

BALANCING INQUIRY AND ADVOCACY

In their book, *The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook*, authors Ross and Roberts explain that Western managers have received training and kudos for being experts at presenting arguments for their points of view and being expert problem solvers. However, they argue, that as problems become more complex with less obvious solutions, individuals need to learn how to listen and ask provocative questions: “They need to learn to skillfully balance advocacy and inquiry.” The key word here is *balance*, because inquiry alone does not necessarily propel the dialogue to action. Individuals need to create an environment in which they each have the opportunity to listen to and learn about each other’s point of view.

In order to be skillful at balancing inquiry and advocacy you will need to develop your ability to do the following (many of these overlap with successful peer coaching competencies):

- Let silence speak.
- Ask questions about facts.
- State and explain your assumptions and the data that led to them.
- Ask questions based on your intuition.
- Ask questions without interrogating.
- Listen without judging for the purpose of understanding.
- Resist jumping to fixing the problem or making suggestions you expect to be adopted.
- Operate from a foundation of caring about others’ growth and progress.
- Ask provocative and relevant questions.
- Share your point of view and the experience it is based upon.
- Refrain from defensiveness when others are presenting their points of view.
- Learn from listening to others’ questions and experiences.
- Ask probing questions to clarify assumptions and recommendations.
- Identify candidly where and why you are stuck or have been avoiding “unapproachable” issues.

WHEN YOU ARE IN THE ROLE OF THE CLIENT:

You have the responsibility to initiate the coaching process. To do so, here are some steps that you can take:

- Explain the goal/results you are trying to achieve in a specific area and what you want to avoid.
- Identify the issues that are keeping you from getting the results you want.
- Reiterate or “paint your picture” of your ideal results.
- Answer questions from your peer coach(es) that will help them to better understand and empathize with your goals and challenges.
- When they share their experiences/points of view, avoid being defensive or dismissive and respond with, “Thank you.”
- Develop (perhaps not immediately) a plan of action that you are committed to implementing.
- Be willing to be accountable for reporting on progress.

“Nothing is so well learned as that
which is discovered.”

—Socrates

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INFOLINE

JOB AID

BALANCING INQUIRY AND ADVOCACY (CONTINUED)

WHEN YOU ARE IN THE ROLE OF THE PEER COACH, HERE ARE SOME QUESTIONS TO ASK:

- If you were the king or queen and could have the results you want, what would that look like?
- Why is this issue important to you?
- What are the key decisions you need to make?
- What would happen if you didn't resolve this issue?
- Why have you lived with this issue unresolved up until now?
- What is working for you right now in this situation? (This question is based on the assumption that something must be working, which is why you haven't made changes thus far.)
- What is not working for you right now in this situation? In other words, what needs to be remedied?
- Can you explain more about that?
- What is the most difficult aspect of this situation?
- How are you feeling about the situation?
- What are the facts about what is going on?
- What additional information do you need to resolve this issue?
- What are the assumptions you are making?
- What have you tried so far?
- What are the non-negotiables in this situation for you? For others?
- What are the greatest risks in this situation?
- What are the greatest potential rewards for you or for the organization if you resolve this?
- Put yourself and this situation on a scale of 1 to 7, with 1 representing the worst case scenario and 7 being the best case scenario. Describe each of those scenarios in more detail first, and then specify where you would place yourself today.