

Asking Powerful Questions

What are Powerful Questions?

“Powerful questions are a reflection of committed listening and understanding the other person’s perspective that is confirmed through paraphrasing. This suggests a progression from listening, paraphrasing for understanding, and then asking powerful questions that yield clarity or mediation of thinking” (Kee et al., 2010, p. 62). Powerful questions are:

- Open-ended questions with no hidden agenda.
- Meant to help the receiver of the question.

Characteristics of Powerful Questions

Kee et al. (2010) assert that powerful questions have the following characteristics:

1. Reflect active listening and grasps the perspective of the receiver of the question.
Like paraphrasing, powerful questions illustrate that you actively listen to and understand what the receiver of the question is saying. All powerful questions should reflect that you listen, so this section will overlap with other characteristics.
2. Presume positive intent:
Powerful questions should always affirm effort, skills, integrity, competence, caring and commitment.
3. Evoke discovery, insight, commitment, or action on behalf of the receiver of the question.
Powerful questions can give the receiver of the question insight into their own patterns, thinking, or encourage them to take action.
4. Challenge current assumptions.
Powerful questions can push the receiver of the question to consider their own patterns or assumptions and help them understand what blocks them or holds them back.
5. Create greater clarity, possibility of new learning.
Powerful questions can help the receiver of the question find greater clarity about their own learning, their own behavior, or push them to look at something in a new way.
6. Move the receiver of the question toward what he or she wants.
Powerful questions can help the receiver of the question move forward and learn how to take action, set goals, and get the help they need.

Exercise 4.9: Asking Powerful Questions

Purpose:

Educators will practice ask powerful questions while engaging in data conversations.

Objective:

Upon completion of this exercise, educators will be able to:

- Ask a powerful question in a Data Conversation.
- Describe two characteristics of a powerful question.

Materials Needed (for each educator):

- *Characteristics of Powerful Questions* handout
- *Asking Powerful Questions Scenario 1* handout
- *Asking Powerful Questions Scenario 2* handout

Time:

Approximately 20 minutes

Instructions:

1. Explain to educators that today you are going to talk about another technique to help them engage in successful Data Conversations: Asking Powerful Questions.
2. The technique of Asking Powerful Questions is a coaching technique outlined in the book *Results Coaching: The New Essential for School Leaders* (Kee et al., 2010). Explain that you are going to talk about how we can adapt this coaching technique to our Data Conversations with multiple stakeholders.
3. Introduce the educators to the characteristics of powerful questions using the handout *Characteristics of Powerful Questions*. Talk through the characteristics and examples together. *Note: these are characteristics of powerful questions. These are NOT discrete categories. They are separated into different categories to provide guidance about how powerful questions can help obtain different goals when having a Data Conversation, but*

Note to Facilitator

“Powerful questions are a reflection of committed listening and understanding the other person’s perspective that is confirmed through paraphrasing. This suggests a progression from listening, paraphrasing for understanding, and then asking powerful questions that yield clarity or mediation of thinking.”

Powerful Questions are:

- Open-ended questions with no hidden agenda.
- Meant to help the receiver of the question.

Kee et al. (2010), *Results Coaching: The New Essential for School Leaders*, p. 62

characteristics may overlap. For example, a question could demonstrate that you are listening, presume positive intent, but also help the receiver of the question clarify his or her own thinking.

4. Give educators *Asking Powerful Questions Scenario 1* handout. Ask each educator to write down powerful questions that he or she could ask the fellow teacher in the scenario.
5. In a fishbowl (or in the front of the room), conduct a role-play where you play the role of the fellow teacher in the scenario. Ask for a teacher volunteer to come up and start a data conversation practicing one, or several, powerful questions.

Optional: You may want to use the Asking Powerful Questions Role-Play Cards in this activity to assign particular roles to educators while they are writing powerful questions.

6. Stop the conversation at an appropriate stopping point and ask all the teachers to jot down some paraphrases that could be used in the data conversation, depending on how the conversation has gone up to this point.
7. Then ask another teacher volunteer to come up and continue the data conversation using one, or several, of his or her sample paraphrases.
8. After that, you may want to offer additional teacher volunteers the opportunity to come up and try out some of their paraphrases or powerful questions.
9. Repeat the same process with *Asking Powerful Questions Scenario 2*.

Note to Facilitator

This activity is meant to provide multiple opportunities for teachers to practice writing paraphrases and powerful questions and also see as many models in action as possible.

Exercise 4.9: Asking Powerful Questions

Asking Powerful Questions

In “Results Coaching: The New Essential for School Leaders,” Kee et al. (2010) assert that powerful questions have the following characteristics:

1. Reflect active listening and grasps the perspective of the receiver of the question.

Like paraphrasing, powerful questions illustrate that you actively listen to and understand what the receiver of the question is saying. All powerful questions should reflect that you listen, so this section will overlap with other characteristics.

Examples	
Can you tell me more about...?	What did you mean by...?

2. Presume positive intent.

Powerful questions should always affirm effort, skills, integrity, competence, caring and commitment.

Examples	
What are you planning to...?	How are you going to...?

3. Evoke discovery, insight, commitment, or action on behalf of the receiver of the question.

Powerful questions can give the receiver of the question insight into their own patterns, thinking, or encourage them to take action.

Examples		
What would you do if...?	What were you thinking when...?	How can you apply...?

4. Challenge current assumptions.

Powerful questions can push the receiver of the question to consider their own patterns or assumptions and help them understand what blocks them or holds them back.

Examples		
How else might you...?	What is stopping you from...?	What would happen if...?

5. Create greater clarity, possibility of new learning.

Examples		
What do you think it means...?	Help me understand what you mean by...?	What will you learn from this...

Powerful questions can help the receiver of the question find greater clarity about their own learning, their own behavior, or push them to look at something in a new way.

Examples		
What do you want to learn?	What have you tried so far?	What kind of help will you need?

6. Move the receiver of the question toward what he or she wants.

Powerful questions can help the receiver of the question move forward and learn how to take action, set goals, and get the help they need.

Exercise 4.9: Asking Powerful Questions Role Play Cards

Reflect active listening and grasp the perspective of the receiver of the question.	Presume positive intent.
Evoke discovery, insight, commitment, or action on behalf of the receiver of the question.	Challenge current assumptions of the receiver of the question.
Create greater clarity, possibility of new learning.	Move the receiver of the question toward what he or she wants.

Data Use PD Series

Exercise 4.9: Asking Powerful Questions Scenario 1

You are in a meeting with a fellow grade-level teacher and collaborating on a classroom summative assessment. During the conversation, you suggest raising the cognitive level of a few items on the assessment. In response, your fellow teacher says, "My kids can't do that."

Exercise 4.9: Asking Powerful Questions Scenario 2

Recently, one of your high-achieving students has been off task and distracting other students. You sit down to talk to him about his progress and he says he knows he is “doing fine” and doesn’t need to worry about it.

Exercise 4.9: Reflections

Describe two of the characteristics of powerful questions.

- 1. _____

- 2. _____

Rate your ability to ask powerful questions during Data Conversations.

Cannot do it	Can do it with significant support	Can do it with some support	Can do it independently
1	2	3	4

Information I still need or want to pursue further:

References

Kee, K., Anderson, K., Dearing, V., Harris, E., Shuster, F. (2010). *Results Coaching: The New Essential For School Leaders*. Corwin: Thousand Oaks, CA.