

Better Listening Through Questions

Did you ever notice that people don't like to ask questions? It's understandable when those questions are personal. You don't want to offend anyone. But, most people willingly give answers to questions asked of them. So why are we so afraid to ask?

When you ask questions, you have the tools you need to be a better listener. It's indirect and subtle, but it works. When you ask questions, you listen for the answer. You aren't spending your energy trying to think of what to say after the other person is finished speaking.

Before you fire up your question engine, be sure to keep a few tips in mind. The first is to be relevant. If you are all over the place on your topics, the other person is going to suggest you switch to decaf, because you are too wound up. Keep your questions relevant to the topic of discussion. You can transition into other topics, but try to keep them related.

Another tip is, don't try to ask questions for the purpose of tricking someone into an answer or trying to show how smart you are compared to him or her. The idea is to connect with people by listening to their stories. In fact, a better approach is to ask questions that you know they will be able to answer. Sometimes, you may already know the answer. But it's the process you are after as well as the answers.

It's okay to ask questions that relate to you somehow, but try to keep the focus on the other person. People love to talk about themselves, and when they find people who are good listeners, they will open up to you.

Good questions can also steer the conversation. This can be an asset when you converse with someone who is overly chatty. If they are going on and on about a topic, use questions to reel them in. It's a focused approach that gives you the control while moving the conversation forward.

If you aren't one who typically uses questions, it can take a bit of practice to learn what to ask. But, you have plenty of opportunity for

that practice in your day to day interactions with people. If you commute via public transportation, for instance, try to strike up a conversation with someone next to you. This isn't as easy as it used to be with people self-absorbed with their smart devices. But, if you try, you will find many people are responsive.