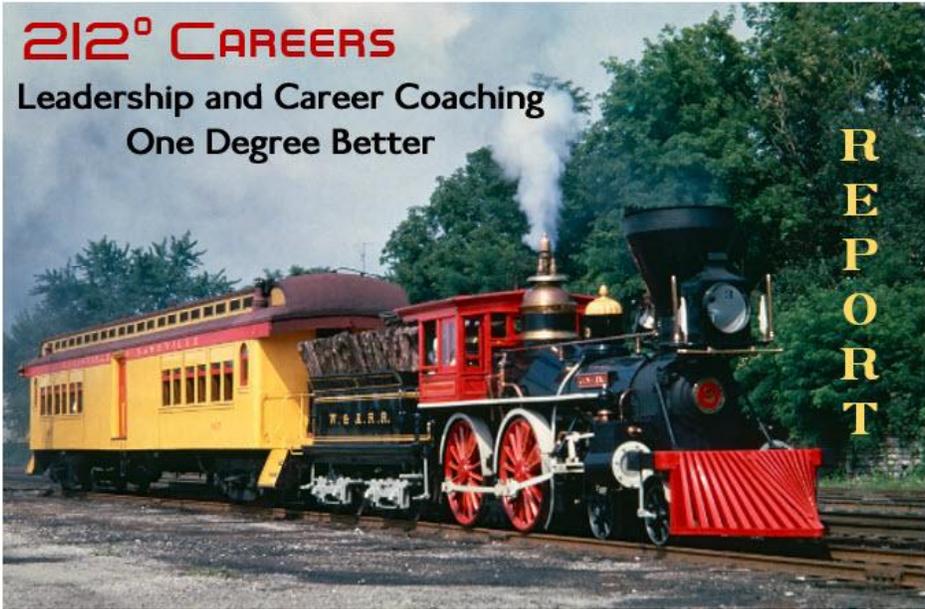I never learn anything talking. I only learn things when I ask questions.

Lou Holtz

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REPORT

Questioning to Discover

He who asks is a fool for five minutes, but he who does not ask remains a fool forever.

- Chinese proverb

'How do you know so much about everything?' was asked of a very wise and intelligent man; and the answer was 'By never being afraid or ashamed to ask questions as to anything of which I was ignorant.'

- John Abbott

A psychiatrist is a fellow who asks you a lot of expensive questions your wife asks for nothing.

- Joey Adams

Reason can answer questions, but imagination has to ask them.

- Ralph N. Gerard

If you do not ask the right questions, you do not get the right answers. A question asked in the right way often points to its own answer. Asking questions is the A-B-C of diagnosis. Only the inquiring mind solves problems.

- Edward Hodnett

Questions are the creative acts of intelligence.

- Dr. Frank Kingdon

I never learn anything talking. I only learn things when I ask questions.

- Lou Holtz

> You can tell whether a man is clever by his answers.
> You can tell whether a man is wise by his questions.
>
> - Naguib Mahfouz

> To be able to ask a question clearly is two-thirds of the way to getting it answered.
>
> - John Ruskin

> There are no stupid questions,
> But there are a LOT of inquisitive idiots.
>
> - www.despair.com

Many authorities, from management, leadership, interviewing, communications, and critical thinking, have discussed the importance of questioning techniques. They have all argued for their use and the necessity of enhancing our questioning skills. Perhaps surprisingly, while there are many descriptive overviews of questions, there is very little training material on how to use questioning techniques effectively.

The world of puzzles and games contains a surprising methodology for learning and understanding effective questioning techniques. It comes from an old game, modified to fit the murder mystery interests of many people, and updated to enable publication of various game packages.

The origin: 20 Questions. The current version: a mystery, various conflicting or confusing clues, and a structured format for asking questions. Very successful puzzle games like MIND TRAP, and games like CRACK THE CASE have featured the players' opportunity to ask questions about the mystery. Answers, coming from the person who has the solution to the mystery, are limited to: Yes, No, Yes and No, I Don't Know, Irrelevant, Define What You Mean by… and Rephrase Your Question.

