

# *Be a Seeker*

***"Ask questions the other person will enjoy answering?"***

***"***

Dale Carnegie

## **Questioning**

There is magic in asking questions. Questions can ignite creativity, shift a life path, build commitment, inspire action, communicate value, spur learning, mitigate risk, and more. Questions are the backbone of teaching, parenting, leading, self-improvement, innovation, doctoring, and coaching. Socrates understood that "Wonder is the beginning of wisdom."

## **Telling vs. Asking**

When questions are asked with a genuine sense of curiosity, a desire to understand and connect they are empowering. Asking yourself questions is a powerful way to explore your deeper self, move in a new direction, or assess your progress towards your life goals.

If you are in a supervisory role, a good place to start is to ask yourself – “How much of my day do you spend making statements rather than asking questions?” If you do ask questions are you leading the witness, seeking affirmation, being rhetorical, or manipulating? Setting your mental channel to “I don’t know.” allows you access to critical information. Over time people learn if you are truly a seeker.

BLANK  
SCREEN



## **Blank Screen**

Even when you think you know the whole story, approach the scene with a blank screen. Let those involved project their understanding of what's happening and then explore what they have placed on the screen. Ask the dumb questions! "What did you mean by \_\_\_\_\_?" "How was it \_\_\_\_\_?" "Who is \_\_\_\_\_?" The blanks are always filled with their words. If you introduce terminology you run the risk of going off-script.

Deep listeners know how to listen for key words, shifts in tone, body language and higher level references. How they say it is as important as what they say. Your goal is to help others do their best thinking. It isn't about you understanding. It is about providing space for them to listen to themselves

## **And – So – Because**

Be a thought partner. Seldom is the first idea expressed, the deeper desire. The Spice Girls had it right when they sang “So, tell me what you want, what you really really want.” “Would you tell me more about that?” is a question that provides space for the other person to direct the conversation. If you are really stuck – “And?” – “So?” – “Because?” asked in a calm soft tone are ways to help them explore their thinking at a deeper level. .

During difficult or sensitive conversation dead air is your friend. Employ the art of the pause. Give them time to think. Remember you are trying to connect. This isn’t an interrogation and you aren’t aiming for I gotcha. Breathe – few people can maintain silence for long periods of time. It’s helpful to ask permission to ask a difficult question. “May I ask you a tough question?” Also, give them an out – “You don’t need to answer this if it is too personal.”

## **The Balcony**

Take them to the balcony. Push the situation out in time or to a bigger context – a higher level. A friend once described it to me this way, I felt as if I was the math problem, then I was working the math problem and now I feel as if I am watching myself work the math problem. Help them watch the movie rather than being in it. Try asking “If you were a member of an audience watching what’s happening – how would you describe it?”

How far out in time you go depends on the complexity of the situation, the age of the individual and their level of stress. To young children out in time is 5 minutes from now. To adults it can be years. As a parent you might want to ask yourself “In three years will this make a difference in my child’s life?”

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If you or the person is feeling stressed you need to narrow the time span. As many self-help programs remind you, one day at a time. Under extreme stress one day can be too much, try an hour and if that doesn't work try five minutes. As a school counselor I often ask students, "So, exactly how many days do you have left in this class?"

Asking "What do you think is at the heart of this issue?" "As you look at the bigger picture what are the key things at play here?" "What will it say about you if you \_\_\_\_\_?" "Tell me about a person who \_\_\_\_\_." Are all examples of a bigger context. In perceptual control theory circles we talk about going up a level. "Why" takes you up a level towards the balcony. However I seldom ask "why". The question "why" leads to a search for a cause-and-effect relationship, and it is most often heard as being judgemental. It allows others to abdicate their role/responsibility. Find a way to ask "Why?" without using the word why? "How come?" and "Because?" are often useful.



## Have – Do – Be

Think *have-do-be*. If they give you a *have* ask about the *do* & *be*. If they speak about what they want/will *do*, ask about what they will *have* and who they will *be*. If they tell you who they want to *be*, ask if they are being \_\_\_\_ what will they *have* and what will they *do*. Singer Margaret Young, said “You must first be who you really are, then do what you really need to do, in order to have what you want.”

All of these questions apply to you as well. In fact practicing with yourself first is highly beneficial. You don’t need to know and understand their story, they need to know and understand what they really want. Always build your question from something they have said. Let go and be that curious child who asks repeatedly – “Why?” without using the word “WHY”.

*Start with a big life question Bob Marley sang about*

*“Open your eyes, look within. Are you satisfied  
with the life you're living?”*

# *Moving to the Balcony*

As you move down the list you are heading towards the balcony.

## Events

1. What happened or is happening? *Be literal, think in terms of quotes and snapshots.*
2. If I were in the audience, how would I describe what's happening?
3. Am I hungry, angry, lonely or tired? *If so – breath relax and come back to explore later.*

## Patterns

1. Over time, what have I noticed about mine/others' actions, as they relate to this situation/topic?
2. How much of what I'm thinking/feeling/doing is about the past or the future? *Stay in the present moment as much as possible.*

## Patterns Continued

3. How do I typically think, act, and feel about this type of situation or topic?
4. What is it I want right now that I'm not getting?
5. What part of this can I control?
6. If I were being a friend to myself right now what would I say/think/do?
7. How is what I'm thinking/feeling/doing serving me right now/future?

## Mental Models

1. What assumptions am I making?
2. How do my beliefs impact what is happening?
3. How is what/how I am thinking/feeling/acting keeping the present structure in place?
4. Who do I want to be in this situation?
5. If I were living my beliefs what would be different?

