**Questions and Questioning Techniques**

Knowing how to ask the right questions and provide good answers is the foundation of all learning. Given the limited amount of time adults will spend in your workshops, you cannot possibly teach them everything about the subjects discussed. However, as a workshop presenter, you can and should give participants the tools they will need to become valuable members of decision-making groups.

One of the ways to do this is to teach them questioning skills. Presenters model these skills in workshops with the questions they ask. Moreover, asking good questions will help generate interesting discussions.

Below you will find a partial list of some useful questions for generating discussions, as well as some that should be avoided.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Type**  Descriptive  Analysis  Evaluation  Compare/Contrast  Causal relationships | **Example**  Questions beginning with such words or expression such as “tell,” “discuss,” “describe,” “illustrate,” “show.” For example, *Discuss some of the processes groups use to guide their work.*  Questions beginning with such words or expressions as “how would you explain the fact that” “prove,” “what is the importance of,” “how do you account for, “ “what is the meaning of.” For example, *What is the importance of setting ground rules before beginning a meeting?*  Questions beginning with such words or expressions as “evaluate the statement that,” “what is meant by,” explain how.” For example, *Explain the statement: Data can help groups make decisions but it must be valid and reliable.*  Questions beginning with such words or expressions as “compare,” “contrast,” “What is the difference,” “What is the similarity.” For example, *Compare the different types of decision making groups.*  Questions beginning with such words or expressions as, “what are the causes of,” “what connection is there,” “what are the results of.”  *For example, What connection is there between the roles that groups need members to fill in order for the group to be effective?* | **Result**  These questions encourage participants to establish their own narrative and prioritize information.  These questions provide basic facts and call for sustained answers involving critical thinking.  These questions are structured like analysis questions but are based on quotations or statements.  These questions call attention to common elements or major differences between ideas or arguments.  These questions may be used to show causal relationships or to determine whether such relationships exist. |

Although there is, strictly speaking, no such thing as a “bad” question, and the kinds of questions you ask will depend on several variables, you should try in general to avoid the following lines of questioning since they usually fail to generate good discussions.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Type**  Yes/No  Factual  Multiple  Elliptical  Whiplash  Leading  Guessing | **Example**  *Is data important?*  *How many types of decision making groups are there?*  *What tools do groups use and what is the difference between formal and informal meeting structures?*  *The Guidebook, what a great resource, hey?*  *A meeting facilitator has to be good at what*?  *Don’t you think that good communication is part of an effective group*?  *Why do you think J. L. Epstein described 6 kinds of parent involvement ?* | **Result**  Does not produce discussion, and encourages guessing.  Encourages short responses and involves no critical thinking.  Confusing, since participants will not know which question the presenter wants answered.  Confusing and unclear. Participants will have no idea what the presenter is getting at.  Participants are prepared to receive information when they are suddenly asked to answer a question.  Conveys the expected answer and prevents participants from reaching their own conclusions.  Answer is only a matter of guesswork. |

**Questions to Use During the Three Phases of the Learning Cycle**

**The Reflection Stage:**

After your participants have completed an “experience” (watching a video, listening to a lecture, seeing a demonstration, completing an exercise) the questions should be directed towards generating data and /or causing learners to reflect on the experience.

* What did you observe?
* What happened? What went on?
* How did you feel about that?
* Who else had a similar experience?
* Who will volunteer to share?
* Who reacted differently?
* Were there any surprises?
* How many felt the same way?
* What were you aware of?

**The Generalization Stage:**

In this phase learners have reflected and generated data. Questions are directed toward making sense of the data for the individual and the group.

* How do you account for that?
* What does that mean to you?
* How is that significant?
* What struck you about that?
* How do those things fit together?
* How might it have been different or better?
* What did you learn or re-learn?
* What conclusions can we draw from that?
* Can you connect that to something else?

**The Application Phase:**

In this phase, participants are concerned with using what they have learned. Questions are directed towards applying the general knowledge they have gained to their personal and/or professional lives.

* How could you apply that?
* What would you like to do with that?
* How could you make it better?
* What are the options?
* What might you do to remember that?
* What would be the consequences of doing/not doing that?
* What changes could you make to improve that?