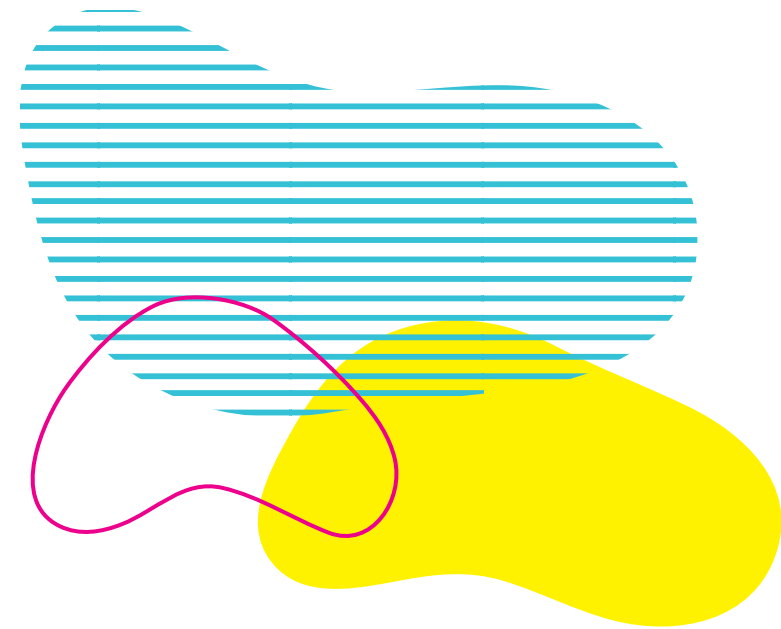




# **The Engineering Manager's eBook of Team Questions**

## Contents

I. <b>Introduction: Why ask questions?</b>	4
II. <b>How to ask questions</b> Cadence, scope, and vulnerability	7
III. <b>Getting started</b> Building a foundation Strengthening ties When the going gets tough	11
IV. <b>Wrap: Building trust on your team</b>	31



## Why ask questions?

Questions are a human superpower. They fuel our sense of discovery starting when we're young, and help us connect with the world around us and each other. Ask any parent about how they build a relationship with their children — it often starts with simple questions about their day or how they're feeling.

On engineering teams, questions can be a powerful tool for building alignment, fostering discussion, and even building trust. But like any tool, questions take practice to use well. For example, choosing the right question is important. Imagine a team retro where someone asks "whose fault is this mistake?" You're not likely to get a lot of discussion. If you

posed the question "What could we have done differently?" you may get more earnest responses and engage your team in building a better process and solution.

Team-building questions, in particular, are designed to foster trust on a team over time. Building trust on a team deepens the level of psychological safety, a major factor in team engagement and effectiveness. While many teams turn to team-building events like offsites or happy hours, research shows that small belonging cues like team questions are an easy way to build trust over time. And they're more accessible to distributed and remote teams.

### What is psychological safety?

Coined by Harvard professor Dr. Amy Edmondson, "psychological safety" addresses our capacity to be comfortable with vulnerability at work, something that has been historically discouraged — to our detriment.

Dr. Edmondson's extensive research revealed that the highest-performing, most satisfied teams felt they could openly admit mistakes, ask for help, and address issues candidly without retribution or humiliation. (Google verified this with their own experiment, dubbed [Project Aristotle](#).)

Questions can be a great tool for making vulnerability in the workplace productive. For more information, check out [our blog post for more about fostering and measuring psychological safety](#).

But asking team questions isn't always straightforward. As an engineering manager, when should you ask them? What should you ask? How can everyone react to them when we're all in different locations?

