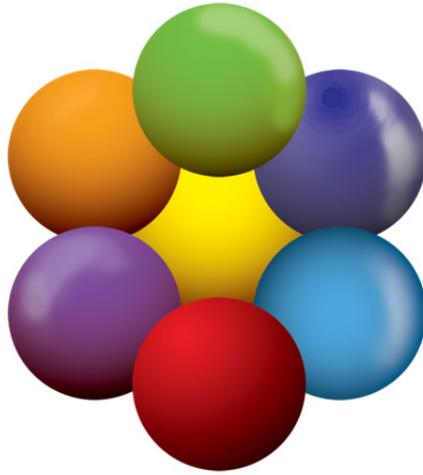


Just ASK's

**Do You Hear What I Say?
Do I Hear What You Say?**

Paula Rutherford



About Just ASK

The Essential Question of Just ASK's Work

What do schools and classrooms look like when they are organized around a commitment to the achievement of high standards by all students?

Just ASK Publications & Professional Development (Just ASK) is based in Alexandria, Virginia, USA. Established in 1989, Just ASK provides products and services for educators in formats that facilitate a shared understanding and the use of best practice in teaching, learning, and leading in 21st century classrooms, schools, and districts.

Driven by the essential question displayed above, the publications and products developed and distributed by Just ASK are used by Just ASK consultants in their long-term multifaceted work with schools and districts, stand alone for use in professional development initiatives led by district personnel, and are often used as texts for college courses. These comprehensive resources use a common language and concept system that makes the standards come alive. Because they are cross-referenced, administrators, teacher leaders, veteran teachers, mentors, coaches, and new teachers can all be on the same page!

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Do You Hear What I Say? Do I Hear What You Say?

There are four main categories of communication skills: reading, writing, speaking, and listening. It is amazing that the ones in which we have had the least instruction and training are the two that we use the most. While we teach and study reading and writing, it is speaking and listening that we engage in most of the time. Think for a moment about your life in the past week. Upon reflection, you will find that you have spent more time using listening skills than you have any of the other three skills.

There are very few really skilled listeners. The good news is that listening is a set of skills just like riding a bicycle is a set of skills and can be learned and refined with practice. The basic listening skills are:

- Make eye contact and hold it.
- Do not check your phone for texts or messages while having a face-to-face conversation.
- Smile.
- Use the other person's name.
- Don't interrupt.
- Listen to entire statements or questions. If you find yourself thinking about your response, stop, and refocus.
- Pause before responding. Wait time is essential in instruction and in communication.
- Paraphrase. We almost always repeat a phone number to see if we heard it correctly. Certainly we should do that when we are engaged in conversation. In the classroom, we call this checking for understanding.
- Probe. Ask the person with whom you are talking for a couple of examples or to tell you a little more before you say, "Oh, sure, I understand!" Do not do this for "nosiness," but for clarity.

That means that in mentoring situations we need ask ourselves these questions:

- Does this person understand what I am saying?
- Did I convey the message I intended?
- Did she say what I thought she said?

If these questions are not addressed, there is often a breakdown in communication. Messages can be misconstrued and misinterpreted leaving both parties or either the mentor and protégée confused, or worse, convinced that the process does not work.



Empathy and trust provide the platform for communication and understanding in mentoring relationships. To demonstrate cognitive empathy and ultimately understanding, one must become a skillful listener. Listening is a learned skill that takes determination and focus. Many people take turns talking at one another rather than listening. We feel more efficacious when we share our opinions and experiences. It is a much easier act than listening and seeking understanding of the person with whom we are communicating. Maybe Stephen Covey was right in saying, "Seek to understand, before seeking to be understood." Do not underestimate the power of understanding how others view the world and the lens through which they process events, information, and authority. If we can predict or at least consider why people react and respond the way they do to us, new initiatives, new directions, conflict, and data, we can better plan our mentoring interactions.

Our life experiences combined with our natural tendencies to process information in certain ways influence the way we perceive the world. When the people with whom we work have different life experiences and process information in other ways, there can be breakdowns in communication. One mentoring hurdle to jump is moving beyond ones personal preferred mode and into the mind of the one being mentored.

The questions below are reprinted from *The 21st Century Mentor's Handbook*. Read through each category and identify your own preferences for processing information; then read through the questions again trying to see the world the way your protégé sees it. Once you identify the differences, you will be better prepared to accommodate them.

Introverted or extraverted: Do you prefer to respond to new information immediately doing your thinking out loud or do you prefer information in advance so that you have time to think about the issues before you have to respond?

Global or analytical: Do you tend to see the big picture and like to have scaffolding?

Random or sequential: Do you prefer to work through steps in sequence or are you more inclined to jump around and deal with ones that interest you in the moment?

Concrete or abstract: Do you want to see the real thing rather than hear about the theory or the possibilities?