In this report, the different types of questions, and some information on their application, will be explored.

Types of Questions

Many types of questions are available to the manager or professional in search of information. The information may be needed to solve a customer's problem or to collect the data needed to make an intelligent decision in a hiring situation. In a training environment, questions may be used to help participants learn new material and explore concepts to ensure understanding

Several scholars have developed approaches to questioning. An introduction to some of these descriptions is the starting point for developing improved questioning techniques.

Bloom's Taxonomy

Benjamin Bloom of the University of Chicago remains unchallenged with the structure he proposed for questioning. His *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives* (1956) has guided instructional interactions for decades. This is an excellent starting point for understanding the types of questions needed to uncover information in a problem-solving, or information-gathering setting, to assess understanding of information presented, and to create environments for application of the information to current and future situations. The six levels are listed below, along with an illustrative question for each.

- *Knowledge*: "Who is known as the father of modern management science?"

- *Comprehension*: "How would you explain the meaning of this Sam Walton quote?"

- *Application*: "How would you use active listening in a conflict situation?"

- *Analysis*: "What conclusions can you draw from this case study?"

- *Synthesis*: "Having learned about Jack Welch's insistence on 'speed, simplicity, self-confidence,' what comparable statement can you make about the needs of your own organization?"

- *Evaluation*: "Can you tell us which of these statements is more relevant for the empowerment project your team is likely to undertake: 'Make no small plans for they have no power to stir the soul' (Anonymous), or 'We can do no great things, only small things with great love' (Mother Theresa)?"

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Speculative Questions

Several descriptions of different questioning techniques focus on Bloom's "synthesis" level as a key element in training programs. If we do not allow participants some time to internalize the learning, to view it from new perspectives, to push it into unexplored mental terrain, then we do them a disservice. Questions can be so intriguing that attendees will return to them again and

again. Speculative questions can truly shatter mental constructs, and narrow views can be broadened to encompass original thought. Sample questions are provided below.

- "If you were arrested for leadership, what answers would you give to what questions from a prosecutor trying to convict you?"

- "If money were no object, what changes would you make in your workplace?"

The Socratic Method

If you explore the subject of questioning, another of the most easily found and often cited is the Socratic Method. The method, which Socrates employed in his philosophical analyses, has five readily distinguishable characteristics:

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1. The method is skeptical. It begins with Socrates' real or professed ignorance of the truth of the matter under discussion. This is the Socratic irony which seemed to some of his listeners an insincere pretense, but which was undoubtedly an expression of Socrates' genuine intellectual humility. The Socratic is tentative and provisional; Socrates' doubt and assumed ignorance is an indispensable first step in the pursuit of knowledge.

2. It is conversational. It employs the dialogue not only as a teaching device, but as a technique for the actual discovery of opinions among men, there are truths upon which all men can agree, Socrates proceeds to unfold such truths by discussion or by question and answer. Beginning with a popular or hastily formed conception proposed by one of the members of the company or taken from the poets or some other traditional source, Socrates subjects this notion to severe criticism, as a result of which a more adequate conception emerges.

3. It is conceptual or definitional in that it sets as the goal of knowledge the acquisition of concepts. Socrates tacitly assumes that truth is embodied in correct definition. Precise definition of terms is held to be the first step in the problem solving process.

4. The Socratic Method is empirical or inductive in that the proposed definitions are criticized by reference to particular instances. Socrates always tested definitions by recourse to common experience and to general usages.

5. The method is deductive in that drawing out its implications tests a given definition, by deducing its consequences. The definitional method of Socrates is a real contribution to the logic of philosophical inquiry. It inspired the dialectical method of Plato and exerted a not inconsiderable influence on the logic of Aristotle.

