

MANAGEMENT ENGLISH 11 ASKING QUESTIONS & COACHING

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Asking Questions, Clarifying, and Summarizing

Open questions, closed questions, confirming queries, and summarizing.

The process of clarifying entails verifying the listener's comprehension of the speaker's message. There are two methods of summarizing: asking questions and summarizing the speaker's message. Additionally, it is effective to request clarification from the speaker when something is not understood. Additionally, clarifying indicates that the listener is engaged and appreciates the speaker's message.

Inquiries that seek clarification without a specific direction;

- "Could you clarify your intention when you made the following statement..."
- "I apologize; I am uncertain that I comprehended your statement."
- "I am uncertain as to the primary concern at hand."
- "Could you repeat that?"
- "It is a multifaceted matter; do you believe you could provide a more detailed explanation?"

Inquiries regarding clarification

Non-directive queries enable the speaker to elaborate on their previous statements in a more detailed or alternative manner. Questionnaires can be extremely beneficial when conducting business across cultures. Typically, the most effective inquiries are open-ended, as they allow the speaker to provide an explanation in their own unique manner. Closed questions are queries that can be answered with a yes or no response, and they generate brief, constrained responses.

- "I apologize; could you please reiterate your statement?"
- "I regret that, Bob, I was unable to comprehend that."
- "Would you be so kind as to repeat that for us, Jane?"
- "I believe we have misunderstood you. Could you rephrase that?"
- "Anne, I apologize for my misunderstanding; could you provide a detailed explanation?"

Open Questions

In order to encourage the speaker to elaborate, it is most effective to ask questions that begin with "how" or "why." However, queries that begin with "what," "where," or "when" can also be effective if they are phrased correctly.

Effective (as can be answered with a short answer)

“What is the specific reason for this?”

“When exactly will it happen?”

“Where is this?”

More effective

“I would like to understand the key points, what should I focus on understanding?”

“Please take me through when everything will take place?”

“I would like to know a lot more, where will this happen?”

Most effective

“I am interested the milestones, how does this happen, please talk me through this step by step highlighting the main issues?”

“Please explain, when will the key events take place precisely and what are the milestones?”

“It would help me if I could understand the details, where specifically will this happen?”

Examples of Open Questions

“How has this happened?”

“How did you close the key account deal?”

“How will you deliver these results Bob?”

“How do you think the situation will evolve Jane?”

“How will this impact on our existing customers?”

“How could we help you in this project Mary?”

“How do you feel about what has happened so far?”

“How did you launch the project?”

“Why did it happen?”

“Why did you do it that way?”

“Why has he?”

“Why is it that ?”

“Why are you?”

“Why do you think that happened?”

“Why do you think that?”

“Why do you think that happened?”

“Why do you think that?”

“Why are you?”

“Why are there several suppliers of this product?”

“Why should we do that?”

“Please tell me about this,”

“Mandy, please tell us more about this,”

“George, please tell me why,”

“Penny, please tell us how.....,”

“Mark, please tell me which.....,”

“Jenny, please tell me could you,”

“Tell me would,”

“Tell me should we understand that,”

Closed Questions

Closed questions are answered with ‘yes’, ‘no’ or short answers, they do not encourage the speaker to share more. They can be useful, after asking open questions, to create more clarification and as a way of creating agreement, plus they are also good at getting quick answers, for example at the start of a group discussion.

“Have you always done it this way?” – can be answered very briefly.

“Please could you clarify; how has it been done before?” & “So, this has always been done this way?” – more effective as it firstly encourages the sharing of info then specific clarification.

Other Types of Questions

Comparison and Contrast Questions

Comparison questions compare one thing to another, whereas contrast questions are used to identify differences.

- “What are the advantages and disadvantages of this process Graham?”
- “Penny, how does Process A differ from Process B?”
- “How does our Net Promoter Score differ to that of our competitors?”
- “How does the German market differ from the French market?”
- “What do these companies have in common and how are they different?”

Structuring Questions

Structuring questions can help with organizing ideas, arguments and proposals.

- “Please can you explain which stakeholders you are considering when you say this proposal will help our stakeholders?”
- “Can you clarify the key steps involved in completing this project please?”
- “What will be prioritized in the sales strategy?”
- “We now know the goal, what are the objectives we need to work on to achieve the goal?”

