A LEADER'S FIRE-STARTER GUIDE

Gifts from the Mountain:
Simple Truths for Life's Complexities

Fuel-starter Questions for Generating Ideas, Dispelling Myths, and Getting Back to What Matters Most

By Eileen McDargh

A Leader's Fire-Starter Guide

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Context:

While *Gifts from the Mountain* looks, at face value, like a personal book, it can really be so much more. Leaders at all levels can use this book as a tool for deeper conversations,resulting in more commitment, creativity, and courage. Too often, organizational conversations are stilted, superficial, or stifled by the squeeze of e-mail. These fire-starter questions afford an opportunity to break through rote responses and develop understanding, awareness and collaboration.

Directions:

Option 1: Use these questions at the start of a team meeting. Allow people to sit in silence for 2 minutes and ponder the question. It might seem like a lifetime. As the leader, share your thoughts and be willing and open to hear whatever is given back to you. You might be the hold-up in progress. A great leader can hear what might be getting in his/her way.

Option 2: Give the book to every team member. Ask one of them (in advance) to select a passage he or she thinks is pertinent to the team.

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That individual then opens the meeting and facilitates this portion of the meeting.

Option 3: State what is the current concern before the team. Open the book at random. Ask the team what that thought has to do with the current issue. It's amazing how wisdom can come from what, at face value, seems unconnected. This is called "breakthrough thinking."

Some of these are purposefully left blank for your reflection and internal conversation. You will notice that there is a space for you to write other questions that might be more pertinent or rise just naturally from the conversation. And, of course, it is always appropriate to ask "What does this statement say to YOU right now about your professional life, your personal life, or the organization in general?"

What does this sentence say to YOU right now about your professional life, your personal life, or the organization?

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Steady strides beat hasty starts.

- ❑ Where are we moving so quickly that we're getting into trouble?
- ❑ What adjustments do we need to make?
- ❑ How can we pay more attention to our process instead of our end product?
- ❑ Your thoughts: _____

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Acclimate at a higher level before you begin the next part of the climb.

- ❑ What do you (or we) need to "try on" before we move too far ahead?
- ❑ Is there a position you'd like to sample for your career growth?
- ❑ Whom might you interview to learn more about the pluses and minuses of a job you seek?
- ❑ Your thoughts: _____

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Switchbacks are necessary to reach the top.

- ❑ What shortcuts are we taking?
- ❑ Are they working or are we in for some surprises?
- ❑ Where do you feel like we're are trudging ahead and not seeing any progress to "the top?"
- ❑ What are the pros and cons of shortcuts?

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❑ What are the benefits for earning results in a slow, steady fashion?

❑ Your thoughts: _____

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Pack out your garbage.

❑ What are we or the organization holding on to that just feels like "garbage"?

❑ What fence do we need to mend?

❑ What rumor do we need to dispel so we can speak with integrity?

❑ Your thoughts: _____

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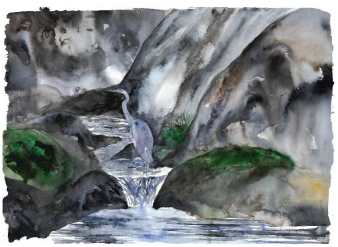
Watch for "ducks" and leave some behind.



❑ Who has been down this road before?

❑ Who can teach us wisdom learned in hindsight?

❑ What are you discovering about your work that could save a bunch of us from falling off a cliff or losing our way?

❑ Your thoughts: _____

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Sometimes it's easier without a pack.

- ❑ What do we need to simplify to move into a new — whatever?
- ❑ What are the fears that we need to ditch in order to venture forth?
- ❑ What new opportunities could a "lighter load" open up?
- ❑ Your thoughts: _____

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Alpine flowers bloom where you least expect them.

- ❑ What was the "good" news you discovered in what looked like "bad" news?
- ❑ Is there something we can do to put a positive brush stroke on what seems negative? Can we help you find the positive?
- ❑ Where have you been surprised by "goodness" when you least expected it?
- ❑ Your thoughts: _____

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You can't tell how far it is until you begin.

- ❑ Where have we been procrastinating and why?
- ❑ What should we start now?
- ❑ Who or what could help us begin?
- ❑ Your thoughts: _____

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Turn around. Celebrate how far you've come.

- ❑ What are some milestones that brought us to today?
- ❑ Who helped us get to where we are and how have we thanked them?
- ❑ What happened yesterday that we didn't celebrate?
- ❑ Your thoughts: _____

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Pause and rest but don't stop.

- ❑ Where do we need a time-out?
- ❑ What does our company culture say about resting?
- ❑ Can we be too driven and what are the consequences?
- ❑ Your thoughts: _____

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Get your bearings or else you might end up someplace you don't want to be.

- ❑ How would you assess our current project, service offering, or product?
- ❑ How can we tell if we are headed in the right direction?
- ❑ What should we use as compass points?

