

Bringing Out the best in others

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Questions are the Answer, Aren't They?

by Alice Wheaton

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A few weeks ago, I bought a CD by Toby Keith and on it is a song called, *I Wanna Talk About Me!* What is interesting about this song is that he laments about people who spend no time showing curiosity or getting to other people; instead, they talk about themselves. Why don't we ask more questions, not just of our clients but of friends and family as well? Is it self centeredness and extreme narcissism or is it that most people do not know how to engage others in conversation? A good rule of thumb is that conversation is like a game of tennis where the game proceeds if the ball is served from one to another and asking questions is the best method to serve the conversational ball. There are at least seven blocks to questioning.

1. Disinterest
2. Self-centered
 - Focus is on my quota, my product, and my performance.
 - Feel we must quickly prove our worth.
 - Interest is in preserving our own self-image and avoiding failure.
 - Need to be in control.
3. Bad Habit - unenlightened self-interest (have too few friends who tell us what we need to know).
4. Denial - do not want to know the answer, because that would require taking responsibility for what disclosed.
5. Wounded Questioners
 - Told as children not to bother authority figures.
 - School focus on always having to have the right answer.
6. Unaware that questioning gives permission for others to talk; unaware that it is indeed polite to ask questions.
7. Lack Skill - do not know how to ask with elegance and grace; fail to realize that questioning is a learned skill.

The four most dangerous words are *I already know that*. Those who say this have contempt for exploration. The questioner's secret, of course, is that they know more because they ask more questions. An investigative attitude pays off in all areas of life and business.

I believe that of the seven reasons for not questioning listed above, the two main reasons people do not routinely ask questions are they believe that probing with questions is impolite and two, they do not know how to ask these questions in a manner that shows respect for others and themselves.

There are three simple strategies to encourage others to carry on the conversation.

ONE: When your conversational partner identifies a problem, encourage further feedback by simply saying: *Tell me more?*

TWO: When your conversational partner asks a question, encourage further feedback by simply saying: *I am curious, why do you ask?*

THREE: When your conversational partner makes a statement, encourage further feedback by simply saying: *Because...?*

These three simple steps can carry you through an entire evening of networking your way through any social gathering. The questions will also help you achieve a deeper understanding of someone you have known for years. Most people have volumes of information waiting to be discovered by someone like you! Try to talk less about yourself and question more to discover what the other person is all about.