

Ask Great Questions

Written by Steve Marr
Monday, 04 February 2019 14:08

When a small child asks me the *why* question, it usually begins an unending series of more *why*'s that easily annoys. I get frustrated with the *why* question because it isn't a specific question; thus, doesn't have a specific answer.

In our business, it is important to ask specific questions that will lead to obtaining the best answers quickly. It's the same thing we learn from using Internet search engines. The more specific the question, the better the answer we receive.

For example, I googled *Civil War* and came up with 1.2 billion results. When I limited my search to *United States Civil War*, I still found 839 million results. When I used *United States Civil War battles*, Google returned 36 million results. Then, I got very specific and asked for results for the battle of Picacho Pass, an obscure skirmish taking place in Arizona. I found eight search results. The battle involved twelve Calvary soldiers from the Confederacy and thirteen Calvary from Union forces. If you researched this minor event by going through all of the Civil War results, you may never get the details you were looking for. However, a specific question quickly zeroes in on the answer.

An advantage of Google is that when your question didn't provide a good answer, you can repeat your question in a slightly different way. In most instances you will come up with results that hit your mark.

I have adopted several guidelines that help me obtain information from others when I ask a question.

1. Avoid yes or no questions.

I prefer to use the words *why*, *when*, *how*, *what*, *who* or *where* to draw more information from

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the person. For example, if there is an issue with a customer; I want to know who the person spoke to, when and what was discussed so I can understand the situation.

The exception is when a yes/no question targets one specific issue. For example, if you wanted to know if someone called a customer back; you can get your answer from a *yes* or *no*.

2. Use follow-up questions.

If a customer is upset about an issue, we need to understand why they are unhappy, what caused the unhappiness and what we can do to resolve the problem. One question won't suffice; it will take follow-up questions.

3. Wait for an answer.

Waiting for someone to give an answer isn't easy. The urge is to start answering the question for the person yourself. Or worse, you say something to fill the silence. Unfortunately, neither response leads to a good answer.

When I encounter silence in response to a question, I might say "I can wait for you to formulate your thoughts or clarify your thinking." However, when I ask questions; I expect an answer, whether it's from a staff member, a customer or someone else.

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4. ☐☐☐☐ **Don't interrupt.** ☐☐

I don't like to interrupt like some news commentary or show hosts interrupt their guests and begin to answer their own question. In most instances I'm not interested in what the host has to say. I likely already know their perspective. However, I am interested in what the guest may share. It's easy to eliminate the possibility of a good answer by interrupting.

5. ☐☐☐☐ **Follow Jesus' model.**

I located nearly 100 scriptural passages where the Lord asked questions. Each question was specifically framed to obtain information. For example, "Who touched my clothes?" (Mark 5:30, NIV) Some required thought to answer, such as, "Who is my mother? Who is my brother?" (Matthew 12:48, NIV)

In your business and life take time to think through, pray through and work through the specific information you want. Then, ask targeted questions. Your communication will improve as will your leadership.

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