Sensing or feeling: Do you prefer to deal with what you can see, hear, and touch or do you prefer to go with your gut instincts?



In the moment or in the past or in the future: Is what happened in the past, what is happening right now, or what the future will bring that matters to you most?

Decisive or open ended: Do you tend to make quick decisions and stand by them or do you prefer to continue to gather information and have several options?

Head or heart: Do you lead primarily with your head or your heart? Do you say “I think” or “I feel?”

Why or how: Which question is the first to come to your mind when someone presents information, “Why is that a good idea?” or “How would that look?”

Observer or hands-on active learner: Do you learn best by observing from a distance or do you need to get into the action and mess around with new ideas and processes?

Research or personal practice experience: Do you tend to seek out and cite research or do you prefer to rely on past experience?

Plan ahead or wait until last minute: Do you finish projects well in advance and put them away until needed or are you inclined to fill all available time no matter when you start?

Internal attributions or external attributions: Do you tend to question the effectiveness of your own efforts or attribute success or failure to the variables that are beyond your control?

Negative or positive: Do you view the world through a rose-colored lens or are you more likely to see problems just around the corner?

Logical or intuitive: Do you prefer to measure and quantify things or are you comfortable knowing without knowing how you know?

Systems thinker or focused personal view: Do you think more about how actions and information impact the complex organization around you or do you focus on the world right around you?

Position power or personal power: Do you define authority primarily by the titles people hold or from the respect they have earned?



After you have assessed your own view of the world and made your best predictions about the person or persons with whom you are working, it is important that you not think that you have the correct view and they have the wrong one. It is a waste of energy to try to convince them to see the world through your lens. The way you present information or data is a variable that can be adjusted in order to promote acceptance, understanding, and action.

You may want to discuss these information processing variables with the new teachers with whom you are working. The information can be valuable to them in their interactions with colleagues, students, and parents.



Communication Skills 101

All of us have participated in multiple communication skills workshops. It never hurts, however, to review the basics. Use the following reminders as needed. When mentoring relationships are not working as well as they might or when conversations and conferences are not being productive no matter what approach has been selected, consider these communication practices as variables to adjust:

- Make eye contact.
- Stop talking and listen.
- Concentrate. Do not be planning your response while the other person is still talking or you will miss part of what is said.
- Do not interrupt.
- React to the ideas being expressed, not to the person who is speaking.
- Listen to what is not said.
- Listen to how something is said. Use your knowledge of information processing styles. (See the two tools related to information processing preferences included in this memo.)
- Listen for external and internal attributions and use attribution retraining to help reframe external attributions.
- Try to identify the underlying cause of any concerns and then match your response to your best guess as to the cause of the concern.
- Monitor your own filters and do not jump to conclusions or judgments. Be sure that different perspectives, generational and experience differences, or language choice do not cause you to react in an unproductive way.
- Put away all papers that might be a distraction.
- Pause before responding.
- Nod affirmatively and make minimal encouraging responses like “I see,” “Hmmm,” and “Interesting.”
- Paraphrase what is said.
- Ask probing and clarifying questions.
- In conference situations, be prepared with notes analyzed, connections to past experiences clarified, and questions and discussion points ready.
- Avoid communication stoppers like
 - “If I were you, I would have tried...”
 - “Based on my experience, I feel that the best thing to do is...”
 - “I told you that wouldn't work.”
 - “Everyone knows that...”



- “Wouldn’t you agree...?”
- “Where did you get that idea?”
- “Everyone ought to...”
- “People should...”

If You Want to Signal That You Want to Work Collaboratively...

- Do all of the above and...
- Sit beside your colleague rather than on the other side of a table or desk.
- Clarify mutually desired outcomes for the meeting.
- Explicitly teach the six-step problem solving process and follow the steps in working together.
- Prepare copies of any materials you are going to refer to during the conference.
- Share copies of units, lessons, assessments, rubrics, newsletters, and others parent communication artifacts.
- Ask new teachers to share what they create with you and others.
- At the end of meeting, summarize by clarifying who is going to do what and when you will touch based again.

If You Want to Signal...

- That the professional conversation is over...
 - digress to personal topics.
 - look at your watch.
 - begin to check your calendar.
 - check your phone.
 - let others interrupt your conversation.
 - stand up and head toward the door.
- That you are just going through the paces...
 - follow only your own script and do not respond to the other person’s silences, emotions, questions, and concerns.
 - leave your cell phone on and perhaps even take or make calls or read or send texts.
 - have difficulty finding your notes from the last meeting or other necessary papers.
 - make notes about unrelated issues.
- That you are taking a position of authority and/or superiority...
 - sit behind a desk and control the flow of the conversation.
- That you do not believe the discussion/meeting provides a valuable opportunity for professional dialogue...



- cancel appointments.
- arrive late for meetings.
- always be in a hurry.
- forget to bring materials you promised to bring.

