

The best answer is often a good question

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Everyone is always looking for answers. Early on, we're nudged in this direction. We get graded on our responses in school. We may flunk or feel frustrated when we can't come up with the "right" answer.

But in day-to-day life, questions are often more important than answers. Why? ¹

- **Questions open us up to more information.** When we have an answer, we may feel like we're "finished." But questions push us to keep exploring. We can actually learn more from good questions than from good answers.
- **Questions keep us mentally agile.** Questions keep us thinking and guessing. They prevent us from resting on our "laurels" and feeling like we know it all.
- **Questions connect us to others.** We often seek out and bond with others when we ask questions. We brainstorm and share ideas. Having answers doesn't force us to interact. But asking questions can be an ongoing, social experience.

Learning to ask good questions

Not all questions are created equal. Here are examples of questions that can be more — or less — productive than others.

- **The closed question.** Any question that can be answered with a "yes" or "no" is a closed question. That's because once you get the answer, the conversation comes to a close. Here's an example: "Are you happy/sad/single/married/cold/warm?" You'll likely get a simple yes or no — and no more information — when you ask questions like these.

- **The open question.** You can't answer an open question with one word. An open question usually starts with words like "how," "where," "when" or "what." The answer has to be more detailed than one word. So you get more information when you ask an open question. (Note: It's a good idea to avoid "why" questions even though they are, technically, open ended. "Why" questions often make people feel defensive and can cause people to close down rather than open up.)
- **Questions that lead to more questions.** Perhaps the best type of question is one that leads us to consider more questions. Rather than supply us with answers, this type of question fuels critical thinking. Each question opens the door to more and more questions. Our world expands as we go through this process.

So don't feel pressured to give instant answers. Instead, follow the thread of interesting questions. You may make discoveries that are far more meaningful than a yes or no.

¹www.ehow.com