Problem-solving questions

These aim to find solutions to problems or challenges.

- “Given how quickly the budget is being spent, how will we finance further work?”
- “How will you prepare for the Town Hall meeting that looks like it will be a difficult meeting.”
- “How will you convince the team that extra work needs to be done?”
- “If sales do continue to increase rapidly what additional resources will the team need?”

Probing questions

Probing questions are commonly part of a group of questions that aim to increase the amount of information known and/or see the bigger picture more clearly. Very often they can be used to avoid confusion or misunderstanding plus encourage others to share more.

- “Why do you think the Net Promoter Score has dropped?”
- “What resistance from the shareholders should we anticipate?”
- “Why are the team failing to deliver on the results they committed to?”
- “Which suppliers are performing, and which are letting us down?”

Leading questions

These questions are specifically made to encourage the person asked to move towards a particular destination, decision or agreement. These questions must be used very carefully as they can backfire when reviewed by others after the discussion, leading others can on a good day be seen as helpful and on a bad day as unreasonable or controlling behaviour, e.g.

Did you have any problems with that team member during the project? – Leading
How did the team members perform during the project? – More open and not judgmental or leading.

Most people prefer or feel more comfortable saying yes when asked a question, when asking leading questions sometimes ‘isn’t it is added to lead to a ‘yes’. This can be effective when closing a sales pitch or confirming agreement, but leading questions must be used very carefully.

- “Wouldn’t it be safer to start the project in March when all the team members have joined?”
- “Don’t you think we should select supplier A rather than supplier B?”
- “Jenny is a much better contributor to the team than Bill, isn’t she?”
- “Isn’t it a good time to start brainstorming new sales strategies?”

Loaded questions

Loaded questions necessitate even greater caution than leading inquiries, as they have the potential to incite offense or be perceived as inappropriate, unfair, manipulative, or aggressive. These questions initially appear to be uncomplicated closed-ended questions, but they do contain a twist (or punch). They can be perceived as a ruse; in cultures where challenging and difficult questions are prevalent, they are more acceptable.

However, in cultures where even standard questions are deemed inappropriate due to business and societal cultural dynamics, they can be perceived as a deception. In numerous cultures, individuals are not accustomed to responding to challenging inquiries in their native language. Consequently, responding in a foreign language can be particularly difficult and perceived as unjust, e.g.;

“Has your factory always had a problem delivering on time?” – Loaded question, it is loaded because an assumption that the factory has always had a problem with being on time. The person asked the question is pushed to say ‘yes’ or ‘no’ but this accepts there is a problem delivering on time. Here someone used to be asked similar questions would be ready to

respond in a manner which rejects the assumption, “Actually we have a good track record of delivering on time and on this occasion, there are a number of factors behind the late delivery that we need to discuss which were beyond our control.”

- “Why does your team consistently fail to reply to customer emails on time?”
- “Do you think you can let us know when you will take accountability for your team’s performance?”
- “Isn’t it clear that Bill is more effective than Brian at business development?”
- “How will the manager explain taking such an irresponsible decision?”

Funnel questions

Funnel questions are grouped, starting broadly then start to narrow to a specific point. They can be used to get people speaking generally and become more comfortable before moving to details. It is important to allow the responder to answer fully, and they should not feel that the approach is ‘loaded’ or ‘targeted’.

- “What type of new products have you been considering purchasing?”
“What factors are most important to you in choice of both supplier and products?”
“Are you considering new potential suppliers?”
“Would it be possible to present our range to you?”
- “How has the team performed in the last year?”
“What have been the greatest achievements?”
“What have the low points of the year been?”
“Which of the team have not performed as effectively as the others?”

Fact Questions

Fact questions are focused on identifying a specific fact, they can be used to clarify background, specific data, steps in processes or key elements involved in a situation.

- “Please confirm the specific dates you called the customer about the invoice”
- “How many people attended the exhibition and how many brochures did you hand out?”
- “Which stakeholders will be informed once the MVP is ready?”
- “What will happen once the order is received?”
- “Who was responsible for the engineering team when the issue occurred?”

Application questions

These questions aim to identify how something can be applied to a real-life situation, creating a connection between practice and theory.

