Toolbox Talk - Questioning the Work Plan

Todd Jerome Jenkins | v2.0 | October 13, 2026 | 5–10 minutes plus field checks

What and why

Questioning a work plan means testing its important assumptions before people depend on them. A previously successful plan may no longer match the equipment, people or conditions.

Objective: Identify one assumption and define evidence needed to accept or revise it.

When and where

Before approving or reusing a plan, especially after a change or conflicting information. During planning, review and safe walkthroughs with the people affected.

How to use it

- Identify the intended result, critical steps and assumptions supporting the plan.
- Ask what could make an assumption wrong. Compare current evidence with the applicable requirements.
- Resolve conflicts with the responsible specialist and update the plan before release.

Verify It in the Field

Trace one planned control to the current governing source and the evidence needed before exposure.

Paper practice: an old plan assumes an access route remains open. A new layout shows an obstruction.

Identify affected steps and the required review. Success means holding the unsupported part of the plan.

Failure points and stop triggers

Copying old plans; dismissing contrary evidence; vague success criteria; hidden downstream effects. Hold affected work for conflicting instructions, unverified critical assumptions or changed conditions without review.

Toolbox talk questions

1. What are we assuming is unchanged?

2. What evidence could contradict us?

3. Who else will be affected?

Use the separate supervisor field check and attendance sheet. Practice is not qualification or work authorization.

Source: DOE-HDBK-1028-2009, Vol. 2, printed pp. 13–15. References and task-specific limits on the webpage.

Next step: Apply this skill to one step on the free JHA/JSA field-verification worksheet.

Expanded guidance and separate forms: toddjeromejenkins.com/toolbox-talks/planning-questions-challenge-work-package

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