someone calling in chits from past favors.

"I focus on the key players, looking particularly for what I can expect from them in the future. Never mind what they said, what were they really after? Why did they want it? Whose help did they get? What were they willing to trade for that help? Who wanted to stop them from getting it? Why?

"You might ask why I spend my energy doing this? Why don't I just listen to music and forget things? In the first place, it makes life more interesting. I have a curious mind: I want to understand what's really going on.

"But it's also the best training one could possibly get. Every day is like analyzing a business school case study. Things do fall into patterns. By having thought through what really went on today, I'll be better prepared for what comes up next time, and I'll have thought out a range of responses I can make then."

2.1 Who are the other "players"—directly or indirectly? Why? What is their involvement?

First issue, just who *are* the other "players" in this game?

You might assume, because you and your managers and peers all work for the same company or the same government agency, that you are all playing on the same team, with the same objective—to make the company profitable, or to make the agency effective . . . or at least to keep the employer up and running, and their jobs carrying on smoothly.

But if you burrow down into what's really happening within the company or agency, you'll typically find that there are often about as many "sides" within an organization game as there are people or departments . . . with each playing the game to their own benefit.

Joe wants to keep the company in business so his job continues. But he also wants to win a promotion, and he may think that means he needs to make himself appear outstanding . . . even if that means holding back some information or cooperation that would help Dana in the next office, because Dana might be competing for the same promotion.

The Manager of Division A (or Bureaucracy A) might have a policy of hoarding information—given the mind-set of knowledge is power. If Division B is unaware of that important info, then Manager A can one-up Manager B, and thereby (so he assumes) make himself look smarter than B . . . which will (again so he assumes) translate to a bigger budget, more jobs slots, and ultimately a promotion.

Granted, they may be playing for *personally* unselfish ends—that is, may believe they are doing it for the good of the company, not just for their own personal good, or the good of their department. But their perception of the

proper objective may be shaped by their role, or in what office they work.

In other words, they're all (nominally) on the same team . . . but they're each playing different games, with different perceptions of what winning means.

"Virtual" players in the game

Sometimes the real players aren't even visible on the game field: they may be in the background, trying to get their goals accomplished through others . . . without revealing their own interest, and without taking any political risks.

Checklist: Spotting who else may have an interest in this, and why

The checklist here will get you started. Add other items from your experience.

- Who are the key people, such as the ultimate decision makers, or the *influencers* of an upcoming decision?

- In spotting who else may be players in this game, ask, Who stands to gain if this works (or if it fails)? Who stands to lose? ("Who" may include individuals, departments, or other kinds of groups.)

- What does each want? That is, What will it take for them to emerge from this situation feeling that they have succeeded? How does each win? How might each lose?

- Whose advice, "buy-in," or support (financial, organizational clout, "political" etc.) do I need?

- Who are (supposedly) my "allies?" Why—friendship? job title? mutual interest? What do they want? Are the interests of these allies—at least for this one project—identical with mine? If not, how do we differ?

- Who are my probable adversaries? Why? What do they want?

- Are there "hidden players," such as players operating through others, or manipulating other people? What do they want?

- What other agendas might be operating?

- Who benefits if things go well? If things go poorly?

- Of these other people, what are they rewarded for, or punished for, in this matter? Therefore, what pressures are they responding to?

2.2 How does each of these "players" win? That is, what problem are they likely trying to solve, and how will they measure success?

The rules of tennis and chess and golf and bridge are clear, and every player knows what those rules are.

But the rules of the games that go on within organizations are often kept secret.

First of all, the game—and the real rules—tend to be constantly shifting.

Beyond that, it's to the advantage of the players to keep even the *existence* of the game secret, let alone to reveal what it is they are really after. (Still another instance of how knowledge is power.)

The Romans had a saying, *Cui bono?* which translates as ¨Who benefits?" The point is, if you can look through the surface appearances to find who gains if a situation goes a certain way, then you gain valuable insight into what is really going on in that situation, as well as who are the most interested players.

The same advice, this time in a different language: "If you have trouble understanding what's really going on in a situation, follow the trail of the dollars. Find who gets what share of the rewards, for doing what. Once you know where the money goes, the puzzle will begin untangling itself.

Then to figure what each is after. To do that, ask, for each player,

- Suppose I were that person (or the department or other constituency they represent), What would I be trying to accomplish here?

If I were that person, how would I recognize whether I have been successful?

Checklist: Some common "wins"

Authority.

- Who will be in charge? Who presently is in control? Is this being tested?

Bear in mind that where the real authority rests may be very different from what the formal organization chart indicates. Often, the real power rests with the person strong enough to claim and use it. Or the assistant to the top executive may be the real power, because that's the person who does most of the work and in reality makes most of the decisions, with the nominal head only a figurehead who signs off on whatever is put before him.

Direction.

- Whose objectives are going to be given priority? Whose methods will be used in achieving these objectives?

Resources.

- Who gets what share of the budget? Which department gets extra equipment, space, personnel?

Rewards.

- Who gets rewards and raises? Who gets extra "perks" such as better offices and assignments?

"Turf."

