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Get and keep the job you want.

The demise of Enron has emphasized the importance of getting the right information in a timely fashion. This month's coaching tips, provided by Dr. Pam Erhardt, CCI's organizational development coach, were drawn from Dorothy Leeds' book, *The Seven Powers of Questions*. Knowing how to ask the right questions can help you solve problems faster, make more effective decisions, and help you understand the needs and motivations of yourself and others.

1. Use questions to define your purpose. Prior to a conversation or meeting, ask yourself, what do I want to gain from this conversation? Do I want help, advice, information or commitment? Do I want to develop new ideas, surface opinions or attitudes, or make a decision?

2. Let questions stimulate your thinking. When you find yourself in a sticky situation, take the time to focus your questions. What is the real problem? What are the options? If you proceed in that direction, what are the consequences? If I get this result, will it justify the time, effort or money I've put into it?

3. To get specific information, ask specific questions. "When we leave out the basics, we leave ourselves open to the crime of miscommunication," says Leeds. For example, who has the authority to sign off on this? Where should this be delivered? When exactly do you need this completed? What could we be doing differently? Why is this important? How can we best meet our objective?

4. Discover solutions to problems by working backward. What do you want to happen? What don't you want to happen? What is the best thing that could happen? What is the worst thing that could happen? How will I feel if I don't do this?

5. Build relationships by asking questions. Most people are encouraged to share their thoughts and feeling when the questioner is genuinely interested and caring in their approach. Show people you care by focusing on ways that make them feel important – maintaining eye contact, giving them your undivided attention, repeating important points back to them, letting them know that you understand their concerns.

6. Listen with more than your ears. Leeds tells us that we listen with four organs: our ears, our eyes, our minds, and our hearts. Without careful listening, information can be left out, feelings can remain unexplored, and incorrect information can be shared – which can lead to a chain of decisions and actions with negative outcomes. To improve your listening skills, listen for content (facts), and intent (feelings).

The more time we spend formulating questions, the more meaningful the answer and, thus, we listen harder. Focusing on a questioning approach slows you down, encourages you to be more thoughtful, and dramatically improves your listening.

If you have any questions you would like addressed in future coaching tips, feel free to e-mail them to us. Have a good month!

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