

## ASKING POWERFUL QUESTIONS

### INTRODUCTION

Feelings are based upon experiences. There is no more effective a way to shut down a dialogue than by suggesting that one's feelings and experiences are invalid.

It is important that we can engage with people's ideas rather than our assumptions about their ideas. Key to this are the questions that we ask. Questions can open the door to dialogue and discovery. They can lead to movement on tough problems; they can generate insights and inspire change.

### WHEN AND HOW TO USE THE TOOL

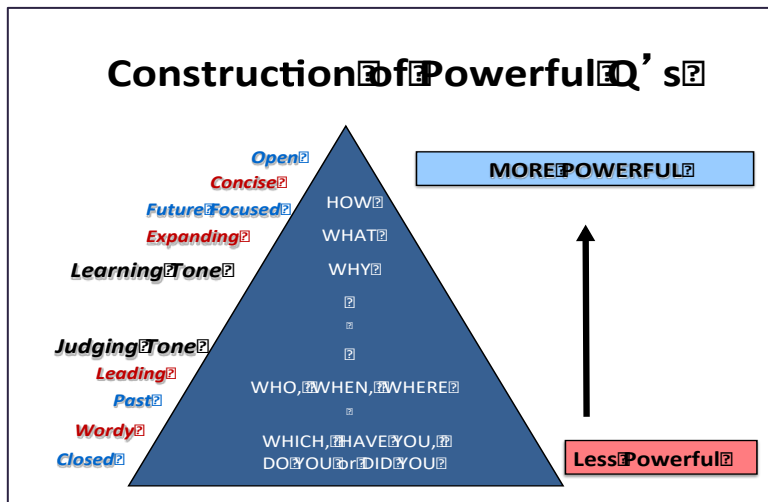
If questions can be so powerful, why do we often ask questions that lead to what we already know? Sometimes, the underlying attitude and tone of the questioner is judgemental rather than curious.

The **least powerful questions** are those that are closed-ended, asking *have you?* or *when will you?* These questions elicit specific information, or short answers such as *yes* and *no*. For the most part, these questions tend to be focused on information the questioner wants.

- The most compelling questions are those that **engage people's values, hopes and aspirations**. Powerful questions shift people's **attention from fixing a problem** to future possibilities.
- Powerful questions also reach into the **deeper meaning** of what might be going on or what could be. They usually **stay with** participants long after they've been asked.
- A powerful question also has the capacity to **"travel well"**—to spread beyond the place where it began.

In summary, there are no set rules for how to go about asking powerful questions, but you can consider the following

1. Your own attitude and tone as people do not appreciate feeling judged or interrogated.
2. Ask open-ended questions that generate curiosity .
3. Ask questions that surface underlying assumptions e.g. *What has led you to this conclusion?*
4. Ask questions that get at all sides of the situation, challenge, problem for e.g. *How might others see this? What other interpretations could you have about this situation?*
5. Ask follow up questions. This is not about making comments after each response; it is about deepening the response by asking questions such as: *Can you tell me more about this? What would that accomplish? How do you see yourself achieving that? What else?*
6. Make friends with silence. Give others the chance to consider your questions, to mull over what the question might mean to them.
7. Ask about questions that draw out what happened, instead of what the person speculates might have happened. *How do you know this happened? What did you see or what do you know from what others have told you?*
8. Ask questions that invite creativity, new possibilities, that generate energy and forward movement. Questions that leave the listener feeling energized and excited.
9. Come from a stance of curiosity, enabling others to gain their own insights. You can ask questions such as: *What did you learn from that?* and *What does this mean to you?*



Reference <https://emergentlearning.org/asking-powerful-questions/>