

Heard Any Good Questions Lately?

By Bonnie Budzowski
President, inCredible Messages, LP

Lots of people tell me they want to improve their writing or speaking skills. Fewer people express interest in improving their listening skills. A stark minority even thinks about skills in asking good questions.

Yet, the questions asked, or not asked, dramatically impact conversations. For example, with the right question, you can steer Great Aunt Sophie from talking about her gall bladder to talking about her life during World War II.

While the ability to guide a conversation through questions is always useful, it is invaluable in professional conversations when the stakes are high. People who are good at selling ideas, services, and products are usually good at using questions to get others in the conversation to talk.

People like to talk, and when you listen to what they say, you provide the gift of respect. In turn, you may receive surprising gifts of information:

- A ranking ordering of a decision-maker's or department's priorities
- The obstacles various people perceive to meeting those priorities
- The criteria by which specific decisions will be made
- Advice about what how to present a winning case

Next time you hear a good question in a professional setting, make a note of it. When you are stuck in traffic or waiting for an appointment, start a log of good questions.

Give the gift of a good question frequently. You may be surprised at what you receive in return.

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