

# Asking Questions and Listening Well

## Asking the right question

Asking the right question is the most effective way of opening up a conversation and keeping it engaging. A high-quality question focuses on what is meaningful for the participants at a meeting and triggers our curiosity and invites us to explore further.

## Some guidelines for formulating questions

- › A good question attracts energy and focuses attention on what matters. The best questions are open-ended questions, not ones that have a simple yes or no answer.
- › Good questions invite curiosity. They do not need to promote action or problem solving immediately.
- › You'll know a good question when it brings out good ideas and possibilities.
- › Check possible questions with key people who will take are organizing / participating in your session. Does the question hold their attention and energy?

## What makes a Powerful Question?

### A powerful question...

- › Is simple and clear: "What is your first reaction to the idea being proposed?"
- › Is thought-provoking: "What if we don't do anything?"
- › Generates energy: "What excites you about this proposal?"
- › Focuses the discussion: "What are the three most important things to do next?"
- › Challenges assumptions: "What's the worst that could happen?"
- › Opens new possibilities: "If we could wave a magic wand, what solution would we want to happen?"
- › Brings to mind more questions: "What more do we need to think about if this is going to work?"



## Listening Well

The goal of active listening is to really hear and understand what a person is saying to you.

Most important is to focus on what is being said and how it is being said. Do not allow distractions like your own thoughts, your phone or incoming emails when you are listening. Listen to the other person's tone and notice their body language.

To ensure that the person who is speaking knows they are being listened to, it helps to provide non-verbal or verbal cues to them.

To ensure you have understood what the other person has said, you can paraphrase or summarize what you have heard and ask for confirmation.

If action is needed as a follow up to the conversation, be sure that both/all people in the conversation understand and are (hopefully!) in agreement about next steps.

