
Tool Kit item 4 - Effective Questioning Techniques, Listening, and Coaching

Effective Questioning Techniques

Whether you are meeting with your staff member to discuss their PRD or for other purpose, asking effective questions can help them understand clearly what information you are seeking and allow for more effective and specific responses. A good technique, accompanied by perceptive questions, allows you to elicit better information and understand the reasons for any issues or concerns the staff member may have.

There are 3 main styles of questioning

Open

An open question requires a complete answer, so it is difficult to answer “yes” or “no”. Open questions assist staff members to outline their issues more fully and show you have interest in what they have to say. They also have the added benefit of providing you with better information. This reduces the likelihood of you making assumptions.

Closed

Closed questions usually result in a short, one-word answer. They also tend to limit or stifle conversation. This type of questioning has a place however if you just need to confirm or clarify specific information.

Probing

Once key issues have been identified, you can then clarify matters by focussing on the areas that need exploration. Probing/follow up questions delve more deeply into areas you wish to find out more about.

Active listening

Listening is a critical skill in the PRD process. Active listening contains several elements that help you to confirm and convey that you have heard and understood what the other person is saying.

Be mindful that these tips need to be considered in the context of an individual’s cultural background.

Good listening techniques consist of the following:

- Keep control over your nonverbal gestures – maintain appropriate eye contact, keep an open posture, nod to show understanding, think about your facial expression.
- In your own words, paraphrase what was said to show understanding.
- Ask for clarification.
- Allow the other person to finish what they have to say before you make your own comments.
- Ask probing questions such as: “What does that mean?” and “Can you give me more detail?”
- Acknowledge the speaker’s feelings.

Coaching

Key to a supervisor/manager's role and their own performance effectiveness is the ability to elicit quality performance from their staff. Perhaps the most significant strategy in facilitating this is the coaching process.

Coaching is about a supervisor/manager helping staff work through job-related problems with the aim of learning new skills and knowledge, and continually improving their performance. It may involve challenging the staff member and their perspective, providing effective and constructive feedback to foster motivation and a focus on performance, and offering support strategies to allow growth and development in a safe environment.

The process of coaching is:

- based on collaboration,
- asking questions rather than giving advice,
- enabling staff to see the problem more clearly, perhaps questioning their own assumptions, and
- not about providing staff with solutions, but rather facilitating them to find an appropriate solution and to act. This approach enhances their ability to work independently, think critically, and find their own creative solutions to problems.