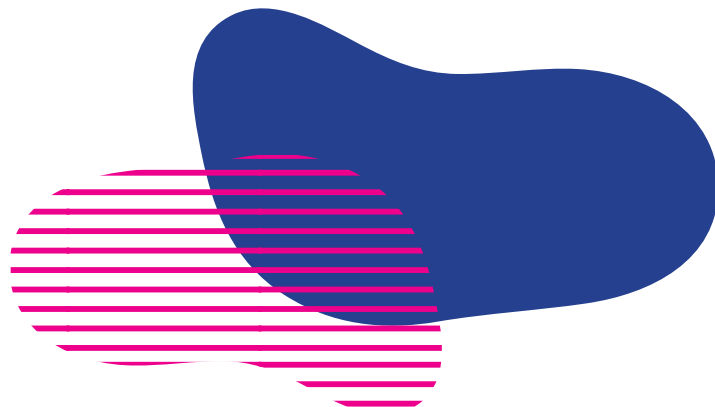
That's where we come in. Range builds team success software that helps teams stay in sync and build connections. As part of Check-ins in Range, teammates can answer team-building questions. We've done a lot of research on how to ask good questions, when to ask them, and even drafting our own extensive database of questions. We've decided to share our learnings to help empower other teams to build trust. This eBook and our [Icebreaker](#) app are tools to help leaders get better at using questions to strengthen their teams. In this eBook, we've included 60 to get you started, and we'll cover tips on how to develop your own.

### Belonging Cues

“How's it going?” is a remarkably simple question, yet a very powerful one. This “everyday” interaction is known as a **belonging cue** — signals that form bonds and a feeling of safety within groups — and we have a lot of informal opportunities to renew them in person. In the absence of these moments, we need to intentionally craft interactions that encourage vulnerability, trust, and belonging.

## How to ask questions

Asking questions might seem straightforward, but to get the most out of questions, you'll need to be intentional about what you ask and how. Each engineering team is different, and while we've included a set of questions to get you started, we also want to help you understand the "why" beyond these questions and how to adapt them for yourself.



## Cadence

To start, no matter what questions you ask, it's important to establish a cadence or a rhythm to asking them. Just like having a happy hour once a year doesn't do much good, asking team questions at random times is only moderately useful in building trust.

Instead, consider asking team-building questions on a regular basis like once a week at the end of a team meeting or once a day during standups. You can also try asking them asynchronously in a Slack channel, on an email thread, or a tool like Range. As you get into the swing of asking team questions, you'll see discussion start to deepen as your team opens up more and engages with the topics.

Having a cadence also helps establish accountability. It also makes the questions a team process, and not something just driven by a leader.

Asking team questions on a regular basis helps build a habit. Consistency and habit formation is what matters here. As you get better at asking questions, the team gets better at answering, and your collective sense of a shared experience grows richer.

## Scope

Getting the scope right is really important. Scope is related to how broad the question is you're asking. Too broad and it can be difficult to answer — like “what's your proudest moment?” That can be hard to think through during a team meeting.

On the other hand, “what's your proudest moment this week?” feels manageable and requires less mental energy. The difference between these is the scope. When identifying or writing questions for your team, consider starting with questions with a very small scope. For example, you might start with yes or no questions before moving into more open-ended ones. And if you're asking something about the whole year or quarter, consider giving the team advanced notice or asking them to write down a few notes in advance.

## Vulnerability

Team questions build trust over time by increasing the level of vulnerability between team members. By slowly ramping up the vulnerability required to answer a question, a leader can deepen trust. For example, a team might start with light-hearted questions about high school or favorite foods. These questions help to establish a base of shared knowledge and camaraderie, and don't require people to immediately open up about their insecurities.

As the team gets more comfortable with one another, they could start to answer and discuss questions about their personalities or communication styles. And eventually, they'll be able to discuss their own work and team well being with openness and trust.

It's important to slowly dial up the vulnerability. Starting your first team meeting with a question like “what do you think is going poorly on our team right now?” might be a bit too intense and cause people to close themselves off. Instead, leverage your cadence of questions to slowly establish the habit before diving into the nitty-gritty.

