

Learning How to Ask Powerful, Searching Questions

Introduction

The key to powerful thinking is powerful questioning.

When we ask the right questions, we succeed as a thinker, for questions are the force that powers our thinking. Thinking, at any point in time, can go off in thousands of different directions, some of which, by the way, are dead-ends.

Questions define our thinking. They lead us in one direction rather than another. They are, therefore, a crucial part of our thinking.

(Lori's note: You don't have to ask your mentee ALL these questions when talking about a topic...use some...these are good searching questions...)

THE QUESTIONS!

Is my thinking clear?

- *Can you tell me more?*
- *Would it help to draw out a picture or chart to show me?*
- *What example can you give me from your life?*

Is my thinking accurate?

- *How do you know this is true?*
- *How can we find out that it is true?*
- *Is there a way to test that it is true?*

Is my thinking as precise as it needs to be?

- *Could you be more specific?*
- *Can you give me more details?*

Is my thinking relevant to the issue?

- *How does your thought right now relate to the project?*
- *Do your thought right now relate to the project?*
- *Will the information we are finding help us with the project?*

Is my thinking dealing with the complexities of this issue or problem?

A statement can be clear, accurate, precise, and relevant, but superficial (that is, lack depth). For example, the statement "Just Say No" which is often used to discourage children and teens from using drugs, is clear, accurate, precise, and relevant. Nevertheless, it lacks depth because it treats an extremely complex issue, the pervasive problem of drug use among young people, superficially. It fails to deal with the complexities of the issue.

- *Why do you think this question is so hard?*
- *Are there some answers that we may know about the question?*
- *What is the hardest part of this...?*

Is my thinking too narrow or one-sided?

A line of reasoning may be clear, accurate, precise, relevant, and deep, but lack breadth (as in an argument from either the conservative or liberal standpoints which gets deeply into an issue, but only recognizes the insights of one side of the question.)

- *Are you looking at this project from just your eyes?*
- *Do you need to look at this project from another point of view? Through someone else's eyes?*
- *What other ways do you think you could look at this issue?*

Is my thinking logical?

When we think, we bring a variety of thoughts together into some order. When the combination of thoughts are mutually supporting and make sense in combination, the thinking is "logical." When the combination is not mutually supporting, is contradictory in some sense, or does not "make sense," the combination is "not logical."

- *Do all your thoughts make sense when you put them all together and when you write them down?*
- *Does your answer come from the logical steps that we just completed?*

Is my thinking focusing on what is most significant?

- *Is this the most important part you need to deal with at this time?*
- *Which of these facts are the most important for you to consider?*
- *Is this the most essential idea you should focus on?*

SOME UNIVERSAL INTELLECTUAL STANDARDS AND QUESTIONS THAT CAN BE USED TO APPLY THEM

Clarity

- *Could you elaborate further on that point?*
- *Could you express that point in another way?*
- *Could you give me an illustration?*
- *Could you give me an example?*

Accuracy

- *Is that really true?*
- *How could we check that?*
- *How could we find out if that is true?*

A statement can be clear but not accurate, as in "Most dogs are over 300 pounds in weight."

Precision

- *Could you give me more details?*
- *Could you be more specific?*

A statement can be both clear and accurate, but not precise, as in "Jack is overweight". (We don't know how overweight Jack is, one pound or 500 pounds.)

Relevance

- *How is that connected to the question?*
- *How does that bear on the issue?*

Breadth

- *Do we need to consider another point of view?*
- *Is there another way to look at this question?*
- *What would this look like from a conservative standpoint?*
- *What would this look like from the point of view of...?*

Logic

- *Does this really make sense?*
- *Does that follow from what you said?*
- *How does that follow?*
- *But before you implied this and now you are saying that, I don't see how both can be true.*