



Questions Lead the Way

One of Stephen Covey's seven habits is - seek first to understand, then to be understood. So many of us are so busy trying to get our points across we miss the opportunity to learn, grow, avoid mistakes, and troubleshoot more effectively among other things.

The key to "seeking to understand" is through specific questioning and listening techniques. This newsletter, I'll focus on what I mean by specific questioning techniques. It is through questions that we allow someone else to clarify, elaborate, express, convey even express catharsis more completely.

Behavioral questioning or interviewing has been around for years. It is also appropriately applied to seeking clarification with staff or when doing an investigation. There are several keys to effective behavioral questioning.

Be specific. Ask for quantification of information. Avoid fuzzy terms such as "many", "improved", "most". Ask: "Specifically, how many is that?"

Use follow-up questions to clarify meanings. Seek answers and deeper meanings with follow-up questions. Ask "Can you elaborate on that?" Or, "Tell me more about how you came to that conclusion?"

Seek real life examples not hypothetical. Start questions with "tell me about a specific time that you." not "what would you do if."

Do not ask a compound question. These are confusing. Break it into several questions. Use a follow-up question instead. Ask: "Tell me about a time when you had to confront an upset customer." Pause for an answer, then, ask: "Knowing what you know now, is there anything you would do differently?"

Now a caveat: do not ask "why" questions. Most often, these are confrontational. (What did you think the last time someone asked you why you did something? You most likely had a defensive response, right?) Besides, most often, the motivation behind it is not as important. Everyone has a reason or rationalization for what they have done or how they decided to deal with something. (Besides, most everyone has a positive



Seeking to understand, learn, or avoid past mistakes are key elements in the mindset required to work with a business coach. If you feel that you could benefit from interviewing skill development, contact Mindset for Performance.

Just what is a personal coach and what can they do for you?

"Part therapist, part consultant, part motivational expert, part professional organizer, part friend, part nag - the personal coach seeks to do for your personal life what a personal trainer does for your body."

- Kim Palmer,
Minneapolis-St. Paul Star-Tribune

intent.) Deal with the facts. This behavior yielded this result, regardless of intent. So, instead, inquire as to what are other options to that behavior or decision or interaction?

A second caveat: Timing is essential. Know when someone will be receptive to deeper inquiries. Otherwise, you may get an unintended response.

These simple straight-forward approaches to questioning and clarifying communication should be used whether in an interview, investigation, or seeking information from applicants, staff or customers.

The next issue will continue on the clarifying questions theme. Asking questions is the easier skill to learn. It is more mechanical. Listening is much more difficult. It requires interpretation. We must fight past our filters or our biases to try to see, hear and feel their point of view with the least amount of distortion possible. More on listening in two issues.