



GETTING WHAT YOU WANT

The art of interrogative discussion

The following can improve your verbal communications skills, whether in planned or unplanned situations:

Read more

Simply increasing what you read (business texts, novels, newspapers etc) can improve your vocabulary, help you express ideas clearly and eliminate weaknesses in your language skills.

Think about the words

Too many words will bore your listener, take up too much time and result in you losing credibility. There is no need to waffle! Remember not to use words that people don't understand (they may not even tell you that they don't understand what you are saying), as you may appear intimidating and make them feel inferior.

Ask open-ended questions

No conversation technique is more powerful than using open-ended questions. Open-ended questions use 'how', 'when', 'where', 'who', 'why', 'what' and 'which'. Don't ask questions that can only give you a 'yes' or 'no' reply. An open-ended question is designed to encourage a full, meaningful answer from your conversation partner using his or her own knowledge and/or feelings. Unlike closed-ended questions, open-ended questions require more than a one or two word response. Open-ended questions have an inviting quality and they encourage authentic responses and two-way communication in both personal and professional relationships. e.g. "Is the building available?" is not a good question (closed) – "When is the building available?" is a good and open-ended question.

Reward statements with and open-ended question

If during your conversation you are asked to make a statement, by all means make the statement but without delay immediately follow the statement with an open-ended question. This will ensure the conversation continues and will ensure that you remain in control. e.g. You are asked whether you can complete a survey by month-end, you may reply, "yes" and immediately ask, perhaps, "How many additional days after month-end have you allowed for discovery of unforeseen issues?"

Prepare (if you can)

You would spend time planning what you would say if you were writing. You would also think about how to make it accessible to as many readers as possible. If you know of an approaching situation, take time out to think about the questions you may be asked and what answers you may need to give. If you are delivering a presentation, you should be prepared for awkward questions and situations where you may need to explain something in a different way.

Listen and be interested

Listening more and talking less means you will understand and bring your listener into the conversation. This helps them to trust you and make them feel that you really understand their needs. When they talk, be interested and show your interest. This will improve the rapport you are trying to build.



Be aware of non-verbal communication traps

The impact of the words you say is only a small element of the communication you are giving. You should make sure that your words, their tone, the gestures you make, facial expressions and body language you use, are all relevant to your conversation.

Honesty is the best policy

Promising something that is not possible will break down any trust that you have developed. Telling someone that you "don't know – but can find out" is more positive than just trying to give an answer you hope is effective.

Show and seek some understanding

Look for understanding from your audience. It's easier to back track at certain points in your conversation than revisit the whole conversation again – or you risk getting the wrong results because your audience did not understand! You can use this when delivering or receiving a message. Occasional summaries and confirmation questions can be extremely useful.

Think about perspectives

Think about what you are saying from the other person's perspective. Just because you understand what you mean, it doesn't mean that they will.

The killer question

“What can I do ...?”

This will give you significant control and will most often get you what you want. For example, “Can I start the survey on March 1st?” has a 50/50 chance of getting you a “No” reply, however “What can I do to allow me to start the survey on March 1st?” – can only get you a response which will be designed by the listener to enable this to happen.