

# THE EXCHANGE

This issue's featured subject is "The Power of Questions."

## QUESTIONS THAT

There is probably no other time when questions are as powerful as when you are selling an idea, service, or product. It is vital to get information before you give it. By asking before telling, it allows you to:

- Better understand the situation, need, or customer.
- Focus on the results that the other person is expecting.
- Stand apart from others who are competing with you.
- Position yourself with the decision maker.
- Determine when you don't have a fit between their concept and your idea, service, or product.

There are basically four types of questions to ask in the selling situation and they usually follow in this order:

- 1. Confirming Questions** check the validity of what you think you know regarding results needed and to make sure that your data is accurate. An example is, "Do you still use 10,000 pounds a week?" Key words to use include: still; remain; continue; currently.
- 2. Informative Questions** update your information and get new results information. An example is, "How do you see this effecting next quarter?" Key words to use include: how; what; explain; tell; show.
- 3. Feeling Questions** discover attitudes and values, previously unidentified issues, and how this person wins or loses. An example is, "How do you feel about....?" Key words to use include: how; what; think; feel; opinion; reaction.
- 4. Committing Questions** move you to a close and determine where you stand in the decision. An example is, "Are you willing to recommend this purchase?" Key words to use include: agree; intend; commit; recommend; decide; plan.

Of course, there is one person you can ask many questions before you approach the decision maker. That person is you! Here are some key questions to ask yourself in the following areas:



### Buying Influences

- Who has final approval?
- Who will be judging my proposal?
- Who might my coach be?

### Buyer Needs

- What are the expected results?
- What is this person's perceived degree of risk?

### Buyer Procedures

- What resources need to be allocated?
- What is the urgency?
- What are the political factors?

### New Players

- What are the recent changes in buying influences?
- Who are the new people involved?
- What reorganization issues might there be?

### Competition

- Who are my competitors?
- What are their strengths and weaknesses?

### Resistance

- How clearly does the decision maker understand my idea/service/product?
- How realistic is it for me to turn this around?
- What remains uncovered?
- What is my credibility with the decision maker?
- What is the real fit?

There is indeed power in questions! Sell the questions so they don't question the sale.



## JULY 2002

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### LOOKING AHEAD:

- ◆ The August issue of The Exchange will focus on Good Stress.

### LOOKING BACK:

- ◆ For previous editions of The Exchange, go to our [back issues](#).
- ◆ Re-read the [08/2001](#) edition: **Improving Written Communication.**



**You know children are growing up when they start asking questions that have answers.**

John J. Plomp

#### Quick Tips:

- **Pause after a question, before you answer it. Your answer will carry more weight.**
- **Ask the other person to summarize in his/her own words understandings that have been reached.**



**To learn more about it, click here!**

## "SET UP" YOUR COMMUNICATION

By Ben Cairns, M.A.



"No Watson, you idiot, someone has stolen our tent!" That's the punch line to the joke that British researchers recently found to be the funniest joke in the English language. The setup for the joke goes

something like this: "Sherlock Holmes and his assistant Dr. Watson were camping under clear weather. When they woke up in the middle of the night, Watson remarked, 'That's unusual, I don't remember the stars being so bright.' Sherlock Holmes asked, 'And what can you deduce from that, Dr. Watson?' To which Watson replied, 'That it's not raining?'"

Natural rhythms and patterns give a sense of predictability to life. Whenever expected rhythms or patterns are broken or deviated from, we are confused or frustrated. Nonsensical patterns are like jokes told by someone who gives the punch line first and then tells you why it is funny. I hope not to have completely ruined it for you, but go back and read the setup to the Sherlock Holmes joke and then the punch line. It should be much funnier than it was the first time you read it.

Humor and questions parallel in an important way. For maximum effect, the setup comes first. For a joke, everything that comes before the punch line is the setup. The better the setup, the more effective the punch line can be. Once the punch line is delivered, the joke is done. For questions, information relating to the question is most effective when it precedes the question. And, like the punch line in a joke, a short question is more effective than one that is long and drawn out.

How often do you ask a question and then have to add information or explanation as to what you meant? And how do you feel when someone else does it to you? If you're like most people, your mind automatically begins working on an answer when you hear a question. Sometimes, people have a hard time listening because they begin formulating a response before the question is complete. This is especially true for long questions. So, when someone asks a question and keeps talking, it can be very frustrating for the

listener.

Effective humorists and communicators share something in common. They are very good with the setup, and they deliver easy-to-understand punch lines and questions. Think before you speak to reap the rewards of better answers and more satisfying communication. Set yourself up to be a better communicator by working on your setup!

## WHAT OUR CLIENTS ARE SAYING

Anonymous quotes from TLC Seminar Participants:

[What I like most about the class is]...

"Atmosphere, Material, Instructor."

"Steady paced discussion with meaningful exercises."

