Use of Questioning in the Training Room

Effective questioning is perhaps one of the most critical facilitation skills. It serves several functions:

- Helps you to determine what participants already know about a topic so you can focus on what they need to know.
- Invites participation and involvement in the training process.
- Provides feedback about how the training is received.
- Enables participants to assess their learning.

The three skills associated with effective questioning are **asking questions**, **handling learners' answers to questions**, and **responding to learners' questions**.

1. Asking Questions

Question Types

Asking questions effectively during training is one of the most important skills you can develop. Asking questions effectively means selecting the right type of question, phrasing it so it elicits the response you are after, and then directing the question appropriately.

TYPE	DESCRIPTION	EXAMPLES
Open	• Requires more than a "yes" or "no" answer. • Stimulates thinking and discussion.	What ideas do you have for explaining the changes to clients? Usually begins with a "what", "how", or "why".
Closed	• Requires a one word answer. • Closes off discussion.	"Does everyone understand the changes we've discussed?" Usually begins with "is", "can", "how many", "does".

Phrasing Questions

Once you have decided on the type of question you will use, you need to determine how you will phrase it. There are important considerations in phrasing questions so that the individual will focus on the precise information you are trying to obtain.

DO	DON'T
Ask clear, concise questions covering a single issue.	Ask rambling ambiguous questions covering multiple issues.
Ask reasonable questions based on what people can be expected to know at this point.	Ask questions that are too difficult for the majority of people to answer.
Ask challenging questions which provoke thought.	Ask question which are too easy and provide no opportunity for thinking.
Ask honest, relevant questions which direct people to logical answers.	Ask "trick" questions designed to fool people.

Directing Questions

The final consideration in asking effective questions is how to direct your question. You can direct your question to either the group or to a specific individual.

If you want to ...	Then ...
• *Stimulate thinking of all participants* • *Allow people to respond voluntarily* • *Avoid putting an individual on the spot*	**Direct the question to the group.**
• *Stimulate one person to think and respond* • *Tap the known resources of an experienced person in the group*	**Direct the question to an individual.**

2. Handling Participants' Answers to Questions

The second skill associated with questions involves the way in which you handle participants' answers to your questions. To insure maximum learning, you need maximum participation. The way in which you respond to a person's answer has an impact not only on the individual but also on the amount of future participation you will receive from everyone.

Some ways to handle answers to questions that will maintain a high level of participation are to:

- Use positive reinforcement for correct answers.
- Acknowledge the effort of the respondent, regardless of whether the answer is right or wrong.
- Minimize potential embarrassment for wrong or incomplete answers.

3. Responding to Participants' Questions

The third skill associated with the questioning process involves responding to questions from the group. Participants' questions provide an opportunity to enhance the learning for the group as well as for the individual. The way in which you respond to questions also affects whether people feel free to ask future questions during training.

There are three suggested ways to respond to questions:

1. Provide the answer yourself. This is most appropriate when you are the only person who can provide the answer.

2. Redirect the question back to the person or to another participant. This is appropriate when there is a high probability that the person will be able to come up with the correct answer.

3. Defer the question. This is appropriate when:
   - The question is beyond the scope of the session
   - The question cannot be handled in the allotted time frame
   - The answer will be provided by material covered later in the session
   - You need time to think about it or research the correct answer