- Here we're referring to turf in the broader sense not only of physical space, but also of freedom to set directions and priorities without being impinged upon by others.

Ultimate "win."

▪ If nothing else, holding onto the job and not getting fired, demoted, or sent to the organization's Siberia may be considered a win.

The template below is a tool for sorting out these issues.

Who else? Direct? Indirect?	Likely allies? Interests align with ours?	Likely opponents? Interests compete with ours?	For each: what does "winning" mean?	Other considerations?

2.3 What are the other "players" rewarded for, or punished for? What implications result?

As you work with people over a span of time, you tend to develop a sense of their personalities, and of the factors that induce them to act as they do.

But personality is only one of several factors that contribute to the behaviors you encounter.

But look beyond the formalities of their job. Look for where the individuals are positioned in the organization's

hierarchy. What responsibilities flow from the job they hold?

Who do they report to? "Who" both in the sense of job title, but also regarding the personality factors and motivations of the person in that higher-level job. What "hat" the individual is wearing in this present role may dictate how they look at things. If their boss is a demanding nit-picker, then very likely they will be one as well . . . for self-preservation.

Look also for the subtle rewards and punishments they encounter. For example, are they more likely to be rewarded for doing something innovative? Or are they more likely to be punished in some way for making mistakes? How do the rewards for being innovative or going the extra mile, balance out against the punishments that may come for making a mistake or stepping over some invisible line?

How would these factors impact on the way they react to new ideas you bring to them, perhaps for cutting costs, or improving the quality of your section's output? Some considerations:

- What *pressures* are they feeling? What implications for me and the way I relate to them?

- Who are the *key judges* of their performance? What criteria do those judges likely use? (On this issue of Who the important judges are, see Question 5.4.)

- What *rewards* are they seeking? What punishments are they avoiding?Are they still energetic and ambitious? Or has the system worn them down? What *implications* for how you work with them?

Summary

Question 2

Who else is involved in this "game"? What is likely to be their idea of "winning"?

2.1   Who are the other "players"—directly or indirectly? Why? What is their involvement?

2.2   How does each of these "players" win? That is, what problem are they likely trying to solve, and how will they measure success?

2.3   What are the other "players" rewarded for, or punished for? What implications result?

Question 3

What's really going on here? Is this a real issue, or a subtle test?

"On my first morning in the new job, the branch manager asked me to come into his office and bring my steno pad. Then he dictated for hours without stopping. Noon came and went, and then one o'clock passed.

"Finally I said, 'What about lunch?' His reply was, 'Oh, is it that time already?'

"Later, one of the people who had been there a while told me this was a game he tried with everyone, to see how far he could push. If you let him get away with it, then you lost his respect, and that showed up in other ways."

Secretary, federal agency

That secretary was my mother, way back when. There are no steno pads these days, but the lesson stuck with me.

The tests and probes usually begin on small matters that seem too minor to warrant making an issue. But if you let them pass, then the pattern has been set.
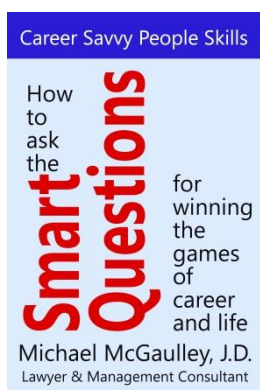
Sometimes the person doing the testing may not even consciously *intend* a test—at least not at the start. They might begin by pushing the limits just a little, sometimes without really intending to. If they find there are no

consequences, they might push a little more, then still more.

They might come in late one day. Next week, a couple of times. If no one seems to notice or care, arriving late becomes the norm.

End of this sample. Find it helpful? Here's how to buy this and other books in the Career Savvy People Skills Series:

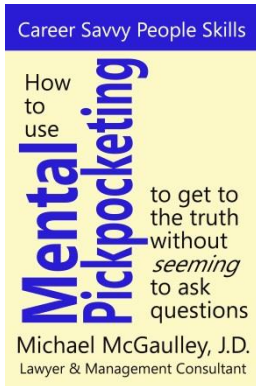*How to ask the SMART QUESTIONS for winning the games of career and life*

"You've got to be aware of the games that are being played. You don't have to play the games yourself, but you do need to recognize when they are being played against you." Like it or not, the reality is that games, probes, and subtle competitions—and not to forget office politics! —are facts of life in most organizations.

Smart Questions provides the tools for looking through to what's really going on in situations, on spotting the "real rules", on focusing on what really matters and staying out of unnecessary confrontations, and on selecting the best option under the circumstances–and defending it if challenged.

TO ORDER SMART QUESTIONS NOW VIA AMAZON

Book 2 in the series:

How to use MENTAL PICKPOCKETING to get to the truth without seeming to ask questions

When you ask a question, *most* of the time, *most* people will do their best to tell the truth, But not always. Sometimes simply to ask a question is to give the game away because it alerts the other person to what you're really after, and hence raises a flag on what they may want to fudge, avoid, or distort. (Or even tell a fib!)

Mental Pickpocketing introduces you to an array of methods of getting to the truth without *seeming* to ask questions.

TO ORDER MENTAL PICKPOCKETING NOW VIA AMAZON