

Formulating Questions

As stated in the RTS coaches manual properly formulating questions is crucial in creating an atmosphere of discovery and a learning experience. Before we get into questions, let me first address why we need a discovery process in our coaching process with churches. Discovery learning is one of our God-given natural learning abilities. People learn best when they discover answers for themselves. As a coach you need the church members and leaders to think through the matters at hand so they can discover the real issues. Once discovery occurs people are more likely to have a desire and motivation to work toward needed change.

If you go into a church situation giving all the facts, information, and a list of suggestions needed for change, you are not coaching. You have become a manager. Your role is not to manage. People being managed will not think for themselves. Neither will they act for themselves. Participation will quickly dissolve even before implementation begins. People need to discover answers for themselves. We, as coaches need to develop questions and arrange information in ways to engage the higher order thought processes of church members and leaders.

Formulating good thought-provoking questions may take some practice, but it will be well worth the investment of your time and effort. Regardless of the information, facts, or statements you are reviewing, ask yourself, "How can this information (facts or statement) be used to create higher order thinking in our next meeting?" That, in fact, is a good example of the type questions you want to develop. It is certainly an open-ended question. There is no simple, one way only, answer. You can come at it from different angles and perspectives. The question causes you to think and to look into the material being addressed from different approaches.

A good open ended question will promote higher order thinking (deep thinking) from everyone in the room; causing people to look at the information or issue from different viewpoints and approaches. Never ask a question you do not want someone else to answer. In other words never answer your own question and do not ask a question and move on without giving an opportunity to field responses from others in the room. Sometimes, you may need to re-ask your question or change the wording to give better clarification.

Using How, What, and Where questions are possibly easiest to formulate for good thought promoting discussion. Using Why to begin a question perhaps requires the most precaution. "Why" questions often lead to responses allowing to people to live in the past and to pass blame. This type of question is generally not productive and can produce a negative atmosphere. Example: Why do you think your church is in the situation it is today? Certainly, How, What, and Where questions could just as easily be posed leading to negative responses.

Instead of dealing in the past and the negative, find the positive or objective of the issue by looking to the future. Example: instead of, "Why do you think your church is in the situation it is today?" you want to ask, "In your opinion, what will a brighter future beyond this situation look like for your church?" This

question causes everyone to think. Not about the past or negative issues, but about a brighter, positive future. As different people respond everyone in attendance is processing the information shared.

Here are a few sample starter questions.

How are we equipped as a church to...? (example: discover the needs of the community)

What strengths do we have that can be used to...? (example: show the community God's love)

Where can we look to find...? (example: a partnership with the community)

What are you willing to do to see this through?

When would be a good time to launch...? (example: a new class)lead the group to realize there are more than just one "good time". In fact, anytime may be a good time.

How would you suggest...?

What is the one thing you could...?

If we were to list...what is the one thing you would add to the list?

Why would moving in this direction be a good move for your church?

How could you involve more ministry groups of the church in...?

In what ways would suggest we promote...?

In formulating good thought promoting questions, always think ahead. If I ask this question, what follow-up question(s) could I ask to keep the discussion going in the direction needed to make forward progress?

People do not like to be told but they love to give their opinion and answer questions with their thoughts and experience. Therefore, use words and phrases such as, "In your opinion," and "What would you suggest..." This takes people off the defensive and immediately engages everyone's higher order thought processes.

Study and practice formulating and using open-ended questions. Become proficient at asking good open-ended thought promoting questions. Then continue to study. Become a student of the question. Learn to think in questions. It is a fun discovery learning way to live!