



Encourage dialogue by asking questions

The challenge

Instilling or reinforcing collaboration and trust requires dialogue. However, discussion doesn't always go as hoped. Indeed, depending on the personality of those involved—more or less extroverted—and depending on the situation, the conversation may flow smoothly and naturally, or conversely be awkward and difficult. Asking questions is a key tool in this regard to open the way for constructive dialogue and get people engaged in thinking. Well-formulated questions draw people into the discussion and give them the desire to contribute. This requires, however, being careful about the manner in which questions are posed, as well as the type of questions asked and the dynamics of the discussion. A veritable art form to be mastered!

Five dimensions requiring attention

The following tips will help you ask questions that make other people want to contribute.

How to ask questions

Treat people with consideration

Your questions must not be perceived as aggressive:

- **Be careful to show that you are open to dialogue.** Pay close attention to the tone and speed of your speech, which must encourage people by giving them space and not putting them under pressure.
- **Do not pile on questions.** Use the other person's words or add your own remarks to let the other person breathe.
- **Be careful about the order of your questions:** don't pose sensitive problems from the start, or you may turn people away from the conversation.

The type of questions

Ask open questions

Ask questions that give the floor to others:

- **Begin the conversation with open questions**, as closed questions freeze the debate by validating your own ideas. E.g.: "In your view, what is not working in this department?" rather than "Isn't this department lacking in collaborative spirit?"
- **Reserve closed questions for the end of the discussion**, to validate a decision or clarify the situation. E.g.: "Do you agree?"

Probe feelings

Ask less factual questions to understand peoples' mindset and encourage them to speak their mind:

- Ask people about their **emotional state and values**, their hopes and dreams, beyond the cold, hard facts. E.g.: "How do you feel about this situation?", "What outcome are you hoping for?" rather than "What are the consequences of this situation?", "What do you predict?"

The dynamics of the discussion

Be attentive

To feel at ease, people must feel heard!

- Take time to **listen**: don't center the debate on your own ideas, but let people express themselves, while accepting to be influenced by their answers.
- **Give people time to answer**: Leave room for lulls in the conversation, without rushing people. Some answers take time!
- **Repeat or reformulate** what people say to make them feel listened to and heard.

Instill reciprocity

The discussion must be balanced to form a cooperative interaction:

- **Explicitly ask people to ask questions** to get them more actively involved in the discussion.
- **Take the initiative to share information** with them.