



## QUESTIONING

### ASK MORE QUESTIONS ... WHY?

- Why ask more questions? Because brilliant thinkers never stop because they know that this is the best way to gain deeper insights. All the great inventors and scientists from Newton to Darwin to Einstein asked questions. By doing so they were able to start the process that led to their tremendous breakthroughs. Asking questions is a sign of strength and intelligence.
- Great leaders constantly ask questions and are well aware that they do not have all the answers.
- In business we also need to ask questions. Eric Schmidt, CEO of Google, said: **"We run this company on questions, not answers."** He knows that if you keep asking questions, you can keep finding better answers. When Greg Dyke became director general of the BBC in 2000 he too asked questions – of all the staff. He knew that, at that early stage he could learn more from his employees than they could from him.
- Use Questions to handle tough situations. When someone gives an answer, the temptation is to plunge in with our opinions, responses, conclusions or proposals. A better approach is to ask more questions, probe further, to deepen our comprehension of the issues before making up our mind. Once we have mapped out the main points we can use closed questions — often answered with a simple "yes" or "no" —to get specific information and move the conversation in a particular direction.

### QUESTION TYPES

#### Closed Questions

- Closed questions are useful if you're just seeking confirmation of specific information ("did you turn the computer on? Is there a light on by the left switch? ") or if you're seeking to summaries and confirm your understanding of the conversation. Used at the end of conversations they can be helpful confirmation.
- Closed questions are sometimes ones we largely ask because we think we know the answer and we want to validate our own beliefs and assumptions. Sometimes all we are really seeking to do is control the conversation.

- If closed questions are the bulk of your conversations it will not expand your knowledge or understanding of people & circumstances you are involved with. They can be called “dead questions” i.e. ones that don't really require a response
- Variations of closed or dead questions are also leading and assumptive questions. The type of questions lawyers ask when they don't want any new information they just need to manipulate the witness into giving the information the lawyer needs. E.g. “So you agree that you were actually there on the night of the 15<sup>th</sup>?”

## Open Questions

- These are questions which do not allow for a “yes/no” response but rather invite the participant to give a fuller response in his own words. They are questions that have a genuine desire to learn and understand behind them. They are particularly useful at the beginning of conversations to open up the conversation, to establish rapport and to gather information.
- **Open questions examples:**
  - How did you achieve those results?
  - When do you see this project happening?
  - Who are the main players in this project?
  - What do you think about that?
  - Why do you think this happened?
  - It is possible to answer some open questions with a one word answer, “Who was involved? Bill

## Motivational Questions

- People learn best when they feel positive and good about themselves. When you want to build rapport with people and go on to ask them more questions you need to put them in a positive and resourceful state. You can do this by embedding legitimate and congruent praise into the question.
- **Examples of motivational questions:**
  - What does it say about you that you achieved that?
  - How are you going to use your strengths of ... (e.g. internal, interpersonal, spiritual, and / or past accomplishments) to help you achieve this task?

- What skills that you already have will help you to complete this task/project?
- What good qualities do you have to draw on to help you handle this situation?
- How will you overcome any obstacles that might get in the way of your positive changes?

## **Socratic Questions**

- The Socratic Method is a search for the underlying hypotheses or assumptions which may subconsciously shape one's opinion. The technique Socrates used was to make these assumptions the subject of scrutiny, to determine their consistency with other beliefs. The basic form is a series of questions formulated as tests of logic and fact intended to help a person or group discover their beliefs about some topic, exploring the definitions, seeking to characterize the general characteristics shared by various particular instances. This method is designed to bring out definitions implicit in peoples beliefs, or to help them further their understanding,
- Socratic questions are those designed to lead the individual to make his/her own discoveries and insights based upon a series of incremental questions and answers. One way of describing Socratic questions is that they are questions that "lead from one step behind" (also known as the "Columbo technique," after the television detective who was a classic example of a "naïve enquirer"). Help me to understand...?
- Socratic questions have the great advantage in that they encourage the other person to do most of the work, because they must actively think through problems and arrive at solutions that have personal meaning for them. Participants are more likely to integrate knowledge they come to through their own thought process rather than that which is delivered or imposed upon them. (Avoiding the "Not Invented Here" Syndrome)
- To summarise, none of us likes to be told that we are wrong/ bad, but we are more willing to listen if someone helps us to see the ways in which our understanding has been limited. We can then correct our behaviour according to our new understanding.
- **More Examples of Socratic questions:**
  - "What are some different options that you could think about?"
  - "What was the effect of that thinking on your behaviour?"
  - "Which way do you think is the best way?"
  - "What might be a different way to see that?"
  - "What might [X] think if he / she heard you make that statement?"

## Conceptual clarification questions

- Get them to think more about what exactly they are asking or thinking about. Prove the concepts behind their argument. Basic 'tell me more' questions that get them to go deeper.
  - *What leads you to say that?*
  - *What exactly does this mean?*
  - *How does this relate to what we have been talking about?*
  - *What is the nature of ...?*

## Probing assumptions

- Probing of assumptions makes them think about the presuppositions and unquestioned beliefs on which they are founding their argument. This is shaking the bedrock and should get them really going!
  - *What else could we assume?*
  - *You seem to be assuming ...?*
  - *How did you choose those assumptions?*

## Questioning viewpoints and perspectives

- Most arguments are given from a particular position. So attack the position. Show that there are other, equally valid, viewpoints.
  - *Another way of looking at this is ..., does this seem reasonable?*
  - *What alternative ways of looking at this are there?*
  - *What is the difference between... and...?*
  - *What are the strengths and weaknesses of...?*

## Probe implications and consequences

- The argument that they give may have logical implications that can be forecast. Do these make sense? Are they desirable?
  - *Then what would happen?*
  - *What are the consequences of that assumption?*
  - *What are the implications of ... ?*
  - *Why is ... important?*

## Questions about the question

- And you can also get reflexive about the whole thing, turning the question in on itself. Use their attack against themselves. Bounce the ball back into their court. Etc.
  - *What was the point of asking that question?*
  - *Why do you think I asked this question?*
  - *What does that mean?*