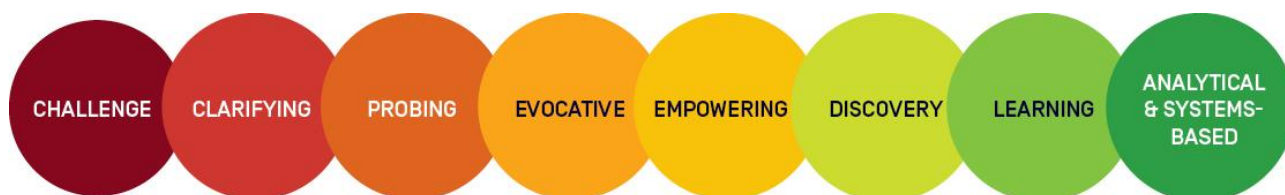




# Asking Powerful Questions User Guide

## The model



The way we engage in a conversation can make it effective as a vehicle for better understanding ourselves, the other person, and whatever we are talking about.

We can help create an effective conversation by remembering to ask curious and powerful questions, rather than only stating our opinion or telling people what to do.

This model explores eight types of powerful questions that help us engage in high-quality conversations.

Not every question type is appropriate for every conversation. Use this model to understand the effect a question type has on the other person. It will become easier to frame good questions for advancing the conversation or enhancing the learning you can both take away.

### Why the model is useful

Asking intentional questions engages the recipient mentally, encouraging them to become active participants in the conversation or learning experience. Powerful questions generate curiosity in the listener, are thought-provoking, and stimulate reflective conversation – they will enable you to improve the quality of your interactions.

### What it looks like in practice

Read and reflect on each type of powerful question below, especially those you don't naturally gravitate to. Practice using the question types and note how they contribute to genuine, insightful conversations.

<b>Clarifying</b>	<p>This type can help make what the other person is talking about more apparent.</p> <p><i>“What do you mean when you say...?”</i></p> <p><i>“What was it specifically that you found challenging?”</i></p>
<b>Probing</b>	<p>This type helps to dig into the initial answers that someone may have given to an earlier question.</p> <p><i>“Could you elaborate on that?”</i></p> <p><i>“Could you tell me more about what you’re hoping to achieve?”</i></p>



<b>Empowering</b>	<p>This type helps the other person realise and tap into the capability they have to overcome challenges.</p> <p><i>“If you had the confidence to do that, what would it feel like?”</i></p> <p><i>‘When have you successfully dealt with a situation like this?’</i></p>
<b>Discovery</b>	<p>This type aims to have the other person generating ideas and possibilities. People are more likely to remember and believe in solutions if the solutions are self-discovered.</p> <p><i>“What might some options be?”</i></p> <p><i>“If you had the means to improve this situation, what could you try?”</i></p>
<b>Learning</b>	<p>This type helps the other person to reflect on the insights that may come from something they have experienced.</p> <p><i>“What are some things that you might do differently in a situation like this in the future?”</i></p> <p><i>“On reflection, what can we learn and apply from this?”</i></p>
<b>Analytical &amp; systems-based</b>	<p>This type helps the person to step back from the situation and to adopt a bigger-picture view. These use an evidence-based approach.</p> <p><i>“What are the underlying causes of the situation you’re describing?”</i></p> <p><i>“What are the risks and benefits of taking this action?”</i></p>
<b>Evocative</b>	<p>This type helps the other person to bring strong memories or emotions to help address the situation. Should only be used once you have built trust with the other person.</p> <p><i>“How would you feel if you could achieve that goal?”</i></p> <p><i>“How did that make you feel?”</i></p>
<b>Challenging</b>	<p>This type aims to directly address something in what the other person is saying (or not saying) that might help them generate insight into themselves and their situation. These can be quite provocative and should be used with care and only when the other person trusts you.</p> <p><i>“Where does that thought come from?”</i></p> <p><i>“What makes you think that wouldn’t work?”</i></p>

### Contextual scenario

The conversation below represents a fictional exchange between a coach developer and an older male coach who is experiencing some issues coaching his U15 girls football team. It helps to illustrate how the art of asking powerful questions fits into a normal coaching conversation.

Coach Developer	Question type	Coach
Hey Tom, how are you going with your new U15 Team this year?	Open	Hi Jenny! To be honest, I’m struggling a bit to connect with the players and to work out what they need.
Oh right – can you tell me more about that?	Probing	The girls are making things a bit difficult for me.



That's no good...what do you mean when you say they are making it difficult for you?	Clarifying	Well, they ask so many questions and take so long to do the things I ask them to do in training.
Right! Are you doing anything different to what you did last year with the boys?	Clarifying	No, I've coached the same as I coach the boys' teams. These girls need to train harder and be aggressive in the game.
Tell me more about what training hard and being aggressive looks like? Where does that thought come from?	Evocative Challenging	I set up activities and ask them to tackle like they would in a game, but they stand back more and don't get in there. I've always got the boys to go hard in the contest. Maybe that comes from the way that I was coached?
What do you know about your players – what they enjoy about playing football and how they would like training to run?	Learning	Hmmm, I'm not sure, I haven't really asked them?
Okay, what might some options be from here then?	Discovery	I could speak to them individually and see what motivates them to play. I could then have a team session about making training more enjoyable.
Great, if you have the confidence to do that then, what would success look like for you?	Empowering	Well, I really want them to enjoy and be fully engaged at training. If I get to know them better and what they like I can tailor training to suit. And maybe I could get some other coaches or senior players to come and give me a hand.
Great ideas Tom. Have you seen the great resources on the ASC website about the considerations for coaching girls?	Closed Informative	I haven't, but I will check these out Jenny! I haven't had a lot of experience coaching girls so getting some any tips and advice here would be amazing.

## How to know if it's working

Over time, you'll become more intentional about creating spaces for safe communication and effectively monitoring others' emotions and reactions. This will empower you to employ various question types suitable for the conversation's intention, environment, and desired outcome.

## Other useful tips

### Open and closed questions

Both open and closed questions can have value in the right context. Closed questions are useful when quick and easy responses are required such as in surveys or to check the accuracy of some information. Open questions are more powerful in conversations as they encourage thoughtful and extended responses. They give control of the direction of the conversation to the person being questioned. This can create safety and helps build trust.



Closed questions generally start with:

Did you...

Will you...

Should you...

Can you...

Could you try...

Also referred to as **convergent questions** as they provide a limited number of response options.

Open questions generally start with:

Who...

How...

What...

When...

Where...

Also referred to as **divergent questions**, as they provide a wider range of response options.

## Other types of powerful questions

### TED 'Questions'

**T:** "Tell me more about that"

**E:** "Explain the situation to me"

**D:** "Describe that to me"

Using these TED prompts can be an invitation to provide lots of information. They might yield a key piece of information just using one 'question' that may take several other types of questions to find.

### AWE Questions

*"And What Else?"*

A person's first answer to an open question is probably not the only answer they could come up with. This question is powerful in uncovering more answers, some of which may even be better than what first came to mind.

### Some 'Magic' Questions

These questions can help people move past obstacles.

*"If you woke up tomorrow and everything was fixed, what would you notice/see or hear?"*

*"What could be happening that's not happening now?"*

*"If you could wave a magic wand and make this how you wanted it to be, what would it look like?"*

## Self-reflection and action learning

Use the [Action Learning Guide](#) to practice applying the models and techniques in your specific context and situation.