## Getting started

With more teams working remotely now than ever before, it's crucial to find ways to build trust. To help you on your way, here are a few ready-made questions and modules. And if you'd like to answer questions as part of your standup, don't forget to check out [range.co](https://range.co) where we integrate team-building questions into Check-ins to build trust and transparency.



We've broken out the 60 questions in this ebook into three sections:

1. Questions for newer engineering teams that will help foster openness
2. Questions for established engineering teams that want to maintain and improve their cohesion
3. Questions for tight-knit engineering teams that are facing new challenges

Thanks again for downloading this ebook and for helping build stronger engineering teams. Happy asking!

# I. Building a foundation

Whether you're new to team-building questions or recently joined a new team, the questions that follow are a good place to start. They focus on getting to know your team better, encouraging a deeper connection as people, not just as coworkers.

With these questions, you'll build a foundation of trust and teamwork that you can deepen over time.

## Did you know...?

Checking in regularly with your teammates is important — and we don't mean the cubicle drive-bys seen in Office Space.

A 2019 survey revealed that 84% of employees think check-ins are important. So much so that an absence of regular check-ins can contribute to turnover. In a recent [Gallup poll](#), departing employees said that in the three months before leaving, their managers had not checked in with them about their job satisfaction.

Yikes!



## Question Bank

### Basic Fun

How was your weekend? What did you do?

What does your name mean?

You're stranded on a desert island. What's the one thing you couldn't live without?

What's the last dream that you remember?

What categories of trivia are you the best at?

### Movies & TV

What have you read or watched recently and enjoyed?

What's one of your all-time favorite movies?

If you could make a guest appearance in a TV show, which show would it be?

When was the last time someone spoiled a film or TV show for you?

What's the last TV show that you binged on?

## Foodie

What's for lunch today?

What should be M&M's next new color or flavor?

What is your favorite meal?

What food do you hate the most?

What helps you wake up: coffee, tea, or something else?

## Feelings & Fears

How are you feeling today?

How would you describe your personality to a new friend?

What did you get into the most trouble for as a kid?

Are you afraid of heights?

Have you ever taken a personality test? What did you learn?

### Tip

Whether you're asking questions every day or once a week, consider starting off with lighter questions. Mondays aren't meant for deep thinking, so try a simple question like "how was your weekend?"

And always consider how your team communicates best, some prefer writing and some prefer in person, so try not to force a format on your team.

## II. Strengthening ties

By starting with the questions in the first chapter, you can establish a habit of asking questions — the cadence — which helps normalize the process. After a few weeks or months, your team will have a solid rapport, and they'll understand better the reason for questions and how to answer them.

From there, you can start to ask questions that require more vulnerability and trust. These are the types of questions you might pause before answering. But since you know your team now, you feel okay sharing.

One way to think about it is that you're giving your team opportunities to be vulnerable. And when they do open up, it deepens trust. Think of it like a muscle that you're working on — as you get fitter, you can increase the intensity.

The following questions do just that. They increase vulnerability to help you deepen trust and strengthen ties.

### Did you know...?

Managers afraid of losing their top talent don't need to throw money at the problem. The majority of today's top performers prioritize workplace culture over salary, according to a [2018 LinkedIn survey](#). Further [research shows](#) that two important strategies for growing a strong team culture are to connect roles with purpose and establish connections in the workplace.

At Range, we know the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic has challenged managers to adapt how they maintain and improve culture with newly remote teams. Check out our webinar, [Making Your Work Culture Work Remotely](#), for guidance and actionable advice on fostering a positive work environment during this difficult time.

## Question Bank

### Aspirations

When you were younger, what did you want to be when you grew up?

When was the last time you asked a teammate for help?  
What happened?

If you had to move to a different country, where would you go? What would you miss?

What professional skills would you like to develop next?

What's one skill that you've improved in the last year?  
How did you do it?

### Thankful For

What seemingly tiny thing are you especially grateful for?

What's a part of your job that you particularly enjoy?

Who has helped make your job easier recently? What did they do?

