Powerful questioning is the ability to pose insightful queries that reveal the information needed for maximum benefit to move a conversation forward or help an individual probe an issue. Dorothy Leeds, in The 7 Powers of Questions: Secrets to Successful Communication in Life and at Work, suggests that such queries will always do one or more of these things:

- Powerful questions demand answers.
- Powerful questions stimulate thinking.
- Powerful questions give powerful information.
- Powerful questions lead to powerful listening.
- Powerful questions get people to open up.
- Powerful questions get people to persuade themselves.

But there are differences between questions that are merely good questions -- in that they stimulate more conversation -- and purposeful questions, which are questions that lead us forward in useful ways.

**BAD QUESTIONS:**
- Get caught up in the weeds -- they get hung up on small details at the expense of the greater discussion.
- Relitigate the past -- they get caught up in rehashing old events instead, and past hurts, and quickly become a version of the “blame game.”
- Devolve us into “us vs. them” conversations -- they become focused on a “them” outside of the room where the conversation is taking place, critiquing behaviors and decisions that other people make.

**PURPOSEFUL QUESTIONS:**
- Help people stay connected to the Big Picture and what’s really important.
- Look towards the future and imagine the possibilities that change and new ideas can bring.
- Focus on us -- the people in the room -- our experiences and challenges.

**QUESTION STRATEGIES THAT MOVE THE CONVERSATION FORWARD:**
- Ask open-ended questions: Avoid “yes or no” questions. Use as a guideline the old journalistic formulation of “who, what, when, where, and how,” if it’s helpful, but try to ask questions that require detailed, thoughtful responses.
- Avoid solution-oriented questions: These are questions that are formulated so that you are really just forcing the speaker to respond in such a way as to provide an answer that you were looking for. Your questions should be genuinely curious and allow for honest expression.
- Zooming in / zooming out: Harvard’s Rosabeth Moss Kanter’s metaphor about the need to take a wider perspective, while sometimes zooming in on the details. It’s an important skill to know when zooming in or zooming out is more valuable (particularly by being able to discern which details are the critical factors in a discussion or a decision).

**JESUS THE MASTER COACH**
In addition to teaching, preaching, and leading by example, Jesus’ favorite strategy was asking incisive questions: A reading of the Gospel quickly establishes Jesus’ favored technique of asking powerful questions of people (which satisfied all of the characteristics listed in the last couple of pages). From Bartimaeus, to the woman at the well, to the disciples, to Pontius Pilate, again and again Jesus made people think honestly about their own desires by asking direct (sometimes tough) questions. He does this more than 200 times!