

Assertive Inquiry Upgrade

Summary

When asking for feedback, there are times when those receiving feedback feel they need to have 'the right answers' and can end up being defensive about any critical feedback.

The atmosphere becomes confrontational, and we lose all the perspective and potential benefits that the feedback could bring

AG Lafley, the CEO of Proctor and Gamble saw this happening in his team.

His version of a method called 'Assertive Inquiry' asked the team to change their mindset when presenting an idea from:

'I am right'

to

'Here's why I think I'm right, but I'm probably missing something. Can you help me to see what that might be?'

This approach blends assertiveness in expressing one's views with the humility to acknowledge potential gaps in understanding. It invites feedback and diverse perspectives, fostering a more insightful dynamic dialogue.

Suggested Application

- Before getting feedback on an idea, **state openly to the team that you intend to use the Assertive Enquiry approach**
- Explain that you appreciate all of their perspectives and would like to explore them
- Where there is feedback that you initially disagree with, you'd still like to explore it with that person, and ask clarifying questions to understand their viewpoint
- Encourage them to speak honestly and openly about your idea. You've come because you want to improve it, and their perspectives are valuable in order to do that.
- **When listening to the views of others, take the time to paraphrase back to them what you think they are saying**, to ensure that you have a true understanding of their point

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Reflection Questions

- **Personal Reflection:** How do you typically approach receiving feedback? Do you find it more natural to assert your own viewpoint, to inquire about others' perspectives, or a balance of both?
- **Mindset Shift:** Reflect on a recent situation where you were certain of your viewpoint. How might the outcome have been different if you had approached it with the mindset of "I think I'm right, but I'm probably missing something"?
- **Impact on Relationships:** How do you think adopting this mindset could impact your relationships with colleagues, clients, or team members?
- **Practical Application:** Can you think of a current or upcoming situation where you can apply this mindset? How would you apply it?
- **Critical Feedback:** Have you ever experienced a situation where someone else's critical feedback, which you initially disagreed with, turned out to be valuable? How did that change your perspective?
- **Cultural Differences:** How might cultural differences influence the effectiveness of this approach? Are there situations where it might be more or less effective?
- **Emotional Intelligence:** How do emotions play a role in assertive inquiry, especially when discussing contentious topics?
- **Leadership Perspective:** From a leadership standpoint, how can this approach be used to foster a more open and collaborative team environment?
- **Professional Growth:** In what ways do you think practicing assertive inquiry could contribute to your professional growth?
- **Challenges in Implementation:** What do you perceive as the biggest challenges in adopting this 'Assertive Inquiry' mindset in your professional interactions? How might you overcome these challenges?

Additional Resources

'Playing to Win: How Strategy Really Works' by AG Lafley and Roger Martin (book)