

Engaging the listener--Using Questioning Techniques

You have probably used all of these questioning techniques before in your everyday life, at work and at home. But by consciously applying the appropriate kind of questioning, you can gain the information, response or outcome that you want even more effectively.

Questions are a powerful way of:

Learning: Ask open and closed questions, and use probing questioning.

Relationship building: People generally respond positively if you ask about what they do or inquire about their opinions. If you do this in an affirmative way "Tell me what you like best about working here," you will help to build and maintain an open dialogue.

Managing and coaching: Here, rhetorical and leading questions are useful too. They can help get people to reflect and to commit to courses of action that you've suggested:

"Wouldn't it be great to gain some further qualifications?"

Avoiding misunderstandings: Use probing questions to seek clarification, particularly when the consequences are significant. And make sure you avoid jumping to conclusions.

De-fusing a heated situation: You can calm an angry customer or colleague by using funnel questions to get them to go into more detail about their grievance. This will not only distract them from their emotions, but will often help you to identify a small practical thing that you can do, which is often enough to make them feel that they have "won" something, and no longer need to be angry.

Persuading people: No one likes to be lectured, but asking a series of open questions will help others to embrace the reasons behind your point of view. "What do you think about bringing the sales force in for half a day to have their laptops upgraded?"

More Tips:

Make sure that you give the person you're questioning enough time to respond. This may need to include thinking time before they answer, so don't just interpret a pause as a "No comment" and plow on.

Skillful questioning needs to be matched by careful listening so that you understand what people really mean with their answers.

Your body language and tone of voice can also play a part in the answers you get when you ask questions.