THE ART OF ASKING QUESTIONS

CUCSA
Council of UC Staff Assemblies
Do your homework.

Review the speaker's bio, know current events in their field, or "Google."
Listen to the presentation.

The speaker may say something that sparks a question or piques your interest.
Craft your question.

The typical formula is "welcome," "context," and then "question." For example: Thank you for meeting with us today. You mentioned XYZ during your presentation. How did leadership respond when you proposed that idea?
QUESTION ONLY, NO PREFACE

Works if everyone clearly understands the question, either because of the presentation or generic nature of the question.

- Please clarify how you came to the decision to purchase XYX for this project.
- What are the most important decisions that you face daily as a leader in your organization?
Preface for context, followed by question

- Providing some brief context helps you guide and enables the speaker to focus the response.
- UCOP has administered 2 engagement surveys and the change management results continue to be largely unfavorable. As UCOP continues to roll-out systemwide initiatives, what steps are being taken to better engage campuses during the early stages of change initiatives and improve communication?
- I noted in your bio that you have extensive experience working in both the public and private sector. Managing in the UC system has been compared to "managing by committee" or "herding cats." How would you compare and contrast your experience in the two sectors and what's been most challenging?
Avoid this! It is best to follow a comment with a question or request.

- Venting - I think it's wrong that campuses are enrolling more and more students and adding more and more faculty, but staff is expected to do more with less and find efficiencies.

- Try this - I am concerned that campuses are increasing enrollment and adding faculty and it seems that comparable attention is not being paid to building the infrastructure and staff to support this growth. How is the university addressing these issues so that we can maintain our standing as a top tier university?
Ask your question.

When you are afforded the opportunity to ask your question, project your voice, enunciate and make eye contact with the speaker.
Listen attentively as the speaker is responding to your question.

Maintain eye contact and be aware of your nonverbals (facial expressions, head nodding, etc.).
Say "thank you."

Say "thank you" when the speaker is done answering your question. Do not ask an immediate follow-up question, as your colleagues also have questions.
Generic Questions

The following are some generic questions that you might consider asking. Optimally, you will provide context relevant to the speaker and modify the questions to fit the situation.
What are the most pressing challenges that leaders are facing today and why?

How do you maintain your and your team's daily motivation and inspiration despite obstacles, pushback or setbacks?

What are the most difficult decisions to make?

How do you foster creative and innovative thinking within your organization? How are ideas shared and implemented within your organization?

How do you assist a new employee to understand the culture of your organization?
How have you rallied your team in the past in difficult projects/tasks?

What do you do when you are unsure about how to achieve the goals of the team?

What are the most useful resources that you would recommend to someone looking to gain a better perspective on how the University operates?

How do you get others to accept your ideas?

How do you maintain your and your team's daily motivation and inspiration despite obstacles, pushback or setbacks?

What are you doing daily to ensure your growth and development continues as a leader?
QUESTIONS