

## GOT QUESTIONS?

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Do you spend much time thinking about the questions you ask? Are you *intentional* about them? Read what Albert Einstein has to say on the subject:

*"If I had an hour to solve a problem and my life depended on the answer, I would spend the first 55 minutes figuring out the proper questions to ask. For if I knew the proper questions, I could solve the problem in less than 5 minutes."*

So much of the work that we do involves asking questions so we can get information, in order to render really great service – whether to our clients, our family members, or others (including ourselves). In this blog, I'll examine the purposes that *great questions* serve, provide some examples of questions that might be great ones, and guide your attention to the kinds of questions you ask and how you might make them even greater than they are now.

We can identify *great questions* by *the results they get* more than by *the form of the question itself*. In my view, a question is great if it serves one or more of the following six purposes (and the more purposes it serves, the greater the question probably is):

1. It yields important information: important to the financial plan, to the parties present, and/or to the relationship.
2. It advances the purpose of the conversation (e.g., develop a plan, produce creative solutions to a vexing problem or tantalizing opportunity, and so on).
3. It stops the person(s) in their tracks, and leads them to answer *reflectively* rather than *reflexively*.
4. It resolves an impasse and/or stimulates breakthrough thinking.
5. It deepens the authenticity of the conversation, the connection between the participants, and the commitment to the conversation and the common goal(s).
6. It reverses the direction of the conversation from southbound (i.e., heading towards the ditch) to constructive.

Do these six seem about right? Would you add any purposes? Most importantly, what are some great questions that you ask, or that you recall being asked, in any of these areas?

Let me offer examples of questions that can produce great outcomes (their purposes are in parentheses and italics). Maybe they will prime the pump for you, and lead you to come up with some great questions of your own:

"What aspects of your current life are so deeply rewarding that you want to preserve or even enhance their presence in your financial plan?" (*Gaining important information, and inviting the person to answer reflectively*)

"You've said that having a larger home is an important goal for you. Paint me a verbal picture of that home; walk me through each room, and describe what takes place there. What does having this larger home *do* for you?" (*Gaining important information, inviting the person to answer in a reflective way, and deepening authenticity*)

"How is this conversation working for you this far? (Follow-up questions: "What would be a great outcome of our remaining time together today? How can we make that happen?") (*Reversing southbound conversation, deepening authenticity*)

"What are we not seeing thus far?" "What does each of us truly *want* here?" "What have we faced an impasse such as this one -- and resolved it successfully? How did we accomplish that, and how can we apply the fruits of that experience here?" (*Resolving an impasse*)

"What if we were to look at this situation the way (insert name of creative thinker here) would? What would see that we are not yet seeing?" (*Stimulating breakthrough thinking*)

I bet you have your own favorite, tried-and-true questions that you use to achieve one or more of those six purposes. Can you use any of the above questions to stimulate your own great thinking about great questions? If so, and if reading this blog has (a) led you to value your own best questions, (b) sensitized you to the questions you hear and those you ask and (c) given you some ideas for playing with great questions, then it's done its job.

Parting thoughts: *All our questions should count; there's no room for "filler" questions, or for "just askin'."*

So: Got *great* questions?