

Questions

Self-Coaching Guide

Asking effective Questions

Asking effective questions takes conversations forward and elicits valuable information. Often these powerful questions are simple, short, and **open** (i.e. beginning with *what*, *where*, *when*, and *how*). Closed questions, by contrast, may be disguised statements that can normally be answered *yes* or *no*. These types of questions don't normally advance conversations forward or reveal much.

Also, being **non-directive** (i.e. asking a person questions about what they should do) is much more effective than being directive (i.e. telling a person what to do). This is because most people don't like being told what to do. Although they may ask for advice, they will often ignore it. A person tends to get more excited by the plans they've worked through for themselves and therefore be more likely to action them. Additionally, if you tell a person what to do, they will return to you for more advice which is time consuming. If, however, you ask a person questions about their thoughts and ideas on a subject, over time they will develop a capability to solve their own problems, which frees up your time.

How can I ask effective questions?

Telling or asking closed questions causes people not to think deeply. Asking open questions causes them to think for themselves. Different types of open question can produce different desired results:

Focus attention: questions that bring a person back to the task in hand, if they have strayed off topic, and gets to the point, e.g. *'What do you want from this conversation? What would success look like?'*

Follow interest: questions that follow a person's interest and not your interest, e.g. *'What would you like to discuss? Can you tell me some more about that? What else can you tell me?'*

Raise awareness: questions that help a person discover something new through raising their awareness, often by using something they have said and encouraging them to think deeper, e.g. *'What did you mean by ...? How did others react when ...? What did you see/hear that made you think ...?'*

Generate responsibility: questions that generate responsibility within a person, e.g. *'What have you learned from our conversation? What could you do? What will you do as a result of our conversation?'*

Create insight: questions that challenge an assumption which limits a person's thinking or actions, and replaces it with a better assumption to help them think afresh and gain insight, e.g. *'If you were to ... how would you do it? If you knew that ... how would you think about it? If you did that ... what would happen?'*

Using the most appropriate type of open question during a conversation can have a significant impact on how the conversation progresses, what you both gain from it, and the quality and sustainability of the outcome or actions resulting from it.

Reference:

This guide is based on an extract from *The Financial Times Guide to Business Coaching* by Anne Scouler (2011).

"Successful people ask better questions, and as a result, they get better answers."
Tony Robbins

More Information

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