- “How would you use new AI technology to improve project management?”
- “Please show us how they will present the new prototype.”
- “How will the team start working with the new data?”
- “At what point should we start to apply performance management policies?”

Divergent questions

These questions create discussion on different, potentially conflicting, perspectives and possibilities. These questions can help challenge preconceptions and specific assumptions, developing curiosity and creativity.

- “What new ways of marketing have we not tried?”
- “If we had a free hand to act without worrying about the stakeholders, what would we do?”
- “If the budget was 25% higher, what else would we do?”
- “What are our options regarding bringing in new suppliers? And what else?”

Evaluation questions

These questions try to identify the specific impact of a particular situation, decision or act, they can be used to make improvements and also reflect on previous events that have occurred.

- “What are the blockers we must overcome to get this product working better?”
- “Which team members failed to commit to the new team charter?”
- “How many sign-ups did the new application secure in the first week?”
- “Which products sold so well that we achieved plan after a bad start to the week?”

Inference questions

When trying to make forecasts or predictions plus develop ideas these questions are useful. Inference questions prompt responders to use information they already have, to create judgements, ideas and conclusions.

- “From the incredible reaction the MVP received, what can we assume the leadership will be pushing us for?”
- “Given the assumptions the team explained in the meeting, what will the launch date be?”
- “Considering the dramatic drop in sales, when will discussions start on cost cutting?”
- “Reviewing the survey data some clear trends were identified, what action are the product team considering?”

Affective questions

These explore feelings and emotions, help with understanding situations, relationships and creating empathy.

- “When have the team let you down?”
- “How did the engineer react and feel after their performance review?”
- “How do you try to stop pressure becoming stress?”
- “What impact on you did the customer’s feedback have?”

The Art of Summarising

Interpreting the listener's perspective is not permissible when the conversation's essential components are summarized, in addition to the speaker's frame of reference. The objective is to elucidate comprehension rather than to provide an explanation or interpretation.

Typically, summarizing occurs at the conclusion of a conversation; however, it can be employed to effectively elucidate understanding step by step in more complex, lengthy conversations. Furthermore, summarizing can be an effective strategy for increasing awareness, comprehension, and clarity at the outset of certain conversations and discussions. It is imperative to be as succinct and honest as feasible.

At the beginning

“After 3 meetings we are now at a point of deciding on which suppliers we will work with and we need to place orders by next Wednesday.”

During the conversation

“Ok, we have rejected 3 possible suppliers, we now must select 3 from the remaining 5 by the end of the meeting.”

At the end of the conversation

“We have agreed on which 3 suppliers we will work with, orders need to be placed by next Wednesday and we have work to do.”

Use of Names

By using the speaker’s name a question can be made to feel more genuine, personal and helps clarify who is being asked. The appropriate form of name used depends on the level of formality in the meeting and whether the speaker has already said that their first / given name can be used.

Polite / formal

“Mrs. Gill, please can you explain the constraints we must work within again?”

Familiar / informal

“Jean, please can you explain the constraints we must work within again?”

How to Soften a Question

In business and social conversation how questions are asked can be extremely important. Many cultures are very direct in how questions are asked (see Working Internationally booklet) and others are very indirect, in order to build trust and get effective answers this has to be considered. In addition, in all cultures, there are times when asking questions is a sensitive task, for example when working with a new customer, an authority or a senior stakeholder.

Questions can be softened by placing a few words before it that show respect, genuine interest or courtesy as follows.

“(Name) please share your opinion / view / observations / insights / beliefs”

“Can we go into more depth on this Malcom?”

“It would really help us if you could explain more about this Jane.”

“Please can you talk me through this, I am concerned I have not understood it?”

“I would like to know more / get your opinion on”

“I was wondering if you could share the insights you explained on the project again please?”

