

The 5 Levels of Questioning Maturity Model

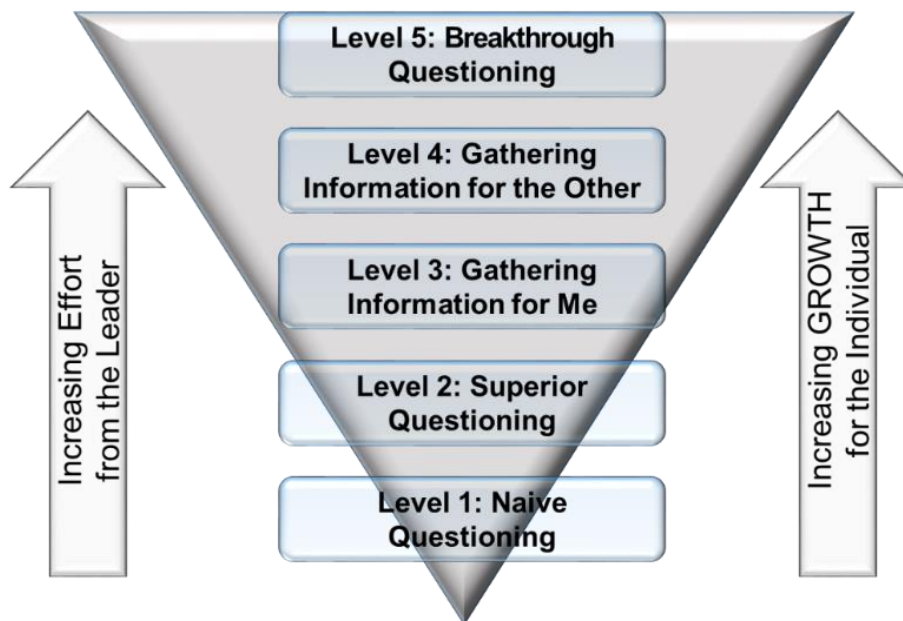


Figure 1: The 5 Levels of Questioning Maturity Model. Copyright Mike Denison, 2023

Level 1: Naive Questioning – When we ask questions, and because we have thought we should ask a question, but there is little thought as to how to apply the question or knowing the purpose of the question other than just getting an answer – these questions are often closed, limiting, sometime leading and whilst there a question they really have no value towards developing someone’s thinking capability, for example:

What were you thinking when you did that? or Have you got what you need? or Will you...? Can you...? Did you...? Is there...? Can we...? Do you...? Must we...? Have you...? Has the...?

These types of question are what I call limited questions, even judgemental or leading. They do not “open up” the thinking process, they are often closed with very little thinking involved to answer

Level 2: Superior Questioning – When we ask questions to present that we are more intelligent, more an expert that we know more than the other person, in some cases to basically put the other person down with the question, or to show how superior we are.

For example: *Have you changed the.....? or You have got the..... ready for Friday haven’t you? or Is it the? What have you done to ensure or confirm.....?*

For some leaders, asking these kinds of question is often a subconscious act and not meant with any intention other than to help, but for the person being asked, it comes across as the leader knows the answer or best way and there is little or no deep thinking involved. These types of question can make someone feel inferior or that even if they have thought about the situation that they should follow what the leader has advised in the question. They are like a

wolf in sheep's clothing, they are often leading and imply a fixed action but posed in a question.

Level 3: Gathering Information for Me Questioning – This is when we ask questions to gather information so I can think through and solve the problem. This kind of questioning is focused on me and ensuring I understand something fully, even though they are good questions, the intention is for me as a leader to show I can work out a best solution. We use the right kinds of question, but because the intent is to grasp information about a situation for me to do the analysis, and come up with a solution or decision, it does not create the space for someone to think deeply about how they might work out a meaningful answer or decision.

Examples: *What happened when.....? Where did it happen.....? Who was involved, or who did it.....? When did it happen.....? Why did it happen.....? How many.....? How much.....? How long.....? How did you.....?*

Moving up from level 3 into level 4, we are now entering the space of another's learning through thinking.

Level 4: Gathering Information for the other person to learn and grow from Questioning – When we ask questions to gather information so that the other person has to think and become more aware of a situation and can find options and ways to solve the problem or move forward on their own.

These questions are designed to expand someone's awareness. This kind of questioning can seem similar to a level 3 but the focus and intention is more on them and their learning, their discovery and insights from thinking through the questions

Examples: *What do you think about....? What might someone else do...? How might you do this....? What else....? What might be your first 3 steps to start this? How do you think this should work? Tell me more about.....?*

Level 5: Breakthrough Questioning – at this level we are designing questions that deliberately facilitate the need for deep thinking, you always know when you are at level 5 when someone says, "that's a great question" When we ask a powerful question that really hits the mark and causes very deep thoughts and reflection to consider a wider view of a situation that at first was not obvious. You know you have asked a powerful question, because the person starts to search around in their mind, spending time thinking about how they might answer.

Example: *What might happen if you did.....? What would you do if you know you couldn't fail? What will that get you? What do you really want here....? What is the real challenge for you in this? What advice would you give a friend in your situation? Why is this important to you? What is the cost of not doing this? What assumptions might you be making about this? What's great about your idea?*