

SGD-9. ASKING QUESTIONS

Questions are one of a facilitator's primary tools. They engage the participants and increase the interactions among them. They also enable you to guide the discussion without taking too much airtime.

Good questions are brief. They serve a simple purpose, are open – inviting dialogue – not usually closed (“yes” or “no” responses) and do not carry a lot of baggage (excess commentary and explanation). There is a time for closed questions, such as when you are bringing a meeting/topic to closure. There are also times when both closed and open questions are used effectively together, such as to end one topic and then engage discussion in a new one.

Here are some of the ways you can use questions to facilitate:

Initiate Discussion (Open)

The next agenda item is distribution. Jean, what are your findings in this area?

Solicit Contributions (Open)

*Valuation seems to be a recurring theme here. How should we address it?
Helmut, what would you suggest?*

Clarify Statements (Open)

What do you mean by “distributed processing”? Could you give an example?

Direct the Discussion (Open)

Storage is an important issue, but it's not on our agenda today. Can we focus on production? The key issue is feed stocks. What problem are we having with them now?

Manage Time (Closed)

Should we move on?

Promote Active Listening (Closed with paraphrasing, followed by Open)

Are you saying that interest rates have less bearing on the decision than we thought? Could you tell us more about that?

Test for Consensus (Closed)

Can everyone live with this?

Transition to Another Topic (Closed, followed by Open)

Are we ready to move on? Okay, the next issue is seniority. John, would you tell us what your team found?