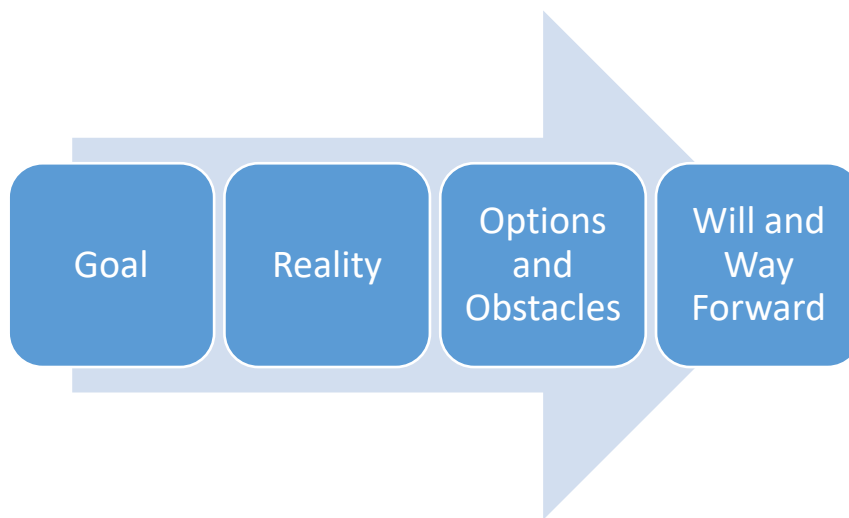
“Would it be ok if I ask for”

“Do you think I might be able to have another explanation of this issue please George?”

“I am sorry I might I do not understand this please tell me about again.”

Coaching

The most commonly used coaching model by managers is the GROW, shown below. This model has four stages: creating objectives (Goal), exploring the existing circumstances (Reality), assessing potential alternatives (Options), and agreeing as action plan (Will).



The following questions are an example of questions that can be used in the GROW model.

“What would need to happen for you to walk away feeling that our time was well spent?” (Goal)

“What does success look like for you at the end of today’s session?” (Goal)

“What has contributed most to your success so far?” (Reality)

“What hasn’t been working well for you so far and why?” (Reality)

“Why must you do differently this time to completely overcome your major roadblocks?” (Options)

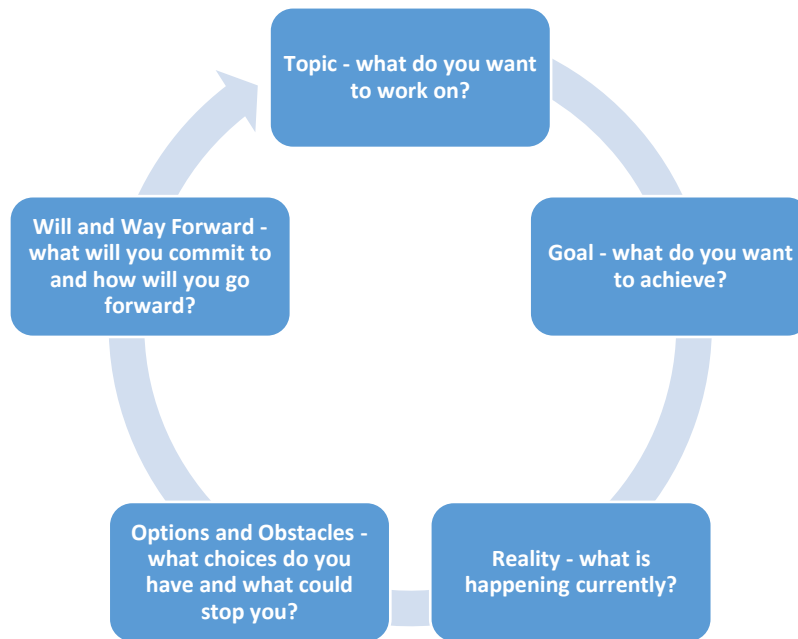
“If you could start all over again how would you have done differently?” (Options)

“What are the key success criteria that you must consider in assessing your various alternatives?” (Options)

“What is one thing that you could do over the next month that will make a huge difference to accelerating your success?” (Will)

“What support do you need from me to really help you achieve success?” (Will)

“How do you objectively measure success at the end?” (Will)



Goal

GROW Coaching starts with exploring and agreeing a goal. The goal might be a development goal, a decision goal, a decision to make, or a problem to solve in the coaching session. Managers should help staff follow a S.M.A.R.T. goal:

- Specific
- Measurable
- Attainable
- Realistic and relevant
- Timely

These questions can help people gain clarity about their goals:

“(Name), what would you like to achieve from this session?”