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❑ Your thoughts: _____

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Solitude lets you see more.

❑ When was the last time you were alone with space to think?

❑ What is keeping you back from taking time away to think?

❑ What are some ways of taking yourself away without going too far?

❑ How can we create work/life balance in our organization?

❑ Your thoughts: _____

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Every ounce counts.

❑ What's the non-essential "stuff" that weights us down?

❑ Where does our product or service need to be simplified?

❑ What can we do to help each other lighten the load?

❑ Your thoughts: _____

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Little things trip you up.

- ❑ What small thing have we done that became a major headache?
- ❑ In hindsight, what could we have done to prevent "the small" from becoming "the big"?
- ❑ Where might "habit" trip us up?
- ❑ Your thoughts: _____

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The flexible survive. The yielding win the day.

- ❑ Where are we being too rigid?
- ❑ Where do we need to bend in order to win?
- ❑ What feedback can we offer each other on behaviors that seem inflexible?
- ❑ Your thoughts: _____

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Walk too fast and you'll miss the beauty.

- ❑ What have we failed to notice in our environment?
- ❑ Whom have we failed to notice in the last rush to a deadline?
- ❑ Is there "beauty" in our work? If not, why not?
- ❑ Your thoughts: _____

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Sometimes it's better not to know how hard the trail or how far you have to go.

- ❑ What have we done, that in retrospect, was much harder than we thought it would be?
- ❑ What did we gain by NOT knowing how hard it was?
- ❑ What lessons can we take for the next time?
- ❑ Your thoughts: _____

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Stop when you are tired.

- ❑ How would you assess your energy level and what would help it?
- ❑ How well do we support each other's need to rest?
- ❑ What is exhausting you right now?
- ❑ Your thoughts: _____

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Mosquitoes are only a nuisance.

- ❑ What is annoying right now, but is still something we can live with?
- ❑ When have we made something into a huge issue instead of just tolerating or ignoring it?
- ❑ On the flipside, what are we tolerating right now that should be addressed?
- ❑ Your thoughts: _____

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Feel the fear and do it anyway.

- ❑ What is our greatest fear if we continue as we are?
- ❑ What is our greatest fear if we change?
- ❑ What are the odds our fear will actually happen and what is our game plan if it does?
- ❑ Your thoughts: _____

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Observe nature's patterns. Different trees grow at different elevations.

- ❑ How are we different?
- ❑ How does this difference help us?
- ❑ What might we do to further respect the diversity of this team?
- ❑ Whose shoes might we need to walk in?
- ❑ Your thoughts: _____

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Look for ways to make the trip enjoyable.

- ❑ What might make our work more fun?
- ❑ How can we increase the enjoyment of our customers or clients?
- ❑ What part of your work do you enjoy the most and are you doing it enough?

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❑ Your thoughts: _____

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Encourage those on the way up.

❑ How can we mentor one another more?

❑ Have we created a culture that encourages personal growth?

❑ Who are our potential leaders and how are we grooming them?

❑ Your thoughts: _____

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Downhill is more dangerous than uphill.

❑ What has become so easy that we no longer think about it?

❑ Where might we be too cocky with our success?

❑ Have we stopped learning new skills?

❑ Your thoughts: _____

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If the sky falls, there's another one behind it.

❑ Where are we discouraged right now?

❑ What have we learned from coming through the last tough time?

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❑ What are some clues that tell us “this too shall pass”?

❑ Your thoughts: _____

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Watch for wild onions.

❑ What’s a wild idea that bears exploring?

❑ Where do we need to add “spice” to our service or product?

❑ Who would add spice to this gathering?

❑ Your thoughts: _____

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If you keep your head inside a tent, you’ll miss the stars.

❑ What is keeping us “inside our tent”?

❑ Where do we need to encourage risk-taking?

❑ What opportunity might we be missing by staying inside our comfort zone?

❑ Your thoughts: _____

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Don’t keep looking for the pass. Just go one step at a time.

❑ Where do we spend too much time looking for the end instead of doing what needs to be done right now?

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❑ How do we keep our focus daily?

❑ How do we monitor signs of progress?

❑ Your thoughts: _____

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Expect the unexpected and deal with it.

❑ What might get in the way of our key initiatives?

❑ What is a backup plan to deal with these possibilities?

❑ What are the unexpected opportunities that might arise?

❑ Your thoughts: _____

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Pain means the pack must be adjusted.

❑ What is causing us pain right now?

❑ What adjustments can we make?

❑ How can we help each other more?

❑ Your thoughts: _____

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Sometimes you have to get your feet wet.

❑ Where do we need to take the plunge?

❑ Who might need some encouragement to get their feet wet?

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❑ Who might not be ready for this venture?

❑ Your thoughts: _____

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It always takes longer than expected.

❑ What is taking longer than expected?

❑ What can we do to speed it up or else just accept the fact?

❑ When is impatience a vice? A virtue?

❑ Your thoughts: _____

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Protecting the environment is a nuisance. Not having the environment is a disaster.

