



You are doing lots of good listening and you are showing lots of empathy, but... Do you ever get frustrated when you make suggestions to help someone, and all they say is "Yes, but..."? The more advice you give, the more they play the "Yes, but..." game!

Do you often wonder how to help people get motivated, to take responsibility for their problems?

Would you like to feel more confident when counselling staff about a future career, about problems in their job performance or during a performance appraisal?

THE QUESTION STYLE OF COUNSELLING

Many managers and supervisors believe their role in counselling is to give lots of advice. Our advice is stop trying to give advice! Because when you keep giving advice, the person avoids taking responsibility for the problem. They "Yes, but..." and put the responsibility back on the person doing the counselling. To avoid this, you need to move away from the advice style of counselling, to the "Question style".

The essence of the question style of counselling is that responsibility is placed back onto the person being counselled, to solve the problem themselves,

BASIC STEPS OF THE QUESTION STYLE OF COUNSELLING

There are four basic steps in conducting the question style of counselling.

1. Ask the other person for suggestions: "Do you have any suggestions?", "What are your thoughts about...?"
2. Use lots of questions starting with the words "why", "how" and "what". Examples include: "Why is this happening?", "How can we handle this?", and "What should we do about this?"
3. Use silence to put gentle pressure on the other person to respond to the questions you are asking.

People often feel uncomfortable with silence, and tend to rush in with more questions, comments or suggestions. This is an acquired skill and tough to learn. When mastered, it can be used effectively not just with individuals, but also in a group.

4. Finally, push for detail - push the person to be specific in their suggestions.

The other person should take responsibility for the problem. If they do, they end up more likely to be committed to any solutions or outcomes that are decided on.

An important thing to remember is that even though the question style is better in many situations, there are some situations where the advice style of counselling is appropriate. In cases of an emergency where there is a time constraint, or perhaps where the person being counselled has no chance of knowing what the answer to a problem is, the advice style of counselling is probably better.

But the question style of counselling is useful where there is some time available to discuss the problem, and where the person being counselled can reasonably work the problem out for him or herself if pushed. The question style is useful when trying to develop problem solving skills in the other person.

Be wary of using only the advice style. People with technical backgrounds have a strong tendency to use only the advice style of counselling.

The key to productive counselling is to move more and more to using the question style of counselling - to put responsibility back onto the other person for solving the problem.

Notes from the video training package, *Productive Counselling*, produced by Ash.Quarry Productions and distributed by Seven Dimensions, telephone +61 3 9686 9677, www.7dimensions.com.au.