



FUNCTIONAL COMMUNICATION PART 1

ADVOCACY AND ENQUIRY

Advocacy and enquiry are both needed for functional communication. If either are absent, the tone and then the effectiveness of the communication will deteriorate. As a basic distinction, advocacy is telling, and enquiry is asking. More specifically, advocating involves proposing something whereas enquiry is concerned with finding something out. When you advocate you are giving voice to a view or opinion, and this is most clearly done when you explain why you are proposing what you are saying. The same is true of enquiry, where an explanation of why you are making your enquiry will help others understand what you are seeking.

It is worth clarifying the difference between asking questions and enquiry. Most questions embody an opinion and are advocacy rather than enquiry. “It’s a hot day, isn’t it?” is an example of advocacy through a question. Another is “You would not trust him, would you?”. The feel of such questions leads you to agree or disagree with the position advocated. Enquiry, on the other hand, leads you to pause and search for a response. This means searching internally for the response that may be most appropriate to the enquiry. A question that takes the form of enquiry is one where you do not know the answer beforehand, and you want to know the answer. Such a question leads to clarification or discovery. First-hand learning is a particularly valuable source of enquiry, as is apprenticeship, where you watch, listen and notice – generally without asking questions. Things can be learnt in this way that are more subtle than can be put into words. In comparison, enquiring by asking questions can be a lazy way of learning. Rather than watching and learning for yourself, a question may be an attempt at a short cut to get the answer without doing the thinking involved to get to that answer.

One could say that questioning prompts memory, whereas enquiry prompts thinking. You may be enquiring to find out for yourself, whilst in coaching the enquiry, and the questions asked, may be primarily intended to help another person discover things. In Dialogue enquiry is helpful when it reveals the different dispositions, views, and opinions of the participants. There may be a range of information, interpretation, and knowledge on any matter. A check-in is a simple example of this. One aim of a Dialogue is to fill out the picture sufficiently for people to hold a common meaning and a common story about things. That may involve asking about things that it would help you to know. Another is to allow new understanding to emerge through a flow of meaning between all the participants. This may lead us into new territory as we enquire into things you didn’t realise that you didn’t know.

The quality of good advocacy and good enquiry depends on the level of attention given. It is a matter of proprioceptive awareness. Listening to yourself speaking, when you do, and following the movements of your own thinking as well as the response in the room, deepens the experience significantly. In this way you become a part of the live flow - rather than separating yourself from others, who are then more like your audience listening to your past thoughts. In this spirit, good enquiry requires the curiosity to get behind the initial understanding, and the courage to reveal what is found. Good advocacy, on the other hand requires the wisdom to weigh up what lies behind a position, and the resilience to stand still to discover its value as it lands with others.

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