❑ Are there things we are doing that harm our community environment?

❑ Are there co-workers who are "endangered" and could be lost?

❑ What could we do to be more socially responsible as an organization?

❑ Your thoughts: _____

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Big winds don't always bring rain.

❑ When have we overreacted to someone who is just bluster?

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❑ What event have you over-reacted to?

❑ What might these things teach us for future interactions?

❑ Your thoughts: _____

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Remember the night rainbow.

❑ Has there been a time when we could not see the outcome but had faith in the process?

❑ How did things turn out?

❑ What worked for us? What might we do differently now?

❑ Your thoughts: _____

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You have to get your hands dirty.

❑ What is the toughest part of your work?

❑ What is the dirty task that you push off to others instead of doing it yourself?

❑ When do you need to get in the trenches?

❑ Where do we need to join you?

❑ Your thoughts: _____

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You can do more than you think you can, particularly when someone believes in you, and especially if you believe in yourself.

- ❑ How can we support each other?
- ❑ Have we built a culture of encouragement?
- ❑ When was the last time we talked about the strengths we see in each other?
- ❑ What's stopping us from doing it right now?
- ❑ Your thoughts: _____

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You can face your fear without going over the edge.

- ❑ What scares you right now?
- ❑ What evidence do you have that what you fear will occur?
- ❑ What would you do if you had no fear?
- ❑ Your thoughts: _____

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Hum the moon up. Sing the sun down.

- ❑ If this team or organization had a theme song, what would it be?
- ❑ If we don't like the song, what could be done to change it?
- ❑ What would put a song in your heart?

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❑ Your thoughts: _____

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Respect the territory of the other animals.

❑ When are we disrespectful of other people because we truly don't know them?

❑ What territory of yours is invaded too often?

❑ How can we learn to ask before entering?

❑ Your thoughts: _____

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Let people know where you are headed.

❑ Who needs to know more about our team and its work?

❑ Who could help us with strategy?

❑ Have we shared our plans with the people who support us?

❑ Your thoughts: _____

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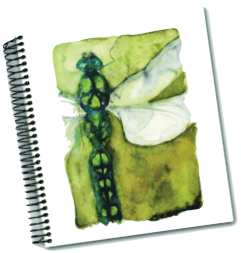

Write on keeps you right on.

❑ Are we recording what we have learned?

❑ Where are we putting too many things in writing instead of talking?

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❑ Your thoughts: _____

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Wind rises most when you are naked.

❑ Where and when are we vulnerable?

❑ How does acknowledging our vulnerability help us?

❑ What protection can we plan in the event of "wind"?

❑ Your thoughts: _____

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Don't forget the Band-Aids.

❑ To whom do we owe an apology?

❑ Have we hurt anyone in our process?

❑ What or who needs to be mended?

❑ Your thoughts: _____

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If someone is struggling, share his load.

❑ How do we let each other know when we need help?

❑ Can you give help without expecting something in return?

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❑ How well are we matching assignments with people's abilities so that there's effort but not back-breaking struggle?

❑ Your thoughts: _____

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Travel with people willing to share the work.

❑ How would you assess the "load" sharing on this team?

❑ If there are inequities, how and when should we speak up?

❑ Your thoughts: _____

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Look for help when you need it. Any kind of help.

❑ What keeps us from asking for help?

❑ What do you need right now from team members or the organization?

❑ Are you clear in your request so people can help?

❑ Your thoughts: _____

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Cross the stream if you come to it — not before.

❑ When have you let your imagination envision the worst?

❑ When has worry gotten the best of you?

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❑ Your thoughts: _____

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Laughter lifts your feet and your heart.

❑ What's the funniest thing that has happened to this team?

❑ How can we stop taking ourselves so seriously?

❑ What keeps us back from laughing more?

❑ Your thoughts: _____

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You don't need as much food as you think.

❑ What are excesses that cause us to overextend our efforts?

❑ Where can we cut back?

❑ What is the necessary "food" for us and are we on the right "diet"?

❑ Your thoughts: _____

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Celebrate. Celebrate. Dance to the music.

❑ What's the potential value of acknowledging and celebrating?

❑ What's the cost of skipping over this?

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- ❑ What gets in the way of cultivating this as a habit?
- ❑ What do you want to acknowledge/celebrate about yourself?
- ❑ Where do you want to apply acknowledging and celebrating with others?
- ❑ Your thoughts: _____

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There is no place like home.

Hungry for More? A word from Eileen

I trust you'll find yourself stimulated and thinking of what other Leader's questions might spring from using the metaphors from my mountain. This fire starter guide is intended to set your own voice into action.

Please let me know the results and what new questions you have created from *Gifts from the Mountain*. Write me at eileen@eileenmcdargh.com. Who knows, we might create a sequel from your contributions.

Many thanks to Dr. Beverly Kaye for the input and advice.
www.careersystemsintl.com