

TYPES OF QUESTIONS TO ASK

There are five categories of questions that skilled facilitators use to gain greater participation by their team members. These types of questions include:

1. Open Ended
2. Greater Response
3. Redirection
4. Feedback and Clarification
5. Close-Ended

Facilitators typically need to use the first four question types frequently and the close-ended probe only under special circumstances. Each of these five types of questions are discussed below.

1. Open-Ended Questions

An open-ended question is one that cannot be answered with a single word or phrase such as "yes" or "no." Open-ended questions are quite powerful because they stimulate thinking, encourage greater discussion, and discourage team members from prematurely taking definitive positions on issues not yet thoroughly discussed. They typically begin with words such as "how," "what" and "why." Here are a few examples of open-ended questions.

- *How* do the rest of you feel about this?
- *How* will this solution impact you?
- *How* do you want to evaluate this idea?
- *What* are your observations of these three potential causes?
- *What* can be done to eliminate this type of mistake?
- *What* happens if we don't solve the problem?
- *Why* are waste and spoilage up even after our new equipment purchase?
- *Why* are we having problems with our billing system?
- *Why* did you say "step 3" is so crucial to the process?

2. Greater Response Questions

An adaptation of the open-ended probe is the *Greater Response Question*. In order to gain understanding and add depth to the team's involvement, facilitators need to know how to use three words to draw out greater information. These words are "describe," "tell" and "explain." For example:

- "Can you *describe* how we typically handle telephone complaints?"
- "Could you *tell* us more about our customers' reaction to the policy?"
- "Would you please *explain* to us why our new system still costs more to operate?"

3. Redirection Questions

A team member will often ask questions of the facilitator as a follow-up of a remark made by him or another team member. It is important to recall that the facilitator should be neutral in content and proactive in structure. If the question relates to structure, answer it. However, if the question relates to content, consider redirecting it to other team members. For example, a team member might ask you, "Why do you think our costs increased after the new equipment was installed?" As the facilitator, you might respond by appropriately redirecting the question in the following ways:

- "What do the rest of you think about that?"
- "That relates to what Helen suggested earlier. Helen, what are your thoughts?"
- "That question needs to be answered by someone experienced in that area. Is there anyone who has worked with the new equipment?"