What's one thing you enjoy about your home or neighborhood?

What's a simple pleasure you enjoyed this week?

### Showing Up

What are two ways in which you express your gratitude?

Think of the last meaningful “thank you” that you received. What was it?

What’s one moment of success you experienced this week?

What’s your favorite charitable or non-profit organization? Why?

What do you want to do more of in the new year?

### Making Changes

Is there anything you want to do less of in the new year?

What does your ideal workday look like?

What is the best piece of advice you’ve received?

What’s your current state of mind?

In your own words, how would you describe what your team does?

### III. When the going gets tough

At this stage in your engineering team's evolution, you may have noted a few things: you know who is afraid of heights, you know the self-identified extroverts and introverts, and you've noticed a stronger sense of trust and willingness to share. But building trust during the good times is the easy part. Building resilience so your team can weather and bounce back from challenges is the next step.

Because you've already established the habit of answering questions and have a foundation of trust, you can now use team questions to uncover problems and bring about solutions. We've tailored

these questions to what you and your team need right now. If you've just had layoffs, you might ask your team to share their fears and what they're worried about. If your team just went remote, you might share ideas for home desk setups or how to stay focused with kids at home.

For a sense of when to deploy these themes, we've paired questions with a likely scenario in the form of modules. "Working Styles" and "Stress" are great modules to start with for teams dealing with the fallout from COVID-19, especially if they haven't worked remotely before.

#### Tip

As you ask deeper questions, remember to still include light-hearted ones. You'll note that our modules always pair vulnerable questions with fun questions that don't take much thought. No one is able to be vulnerable all the time, so it's important to build in these rest moments.

## Module 1: Working Styles

Dealing with the sudden shift to virtual teams

If you could choose your own working hours, would you be a night owl, early bird, or something in-between?

Where, outside of work, do you get your best ideas?

What distractions prevent you from doing your best work?

When was the last time you were so into your work that time flew by?

Outside of work, what activity makes you lose track of time?

## Module 2: Managing Conflict

Resolving new culture challenges as a result of a merger or buyout

What song or artist have you been listening to lately?

What was a real-life situation where you stood up for someone or something?

What conditions help you feel comfortable when engaging in conflict?

What was the last team decision that felt like it took too long? Why did it take so long?

How do you feel about conflict? How do you react to conflict with others?

### Module 3: Stress

Balancing work, family, and a global health threat

What is your favorite walk, hike, or bike ride?

What are you excited about this week? What are you worried about?

When you're feeling stressed, how do you deal with it?

How do you recognize when you're stressed?

How much does your workload change from week to week? How do you feel about that?

### Module 4: Feedback

Ironing out issues around new power structures and those learning how to become managers

What would you rather hear first, good news or bad news?

Think of a time when feedback felt like a gift. Why did it feel that way?

Think of a time when feedback was NOT helpful to you. What went wrong?

If you could give your younger self a piece of advice, what would you say?

How do you ensure the feedback you give is candid, and not overly critical or overly polite?



### Did you know...?

Because establishing cadence happens over time, we curate our questions based on a progressive path that reflect the varying levels of openness and engagement. Range's questions differ in scope, assumptions, and construction. Fun questions that cover topics outside of work can get people thinking creatively and shift mindsets, and eventually, can lead to learning about how they prefer to work and deal with conflict.

Here's why that matters: If you ask a new team member a question with too wide a scope — or one that carries certain assumptions for information not yet acquired — they may shut down trying to answer. Conversely, ask a long-time employee a question that is too “easy,” and it may come off as lacking substance and purpose (not to mention, a waste of time).



## Building trust in your team

At Range, we believe in the importance of check-ins as a key practice in balancing well being and performance on teams. That's why we've invested time and research into crafting vulnerable, trust-building questions that help your team connect and grow together.

We hope you'll try out one of these questions in your next team meeting or stand up, and if you're ready to start daily Check-ins, you can get started at [here](#).