“What goal do you want to work on?”

“(Name) what do you really want?”

“What do you want to accomplish today?”

“What outcome are you looking for?”

“(Name), what are you trying to achieve?”

“Why do you want to achieve goal?”

“Please describe the type of outcome you would like to achieve?”

“How and what will you change?”

“How will you benefit when you achieve this goal?”

“Who will you become when you achieve this goal?”

“What is the goal behind the goal?”

Current Reality

During this stage managers need to take their time and ensure they really help the staff members become aware of their reality and reflect on their revelations. Managers should try to use active listening skills, push the staff member to consider alternatives, if required offer alternatives for consideration and take time.

These questions can help identify current reality:

- “What have you done so far towards achieving this goal?”
- “What is currently going well? What impact does this have?”
- “What is holding you back?”
- “Where are you now in achieving your goal?”
- “On a scale of 1 to 10, where are you now?”
- “Why do you think you have not achieved this goal already?”
- “What do you think is actually going on?”
- “What could you do better?”
- “Who has achieved this goal? What advice do you think they would give you?”
- “Where and who could you get some help from?”
- “How could you improve your performance?”
- “What feedback would you give yourself?”
- “On a scale of one to 10, how severe/serious/urgent is the situation?”

Options

The manager can move the session on to discuss options once there is a clear understanding of the situation.

These questions can help identify options:

- “How many options do you have? What are they?”
- “What could you do first?” then “What else could you do?”
- “Who could help?”
- “If you do nothing, what happens?”
- “What has worked before? Would more of that help?”
- “If someone else was in this position, how would you advise them to make progress?”
- “What are the pros and cons of each possible option?”
- “Which option are you ready to start?”
- “What are you prepared to do differently?”
- “If you could do anything you wanted, what would you do?”
- “And what else could you do?”

Will (Or Way Forward)

The manager helps the staff member identify their commitment and helps them both make and commit to action steps.

These questions can help identify will and the way forward:

“What next?”

“What can you commit to?”

“How will you do this?”

“What will you do first?”

“How will you track progress?”

“How will you know when you have achieved it?”

“What else will you do?”

“How confident are you that you will be successful?”

“What could make you more confident?”

“What risks and obstacles could you face? How will you manage them?”

“What resources do you need?”

“What support do you need? How will you get it?”

“What does success look like?”

“What will happen if you do not achieve this?”

“How motivated are you?”

“How committed are you?”

“How will you make yourself accountable?”

Additional Questions for Managers Experienced in Coaching

Getting started

“*What’s on your mind?*” This lets the staff member know they are determining the subject and its their session, not the manager’s. If they need help getting started, “Would you like to talk about people, projects, performance or something else?”

The “Foundation” Question

Ask, “*What do you want?*” This question is designed to lead you directly to the main challenge. It has a companion question as well, which is “*What do you really want?*” Managers need to make sure the goal is stated in a positive form and within the staff member’s control.

The “Focus” Question

Ask, “Why is this important to you?” and “What’s the real challenge here for you?” This question helps you to uncover a deeper issue.

Exploration

“What is urgent and what is important?”

“When you look at this situation as a fly on the wall, what do you see?”

“How have you achieved similar successes?”

“What will you do differently?”

“How would a mentor or someone you admire suggest you make progress?”

“Which of your personal values are important to consider in achieving this?”

“What impact will success have on other people around you?”

“What are we not talking about that we should be talking about?”

As If questions

Time shift - “What are the benefits you see if you are successful?” and “What would happen if you were successful earlier than planned?”

Point of view shift - “What opinions would other people have on this?”

System shift - “If you look from the overall company’s perspective what do you see?” and “What does the team need to consider and plan in achieving this goal?”

Information shift - “If you had all the resources you needed, what would your next step be?”

The “Strategic” Question

Ask, “*If you’re saying yes to this, what are you saying no to?*”

Ask, “*And what else?*”

“If you found a way of committing 50% more time to this goal, what would the outcome be?”

The “Learning” Question

Finally ask, “*What was most useful for you?*”

“Who would you like to become if you manage these development issues in the next year?”

“Which 3 words will describe you when you are successful?”

“What powerful thought might we finish with today?”