For more information on engaging in data-driven mentoring discussions see Chapter VII in ***The 21st Century Mentors Handbook***. The chapter features guidance on both planning and reflective conferences with an emphasis on the selection of the best conferencing approach: coaching, collaborating, or consulting. Page 215 pulls together key points to remember when engaging in reflective conferences.



Information Processing Styles Survey

Do you hear what I say? Do I hear what you say?

Complete the survey below by identifying your own preferences. Have your protégées also complete the survey. Then compare your choices. Discuss how the similarities and differences you identify have impacted or could impact the effectiveness and efficiency of your interactions. Save the completed survey to consult if and when you encounter communication problems.

Me You Preferences in Processing Information

- ___ ___ **Are you more introverted or extroverted?** Do you prefer to respond to new information immediately and do your thinking out loud (extroverted) or do you prefer information in advance so that you have time to think about the issues before you have to respond (introverted)?
- ___ ___ **Are you more global or analytical?** Do you tend to see the big picture and like to have scaffolding on which to hang details (global) or do you prefer to see the bits and pieces and then put them into the whole (analytical)?
- ___ ___ **Are you more random or sequential?** Do you prefer to work through steps in sequence (sequential) or are you more inclined to jump around and deal with what interests you in the moment (random)?
- ___ ___ **Are you more concrete or abstract?** Do you want to see the real thing (concrete) rather than hear about the theory or the possibilities (abstract)?
- ___ ___ **Do you live more in the moment, in the past, or in the future?** Is what happened in the past, what is happening right now, or what the future will bring that matters most?
- ___ ___ **Are you inclined to be more decisive or open ended?** Do you tend to make quick decisions and stand by them (decisive) or do you prefer to continue to gather information and have several options (open ended)?
- ___ ___ **Do you lead with your heart or your head?** Do you most often say, “I think” (head) or are you more likely to say “I feel” (heart)?



Information Processing Styles Survey

___ ___ **Do you ask why or how?** Which question is the first to come to your mind when someone presents information. Do you ask “Why is that a good idea?” (why) or do you more often ask “How would that look?” (how)?

___ ___ **Do you learn by observing or are you a hands-on active learner?** Do you learn best by observing from a distance (observer) or do you need to get into the action and mess around with the new ideas and processes (hands-on)?

___ ___ **Are you inclined to seek out research or focus on personal practical experience?** Are you interested in what the experts have to say about the information or strategy (research-based) or do you tend to rely more on what you have used in the past (personal practical experience)?

___ ___ **Do you prefer to plan ahead or wait until the last minute?** Do you finish projects well in advance and put them away until needed (plan ahead) or are you inclined to fill all available time no matter when you start (last minute)?

___ ___ **Do you make internal or external attributions?** Do you tend to question the effectiveness of your own efforts (internal) or do you attribute success or failure to variables that are beyond your control (external)?

___ ___ **Do you consider yourself more positive or pessimistic?** Do you view the world through a rose-colored lens (positive) or are you more likely to see problems just around the corner (pessimistic)?

___ ___ **Are you more logical or intuitive?** Do you prefer to measure and quantify things (logical) or are you comfortable knowing without knowing how you know (intuitive)?

___ ___ **Do you consider yourself a systems thinker or do you have more of a focused personal view?** Do you think more about how actions and information impact the complex organization around you (systems) or do you focus on the world right around you (personal view)?

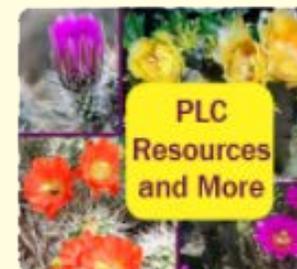
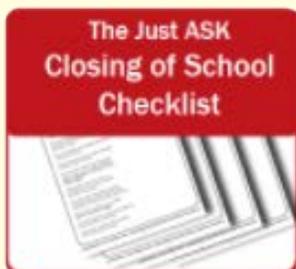
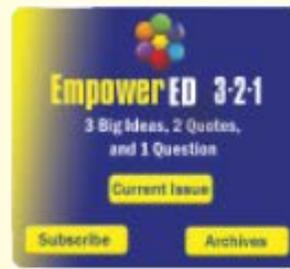
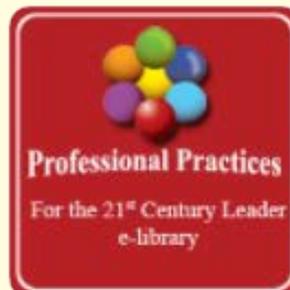
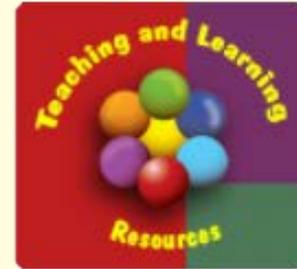
___ ___ **Do you see power as based in position power or personal power?** Do you define authority primarily by the titles people hold (position) or by the respect they have earned (personal)?



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