

Asking Over Telling: Using humble enquiry to build trust and do great work

#Agile 2017

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Humble Inquiry is the fine art of drawing someone out, of asking questions to which you do not already know the answer, of building a relationship based on curiosity and interest in the other person.



Listening Exercise (in pairs):

Think of a problem situation you're involved in.

For 2 minutes: one person talks, other listens silently and notices which level they are listening at

Reverse roles

Discuss with your partner:

How did it feel to be really listened to?

How did this exchange differ from intro session at start?

What did you notice about your listening?



What is humility?

- 1
- 2
- 3



Pair discussion (pick a different partner than last time):

Think of people in your life you admire and respect.

What types of humility do you feel toward them?

What do you think, feel and do that expresses this humility?

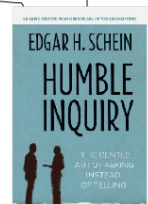
Connect the different types of listening with the people you admire and respect.

How do they pay attention to you and others?



Humble Inquiry maximizes my curiosity and interest in the other person and minimizes bias and preconceptions about the other person. I want to access my ignorance and ask for information in the least biased and threatening way. I do not want to lead the other person or put him or her into a position of having to give a socially acceptable response. I want to inquire in the way that will best discover what is really on the other person's mind. I want others to feel that I accept them, am interested in them, and am genuinely curious about what is on their minds regarding the particular situation we find ourselves in.

Schein, Edgar H. (2013)
Humble Inquiry: The Gentle Art of Asking Instead of Telling.
San Francisco CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers



The main reason why Humble Inquiry becomes such an important skill is that genuine curiosity and interest minimizes the likelihood of misperception, bad judgment, and hence, inappropriate behavior. In the culture of Tell, the biggest problem is that we don't really know how valid or appropriate what we tell is to the situation. If we want to build a relationship with someone and open up communication channels, we have to avoid operating on incorrect data as much as we can. Checking things out by asking in a humble manner then becomes a core activity in relationship building.

Questions Exercise (whole table):

Arrange the question cards in priority from most powerful to least powerful.

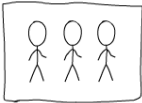
(Bonus) Create a question of your own!

Discuss with your partner:

Think of an opportunity where you can experiment with using powerful questions next week



Why is Humble Enquiry so hard?:



Discuss with your table:

In your work environment, what are the norms about how to relate to people higher or lower in status than you?

What other barriers or supports to Humble inquiry exist?

Which strategies can be used to develop trust in your environment?



The world is becoming more technologically complex, interdependent, and culturally diverse, which makes the building of relationships more and more necessary to get things accomplished and, at the same time, more difficult.

Relationships are the key to good communication; good communication is the key to successful task accomplishment; and Humble Inquiry, based on Here-and-now Humility, is the key to good relationships.

