



10 RULES FOR ASKING NON-THREATENING QUESTIONS¹

The key to all effective group discussion is framing the question in a manner that encourages participation of all members, and addresses the issues at hand.

10 Rules for Asking Non-threatening Questions:

1. Ask questions of the entire team. Announce to the group the questions for discussion.
2. Pause after asking the question and allow time for reflection.
3. If possible, especially for questions that are lengthy, write the question where all participants can see.
4. When a participant responds, acknowledge their contribution with “thank you,” or by recording the response on a flip chart. **Note:** Avoid comments such as, “*good idea,*” or “*great answer,*” since you may not respond in like manner to others.
5. Encourage other responses with comments such as, “*other ideas*” or by following with a question such as, “*Any reactions to this idea?*”
6. If no one responds after 20 – 30 seconds of silence, look for body language which may indicate an idea, and call on that person or nod in their direction.
7. If blank looks continue, consider rephrasing the question.
8. Avoid questions which can be answered with a “yes” or “no.”
9. Avoid questions that put others on the defensive. *Example: “Why did no one from X club help with this project?”*
10. Frame questions to address a single issue. *Example: Don’t ask “What are your ideas for increasing participation in 4-H decisions and the ‘Fun Family Field Day?’”*
Rather ask about one event at a time.

¹ Hackett, Donald and Martin, Charles L. *Facilitation Skills for Team Leaders*. Menlo Park, CA: Crisp Publications, 1993.