Ten Questions First

Quick guide · slow down before you solve the wrong problem

What this is: a two-minute interrupt for the moment a problem lands and you're already reaching for the fix. Ten questions about the problem — written down, no answers — before any solution is allowed. Use it on your own, or run it with the team before a kickoff so you don't build the wrong thing together.

The one line: ten questions before the first answer.

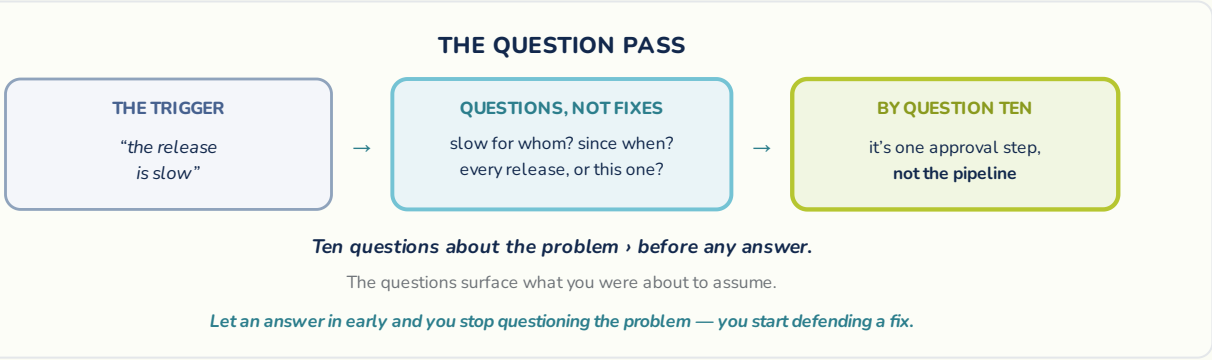
THE ONE IDEA

The first answer usually arrives before the real problem does. This puts a short wall between the problem and the solution — a deliberate delay that surfaces what you were about to assume: who, since when, how often, what's really being asked. **No solutions until all ten are written.** That discipline is the whole tool.

1 · WHAT DO I ACTUALLY DO?

Ten questions, no answers

When a problem lands, pause the fix and write ten questions about the problem itself. Solutions don't count — and the numbering matters: it's what stops you at three and makes you find seven more. By the tenth question the problem usually looks different from the one you assumed.

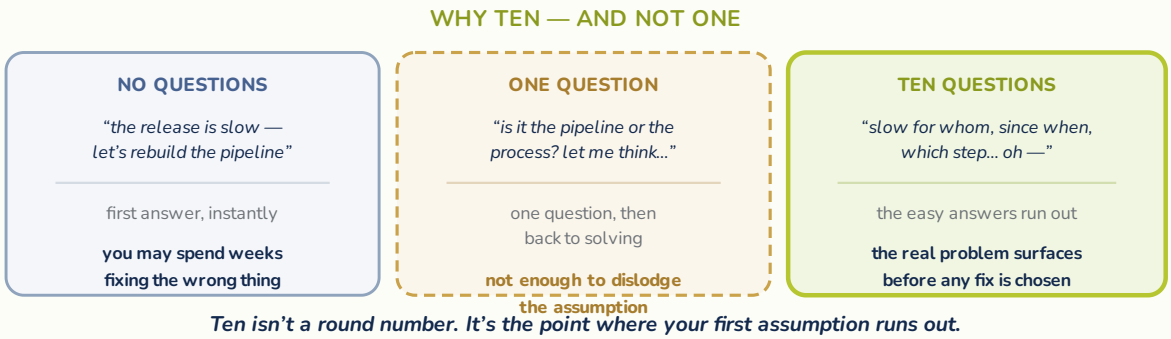


2 · WHY TEN?

The number is the mechanism

This is the part people skip, and it's the reason the tool works. One question feels like diligence, but it can be answered from the assumption you already hold — you ask it, satisfy yourself, and carry on to the fix you'd already picked. Ten is enough to run out of easy answers.

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Ten isn't a round number. It's the point where your first assumption runs out.

One question can be answered from the assumption you already hold. Ten cannot.

3 · WHEN DOES IT HELP MOST?

Where to use it

A problem lands — before you reach for the fix, write the ten questions. · **An "obvious" solution** — if the answer feels instant, that's exactly when to question first. · **A vague request** — ten questions turn "make it better" into something you can act on. · **Before a kickoff** — run the pass as a team, so you don't build the wrong thing together.

4 · WHAT GOES WRONG?

Common mistakes

What you'll see	The fix
Your questions are solutions in disguise	"Should we rebuild the pipeline?" is a fix wearing a question mark. Ask about the problem: who, since when, how often, compared to what.
You stop at three or four	That's where the easy ones run out — and where the useful ones start. Keep going to ten.
You answer as you go	Then you're defending a fix, not examining a problem. Write all ten first, then read them back.

5 · HOW DO I MAKE THIS STICK?

The habit to keep

THE HABIT

"Ten questions before the first answer."
When you feel the pull to solve, count to ten — in questions. Each one is about the problem, not the fix. If the problem looks different by question ten, you have just avoided solving the wrong one.

Teams that do this stop confusing the first problem statement with the real one. Two minutes of questions routinely save weeks spent solving the wrong thing.

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6 · WHERE DOES THIS FIT?

Where this sits in the Gym

Five tools help you define the problem. **This is the only one you run in the moment** — a two-minute reflex-breaker before you start solving. The others are deliberate investigations you choose to sit down and do: **Root Cause Drill** (drill one cause down through its layers, when you know the problem is real) · **Assumption Breaker** (surface and test what you're assuming) · **First Principles** (rebuild your understanding from the ground up) · **Future Back** (work backwards from where you want to end up).

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