Socratic Teaching

The oldest and still the most powerful, teaching tactic for fostering critical thinking is Socratic teaching. In Socratic teaching the focus is on giving students questions, not answers. An inquiring, probing mind is modeled by continually probing into the subject with questions.

Each of the elements represents a dimension into which one can delve in questioning a person. We can question goals and purposes. We can probe into the nature of the question, problem, or issue that is on the floor. We can inquire into whether or not we have relevant data and information. We can consider alternative interpretations of the data and information. We can analyze key concepts and ideas. We can question assumptions being made. We can ask students to trace out the implications and consequences of what they are saying. We can consider alternative points of view. All of these, and more, are the proper focus of the Socratic questioner.

As a tactic and approach, Socratic questioning is a highly disciplined process. The Socratic questioner acts as the logical equivalent of the inner critical voice that the mind develops when it develops critical thinking abilities. The contributions from the members of the class are like so many thoughts in the mind. All of the thoughts must be dealt with and they must be dealt with carefully and fairly. By following up all answers with further questions, and by selecting questions which advance the discussion, the Socratic questioner forces the class to think in a disciplined, intellectually responsible manner, while yet continually aiding the students by posing facilitating questions.

A Socratic questioner should:

      a. Keep the discussion focused

      b. Keep the discussion intellectually responsible

      c. Stimulate the discussion with probing questions

      d. Periodically summarize what has and what has not been dealt with and/or resolved

      e. Draw as many students as possible into the discussion.

The Five Whys

The quality movement created strong interest in a questioning technique known as the *Five Whys*. It is a simple and powerful technique in which WHY? is asked at least five times to help detect the root cause or meaning of a particular problem or situation. *Five Whys* helps individuals or groups use higher level thinking skills to move to a deeper understanding of an issue. It challenges the traditional paradigms or perceptions of a problem.

The steps for the *Five Whys* are simple to follow:

1. Identify a problem, situations, or concept to be studied.

2. Ask *Why does this particular situation/condition exist?*

3. Each time the question is answered, ask *Why?* again.

4. Continue to ask *Why?* until everyone involved is satisfied they have moved away from identifying symptoms of problems and have finally arrived at the root cause of the problem.

Example:

■ Why isn't more time being spent in the management training on team building?
❑ *There is not enough time in the training program.*

■ Why isn't there enough time in the training program?
❑ *There is too much material to cover.*

■ Why is there too much material to cover?
❑ *We keep adding material to the program, but we don't get rid of material.*

■ Why do we keep adding material and not eliminate anything from the program?
❑ *We don't have a process for deciding what to keep and what to eliminate.*

■ Why don't we have a process for deciding what to teach?
❑ *We don't take time to review the curriculum on a regular basis.*

Fact-Finding – Questioning for Depth

In a variety of settings, from the "how-to's" of writing a good newspaper story to the skilled probing of investigating and interviewing techniques, it is easy to find an emphasis and asking and answering the "Five W's and an H." Who, What, Where, When, Why, and How?

Learning how to ask these simple questions, and using them in powerful ways to uncover critical information, requires training and practice.

If you study the process and specific techniques of interviewing, it is easy to see that a common technique is focused on asking some basic questions to probe beyond the candidates initial answering. Called "probing" or "fact-finding," this technique is focused on getting the candidate to provide great detail. But it's more than just "tell me more." The skilled "fact-finder" knows what questions to ask to get good information.

Nobody exemplifies this approach better than Lou Adler, the creator of **Performance Based Hiring**. In Adler's **Performance Based Hiring** process, objective evaluation of candidates is a key principle – and fact-finding is the foundation of the principle.

It is based on a simple concept. Candidates like to talk at the 40,000-foot level – unfortunately interviewers are often willing passengers on this flight and do not control candidates through good questions to get them down to the real facts, to ground zero. In **Performance Based Hiring**, it's called "peeling the onion." The process is structured to "train the candidate" and provide more detailed answers to the interviewer's questions.

