

# Crafting Questions for Effective Relational Organizing

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## Overview

- **Relational organizing:** process by which individuals harness their personal and professional relationships to engage in interpersonal communication with the goal of effecting community change
  - These conversations often take place over a period of time
  - Everyone can do it!
- Being able to pose powerful questions is an important relational organizing skill
  - Powerful questions help to build emotional bridges, highlight common values, allow for self-discovery, and make a point in a non-aggressive manner
- Doctors For A Healthy US, LLC aims to connect with people through relational organizing, and advocates for political candidates who are committed to addressing health equity and social determinants of health

## Powerful Questions

- Albert Einstein: *"If I had an hour to solve a problem, I'd spend 55 minutes thinking about the problem and five minutes thinking about solutions."*
- **Powerful questions are:**
  - short, precise
  - one single question
  - open ended (not yes / no)
  - free from assumptions
  - not leading (goal is to explore what they're thinking)
  - focused on encouraging action and personal behavior change (or at least considering it)
- **Powerful questions should:**
  - generate curiosity / the spirit of inquiry
  - stimulate reflective conversation
  - be thought provoking
  - bring underlying assumptions to light
  - invite creativity, new possibilities
  - generate energy and forward movement

- channel attention, focus inquiry
- stay in participants' minds / resonate with them
- touch a deep meaning
- evoke more questions
  
- **The most powerful questions begin with *how, what, or why***
  - Craft "why" questions carefully; they can evoke defensive answers, since the responder feels like they must justify themselves
  - *When, where, and who* are less powerful question words
  - *Did, which, will, & can* are the least powerful, along with *yes / no* questions
  
- **Powerful questions matter because they:**
  - help individuals discover their own knowledge
    - It's rarely effective to tell someone to do something; people want to come to conclusions on their own, based on their own values
  - are thought provoking, lead to reflection, and help us find deeper meaning
    - open the door to vulnerability
  - expand thinking about new possibilities
  - focus attention on the most vital issues
  - help reveal underlying assumptions and diverse perspectives
  - stimulate curiosity, creativity
  - can accelerate the potential of a group or community to move forward
  
- **Designing powerful questions**
  - Consider context
    - Personal or professional?
    - How divisive is the topic?
  - Think about what you're trying to accomplish; for example,
    - To open the door to talk about values?
    - To directly persuade a person to vote a specific way?
  - Identify what outcomes you want; for example,
    - To have non-aggressive dialogue about a topic or issue?
    - To identify shared values between you and the audience?
    - To encourage the audience to think about a topic or issue?
    - To get the person to vote?
  - Keep in mind how the participant will benefit from the conversation
    - Want the audience to be motivated to participate
    - Ultimate aim is to move everyone forward together

- **General Tips**
  - Deliver your thoughts through neutral, non-political sources
  - Speak to examples, especially personal ones
  - Hone in on the audience's interests and passions
  - Avoid jargon / complex science
- **Maneuvering power dynamics**
  - Identity politics come into play (religion, race, gender, income, education, etc)
  - Identify and focus on shared goals to connect with the audience

### ***Exercise on Powerful Questions***

1. Identify a topic and the discussion end-in-mind / goal
  - Both should be relevant to you and the audience
2. Write down several questions relevant to the topic
3. Discuss and rate the questions
  - Which is best constructed to promote reflection and creativity?
  - Which has the right scope for end-in-mind?
  - What underlying assumptions might be embedded?
4. Experiment with changing the form and scope of each question to explore potential impacts on the direction of inquiry
5. Give each question the "genuine test"
  - Do we already know the answer? If do, or have a preset response, that is not inquiry

### **Example:**

- Topic: potential COVID solutions
- Shared goal: end the pandemic and return to normalcy ASAP
- Path to get there: should minimize loss of life and avoid extreme financial loss
  - "Wear masks, GDP will be spared 5% drop" - factual statement
- Solutions that worked elsewhere: testing, quarantine, social distancing, masking
- Sample questions:
  - "What are you most worried about regarding COVID?"
  - "What role do you think the government plays in American health?"
  - "What solution would you propose?"
    - Give the listener a chance to say what they would do if they were in a position of power