

OPEN AND CLOSED QUESTIONS

Closed questions can usually be answered with a one or two word answer, usually 'yes' or 'no' and can tend to close off the chance for further exploration of a topic, unless they are quickly followed by an open question.

Open questions require a little more thought and fully engage the 'thinking' process. They do not allow a person to immediately close down the topic and, by the very process of having to think about the answer, they can take a person to previously uncharted territory!

- Closed questions close the subject down
- Open questions open the topic up to wider thought

EXAMPLES OF CLOSE-ENDED QUESTIONS ARE:

- Are you feeling better today?
- Are you happy with the remit?
- Have you worked out your differences?
- Is that your final answer?
- Will you help with dinner tonight?
- Have you finished that piece of work?
- Do you need help with that?
- Are you happy?
- Will you stay late and complete that piece of work?

Closed questions can also be a little less obvious and very complicated. For example, "Do I have to do everything around here?" clearly requires a little more than a "yes" or "no" answer!

Some questions may not be answered with "yes" or "no" but can be just as easily shut down with different wording.

For example the first question, "Are you feeling better today?" could be phrased as, "How are you feeling today?" On the surface, this could seem like a more open question, but when it is met with the answer, "fine", we can see that it has actually been used as closed

So how can we phrase this to be so open that the person cannot possibly close the subject down with their answer?

Open questions should encourage the respondent to think and reflect and the answers may contain valuable information about opinions and feelings. They hand control of the conversation to the respondent, as it is very difficult to predict or steer the answers that you will be given!

Here are some examples of open-ended questions:

- Where do you feel you're 'at' with that piece of work?
- What type of things keep you awake at night?
- How do you stay focussed on your work?
- What do you feel contributed to your success today?
- If your colleagues were asked to describe you, what do you think they would say?

FLIP IT!

Here are some closed questions that may yield more useful information if they were flipped into open questions

- Are you finished yet?
- Do you like her?
- Do you want me to do that?
- Do you want more training?
- Do you need time off?
- Is that how you want it?
- Should you do it differently?

Consider how you make these more open. When you have done that, try to make your 'open' questions even more open!

Now, work in 3's. Talk to a partner and try to find out as much about them as possible. Use a mix of open and closed questions. The third person in the group should observe the dialogue and note how much information the different types of questions elicit. When the dialogue is finished, the observer should try to pick one or two questions and open them out still further to see if even more information is forthcoming. Make a note of some of the most successful open questions used.