"Extremely informative, a wealth of useful knowledge and techniques."

### A Few of Life's Unanswered Questions

- Why does sun lighten our hair, but darken our skin?
- Why doesn't glue stick to the inside of the bottle?
- Why don't you ever see the headline, "Psychic Wins Lottery"?
- Why is "abbreviated" such a long word?
- Why is it called lipstick when it comes off?
- Why is it that doctors call what they do "practice"?
- Why is a person who invests your money called a broker?
- Why is the third hand on the watch called the second hand?

## THE THIRD DEGREE



If you watch television shows with court scenes or police officers, then you are probably familiar with what it means to give someone the "third degree."

As the idiom is used today, it means to intensively drill someone with questions. For example, police might give the third degree to suspects. Parents might give the third degree to their children. Or managers might give the third degree to their employees.

This expression is used commonly. So where did it originate? We get the "third degree" from the Freemasons. Although much of what happens within the organization is concealed, it is said that the highest degree a member can achieve as a Mason is the third degree.

Those who are familiar with this esoteric organization know that acquiring this level of degree is a prerequisite to achieving Master Mason status. To achieve this, an individual must persevere through rigorous testing and grueling questions that measure intelligence and skill. Considering the demanding nature of this process, we currently associate this saying with any situation where excessive questioning is used.

As a TLC rule of communication, remember to ask only one question at a time. Await an answer, then, if necessary, ask another question. Also, pause before asking another question. This can make you sound less controlling and more conversational. Unless an individual is striving to become a Master Mason, they might find it difficult to answer a series of extremely difficult questions. Avoid giving the third degree by applying some TLC!

**The way a question is put can often predetermine an answer.**

Henry A. Kissinger

## "SO, IS IT NOT TRUE?"

By Vincent Ivan Phipps,

Has anyone ever asked you a negative, close-ended question like "So, is it not true?" If they have, either your answer to them was confused or you had to modify it by saying more than just yes or no. Let's analyze this tricky question.



Let's say something is accurate and you are asked, "So, is it not true?" If you say yes, what are you really saying? "Yes, it is not true," or "No, this is true"? What if you just said yes or no? Confusing, right?

When you are under pressure, have time constraints, or are very anxious, it is frustrating and even more difficult to answer negative, closed questions. During my college career, I competed in several forensic and debate competitions. Although I had different debate partners, over the span of four years, I never lost a debate. One of the key factors of this success was my mastery of using these sneaky, closed, negative questions. I would also coach my debate partners on how to use them.

During cross-examinations, especially when someone was in front of a jury, I would ask something like this, "So, according to your testimony, is it not true that you were there that night?" O.K., here comes the tricky part. Since this question is closed, forcing them to say yes or no, and negatively worded, I could spin their answer any way I wanted. Immediately after their answer, regardless of what they said, I would burst out loudly to the jury, "SEE HE ADMITS IT!" Adding a dash of elaborate theatrics (which I enjoyed doing), I would ask more of these negative questions just to make them look more confused and less credible to the judge and the jury. Was this a sneaky trick? You bet it was!

The point is there are some questions that cause people difficulty and confusion when answering. I have learned a lot since those college days when I was a debater. As a Senior Communication Coach for TLC, I now teach individuals to ask open-ended, positive questions. For example, instead of asking, "Do you not understand?" I ask, "What do you need to know?"

If there are ways to make communication harder, then there are also ways to make communication easier. Take the higher road and lead by example. Besides, you are more likely to get better information by asking more open-ended, positive questions. Would you **not** agree? (Sorry, old habits die hard!)



**The art and science of asking questions is the source of all knowledge.**

Adolf Berle

**Remember to...**

- Ask questions that start with "how" or "what" to get people started talking.
- Make sure the person has answered your question before you supply your answer.

**The question of a wise man is half the answer.**

Solomon Ibn Gabirol



Don't spend your precious time asking "Why isn't the world a better place?" It will only be time wasted. The question to ask is "How can I make it better?" To that there is an answer.

Leo F. Buscaglia

People are always asking couples whose marriages have endured at least a quarter of a century for their secret of success. Actually, it is no secret at all. I am a forgiving woman. Long ago, I forgave my husband for not being Paul Newman.

Erma Bombeck



**TLC remembers George Smith, former client, dear friend, and the subject of Beverly's next book. George left this world on Saturday, June 29, 2002 but not before making it a better place for all the lives he touched. We rejoice in remembering his example of leadership and mentoring. Thank you, George, for showing us how to live and die with courage.**

## ASK THE EXPERTS



### Dear TLC,

I currently am being groomed for a promotion in Human Resources. My weakness is also one of the major responsibilities of the job. It is interviewing prospective employees. It has always been hard for me to get information out of people. During interviews, I get 30 minutes of "Yes, No, No, Yes, Yes,..." Unless I learn to interview better, I feel I could lose this opportunity. Help me ask better questions. Signed, Baffled

### Dear Baffled,

Remember the saying, "There is no such thing as a bad question"? Try watching local on-the-scene television reporters or talk shows and you might disagree. The next time you interview someone, apply these three tips:

1. Have your questions pre-written: this can help you compare applicant responses.
2. Use questions beginning with, "what" or "how": this will increase the flow of information and reduce the one-word answers.
3. Keep questions short and simple.