> When it comes to interviewing candidates, **narrow and deep is better than broad and shallow**. We want the candidate to paint a word picture of each accomplishment--- the planned results, the process used to achieve results, and the environment in which the results occurred. Asking the question "Can you give me an example of the exact role you played?" is the best way to get a glimpse of the candidate at work. Most initial responses are too general, and candidates sometimes exaggerate. Getting examples is the best way to understand a specific accomplishment. Good candidates quickly relax with this technique. Candidates who are good presenters, but weak on substance, get nervous.

Basic fact-finding for a candidate's accomplishment
- ❑ *Describe the project, circumstances.*
- ❑ *What did you actually do?*
- ❑ *What was the most satisfying part?*
- ❑ *What was the most challenging?*
- ❑ *Why was it significant to you?*
- ❑ *Give me an example of you taking initiative as part of this project.*
- ❑ *How did you change/grow?*
- ❑ *Did you receive any recognition?*

Applications

For the most part, the application of different questioning techniques is endless. Managers and professionals can use an increased understanding of different questioning techniques in many different aspects of their responsibilities. Here are a few examples, followed by a challenge to determine other areas where some of the techniques discussed in this paper might be applied.

Customer Service

When a customer or guest has a special need, or when a difficult customer service situation arises, it is almost always necessary to collect information. Jumping to conclusions or failure to listen to the customer will often aggravate the situation. It will almost always fail to solve the problem and satisfy the customer. Asking good questions can be a key to not only demonstrating to the customer that "you care" and uncovering important facts in the situation.

Suggested Techniques: Fact-Finding, Who-What-Where-When, Five Whys

Employee Performance

Often, when a manager is confronted with an employee performance problem, the analysis quickly falls into the patterns of "seen it before" or some strongly held paradigms. Here's an opportunity to use some good questions to analyze the problem and, in many cases, do a better job of coaching the employee by developing a good understanding of the problem and possible solutions. In a real coaching situation, helping the employee discover possible solutions is an important step.

Suggested Techniques: Fact-Finding, Five Whys, Socratic Method
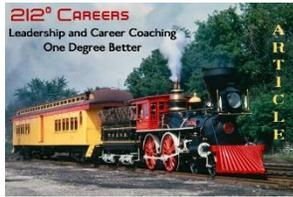
Employee Training

The challenge in many training programs is not answering questions – that's often done too easily. The challenge is asking good questions of participants. Here, the often-asked "Who-What-When" questions can become repetitious and boring very quickly. Challenging students to answer questions that move them toward synthesis and application of material requires good questioning techniques.

Suggested Techniques: Bloom's Taxonomy, Five Whys, Socratic Method, Speculative Questions

The Question Challenge

Situation	Questioning Techniques
	❑ Bloom's Taxonomy ❑ Socratic Method ❑ Speculative Questions ❑ Five Whys ❑ Fact-Finding ❑ Who-What-Where-When-Why-How
	❑ Bloom's Taxonomy ❑ Socratic Method ❑ Speculative Questions ❑ Five Whys ❑ Fact-Finding ❑ Who-What-Where-When-Why-How
	❑ Bloom's Taxonomy ❑ Socratic Method ❑ Speculative Questions ❑ Five Whys ❑ Fact-Finding ❑ Who-What-Where-When-Why-How
	❑ Bloom's Taxonomy ❑ Socratic Method ❑ Speculative Questions ❑ Five Whys ❑ Fact-Finding ❑ Who-What-Where-When-Why-How
	❑ Bloom's Taxonomy ❑ Socratic Method ❑ Speculative Questions ❑ Five Whys ❑ Fact-Finding ❑ Who-What-Where-When-Why-How

Scan the QR Code to visit 212-Careers.

For more information, including workshops featuring exercises described in this report, e.g., "Crack the Case," email info@212.career.com