



The Art of Inquiry

The 'how' of asking questions is just as important as what you're asking. Whether your goal is to engage, provoke thought, gather information or inspire new insights, following the 7 C's will help you get the response you are looking for.

The 7 C's of the Art of Inquiry:

1. **Cultivate** the habit of inquiry. The more expertise and experience you've gained in your field, the greater the tendency is to feel that you're expected to have all the answers. Many leaders have been conditioned to "tell", and it takes effort to build the habit of inquiry and remember to "ask" instead.
2. Adopt a **Curious** mindset. Incorporating questions into your regular practice is not meant to come across as an interview or an interrogation, but a gateway to an open conversation. Exploring different possibilities and viewpoints will fuel innovation and creativity when you are curious and eager to learn.
3. Be **Conscious** of your timing. If someone seems distracted or is focused on a particular issue, he or she may not be receptive to an off-topic question. And if a question requires some thought, try to give advance notice so that the person has time to formulate his or her response.
4. Be aware of your **Context**. The same question can have a very different effect depending on the setting in which it is posed. Consider the dynamics of your team and whether a certain question may be better asked to the whole group, or if you might elicit better responses in a smaller setting.
5. **Carefully** LISTEN without judgement. The best questions are useless if you're not actively engaged and paying attention to the response. Catalyst questions do not have a hidden agenda; you are not asking a question with the intent of leading the person to a specific answer. Setting aside your own opinions and being respectful of the other person, even if his or her answer is unexpected, will build trust and connection.
6. Go deeper – **Clarify** using follow-up questions. If you've ever participated in a "5 Why's" exercise, you know how much can be mined from continuing with a line of questioning instead of quickly moving on to the next item. Clarifying questions help ensure that you've heard the person correctly, and also encourage the person to expand his or her thinking and consider a little further.
7. Become **Comfortable** with silence. Most people need a little time to think before they can offer a good answer. If you become impatient and prompt the person or keep talking, they will feel rushed and may speak too quickly. Training yourself to quietly wait will reward you with a more thoughtful response.

The goal is for curiosity to become a habit, and any interaction is a great opportunity to ask a great question. Here are some ways to use Catalyst Questions:

- Choose a focus question of the day and keep it visible/accessible so you remember to ask it
- Sort through the deck before a team meeting or one-on-one and select a few questions to guide your interaction
- Create a question board where you pose a new question each week and encourage team members to contribute their thoughts

All skills require practice. If you take the time to build the habit of asking great questions using the 7 C's your relationships will improve, your team will be more engaged and empowered, and you will be a more effective leader.