Practice using these tips with a friend or co-worker. Record yourself. Observe your timing, body language, voice, and clarity of questions. People are already nervous being interviewed. If you are apprehensive, it can make the interview even harder on them. To make it easier, make your questions easier to ask and then they will be easier to answer. This will lead to more and better information.

Remember, a good question is like a key to a treasure chest. It can unlock priceless wonders! Ask away!

## USE THE BEST TOOL FOR THE JOB!

The feedback that we get is consistent. People tell us that after they take TLC communication training, they notice how people in the media often ask multiple, negative, leading, & "run-on" questions. In fact, the feedback (and our own experience) confirms that more than just the media "experts" use questions like blunt instruments. People simply hack away with whatever questions come immediately to mind when they don't know better.

I once read that it takes three days to cut a tree down with a hammer. I wonder who figured that out! Anyhow, think about this – you can cut the same tree down in thirty minutes with an ax. Whether you are a carpenter or a media expert, you need an assortment of tools to get the job done. Picking the right one can get the job done more efficiently.

What communication tools do you have at your disposal? Among the many TLC tools you have been given, you know that StartProbes® are open, and StopProbes® are specific. Make broad strokes with StartProbes® and nail down the specifics with StopProbes®! The simpler and better crafted your questions, the faster you'll achieve your objective. Instead of using whichever tool comes first to hand, take enough time to look into your communication toolbox.

When you're building a house, set your goals and make your plans. Pick the ax to get the big work done first. Then put it all together with a hammer and nails. The same is true for your personal and professional goals. Take enough time to consider which communication tools will do the best job. Keep them sharp and handy. When the time comes, remember to use the best tool for the job!!



## CEO CORNER: THE QUESTIONS YOU DIDN'T ASK

By Beverly Inman-Ebel

There is an old saying that there is no such thing as a dumb question. I disagree. I have asked plenty of dumb questions. Like the time I was in college and we had a new professor from Yugoslavia, who was recently named "Physicist of the Year" in Europe. The course was entitled, "Physics of Sound."

I admit that the course and the professor were a little intimidating. He had a very strong accent that made matters plummet from bad to intolerable. Since he did not teach from the text, listening to him became of prime importance. He seemed delighted when I raised my hand. He had not received any questions from these American scholars. I still remember my question verbatim: "What is a vire?" He frantically searched the room. I thought perhaps vires were scampering about on the floor. Then with great enthusiasm, he grabbed an extension cord and said, "Vire! Vire!" The entire class laughed, as did I, if only to follow my parents' advice to laugh with people so they can't laugh at you. Funny, that is the only question and answer that I remember from that brilliant man who turned "w's" into "v's."

While stupid questions are unfortunately memorable, I also remember the questions I did not ask. My father asked me to make a tape of original stories for his ill brother and I did not ask how urgent his request was. My Uncle Gus died the day before the tape arrived. After delivering a successful training series on communication to a client, I did not ask what other needs they had. They purchased training from a competitor because they did not know TLC provided that service.

The art of asking questions can be learned

from children. Often we have heard the expression, "out of the mouths of babes." My favorite age for children is 3 years. At that stage, they are still uninhibited and ask numerous questions, yet their responses have evolved beyond "no!" If you want to improve your ability to ask questions, observe a child. They are passionate in their pursuit to obtain understanding. Shame on us if we tire of their questions.

My goal is to ask intelligent, open, short, positive questions. I have decided that I would rather ask a dumb question than to remain silent. The consequences are more bearable. I challenge you today to wonder. Become a child for a moment and ponder the "what if's" and "how come's." View your world and ask questions. Seek and ye shall find. Ask and it shall be revealed to you. Wonder. Ask. Live your dreams!



### FEATURED SERVICE: Strategic Negotiations

Questions are a valuable tool of being an effective negotiator. Since you negotiate every day, learn to have successful strategic negotiations. Our course, Strategic Negotiations, is offered as a one-day or part-day training depending on the amount of practice you want your participants to receive. Our clients report they have immediately applied this information and have saved millions of dollars!



**I once overheard a small, clever boy ask his mother, "Do you think they call this place Wal-Mart because it has so many walls?"**

**I got up early one morning and rushed right into the day.**

**I had so much to accomplish that I didn't have time to pray.**

**Problems tumbled about me; and heavier came each task.**

**"Why doesn't God help me?" I wondered.**

**He answered, "You didn't ask."**

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