

Asking Good Questions

Presented by:

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Learning Objectives

- Understand why open-ended interviewing produces better information
- Use “Tell”, “Explain”, and “Describe” questions effectively
- Avoid interrupting or contaminating an interview
- Recognize barriers to effective listening
- Apply Science-Based Interviewing methods
- Build rapport while maintaining control of the conversation

Why Interviewing Matters

Importance of Interviewing

Poor Interviews Create:

- Incomplete information
- False assumptions
- Escalation and defensiveness
- Missed warning signs
- Reduced trust and cooperation

Effective Interviews Produce:

- Better intelligence
- More accurate assessments
- Increased cooperation
- Better behavioral insight
- Improved safety outcomes

Key Point:

The quality of information you receive is often determined by the quality of the questions you ask.

The Science Behind Effective Interviewing

HEEAAR Principle

HONESTY

Avoid using deceit or trickery; be clear, objective and direct; keep calm and leave emotions at the door. Plan. Know what you are willing to share and prepare for predictable dialogue that may stray into sensitive areas.

EMPATHY

Recognize the individual's perspective (headspace/feelings); what are they likely feeling or thinking? Use information from them to explore this.

EVOCATION

Draw out the subject's thoughts, feelings, and underlying values and beliefs. Practice "value-spotting" in language and behavior. What do they care about? This is a deeper sense of empathy.

AUTONOMY

Provide choices and openly acknowledge that it is the subject's right to choose whether or not to share and cooperate. Do not gloss over rights.

ADAPTATION

Alter your agenda in response to the subject rather than strict adherence to your interview plan. Use conversational paths that are open to get to your objectives. Do not abruptly change topics without summarizing. "Follow the rabbit".

REFLECTION

Identify and repeat back elements that are significant and tactical to guide a conversation towards the goal; use these to show empathy and adaptation.

Barriers To Listening

What Stops Us From Listening

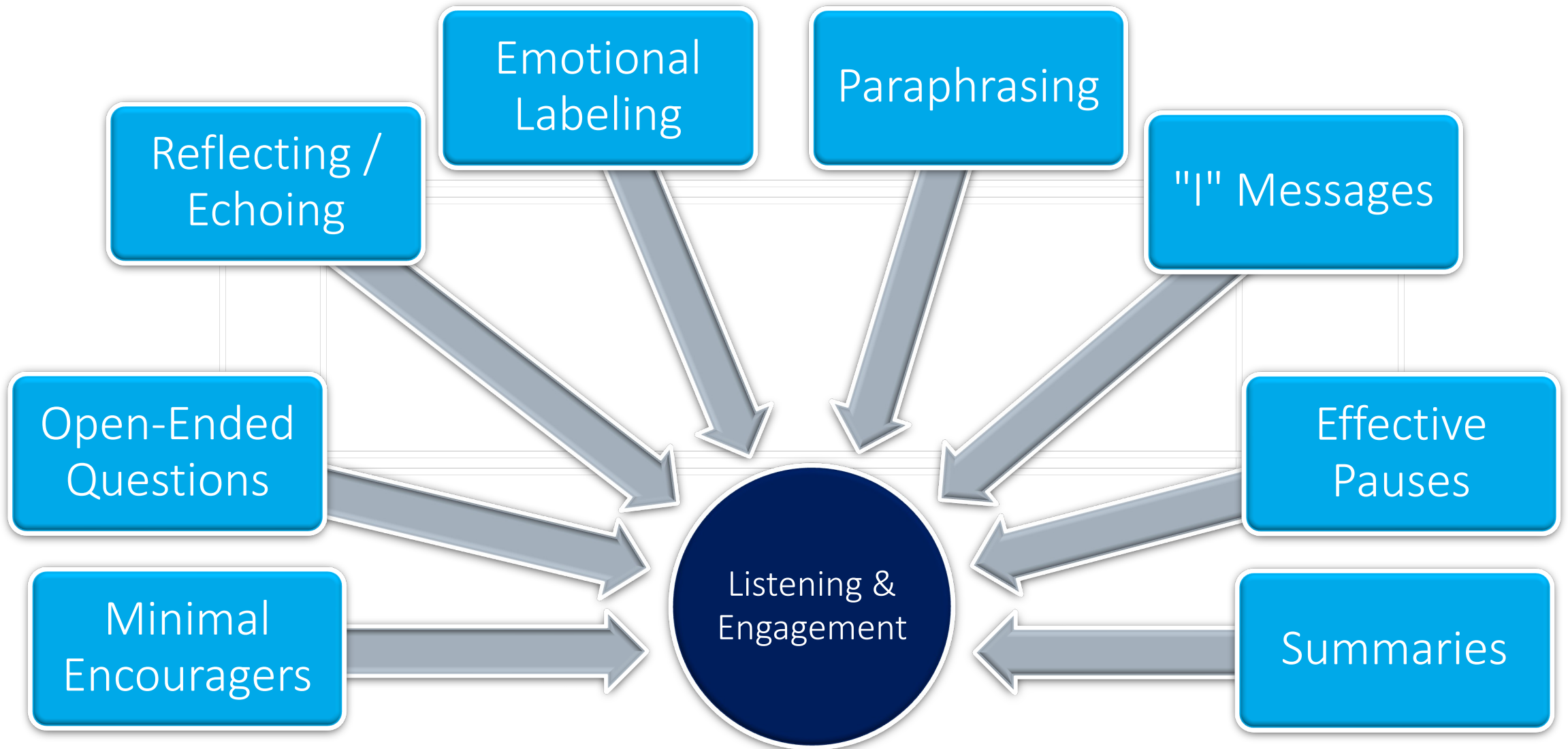
Psychological	Communication	Environmental	Interpersonal	Cognitive	Organizational / Procedural
Stress and anxiety	Language differences	Noise and distractions	Lack of rapport	Information overload	Rigid interview scripts
Preconceived assumptions	Poor questioning techniques	Physical discomfort	Power imbalance	Memory limitations	Bias from prior case information
Emotional reactions	Interrupting	Time pressure	Cultural differences	Distractions from note-taking or technology	Multitasking
Fatigue	Selective listening				
Defensiveness					

Key Point:

Good listening usually depends on active listening skills: maintaining attention, asking clear follow-up questions, and remaining as objective as possible.

Active Listening Techniques

Active Listening Skills: MOREPIES



Question Types

Difference in Questions

Closed

- “Did you argue?”
- “Were you angry?”
- “Did he threaten you?”
- One-word answers
- Interviewer controls

Open-Ended

- “Tell me what happened.”
- “Describe how you felt.”
- “Explain what he said.”
- Detailed responses
- Interviewee provides narrative

Key Point:

Closed questions limit information.
Open-ended questions expand information.

Open-Focused Questions: Interrogatives

Who

What

Where

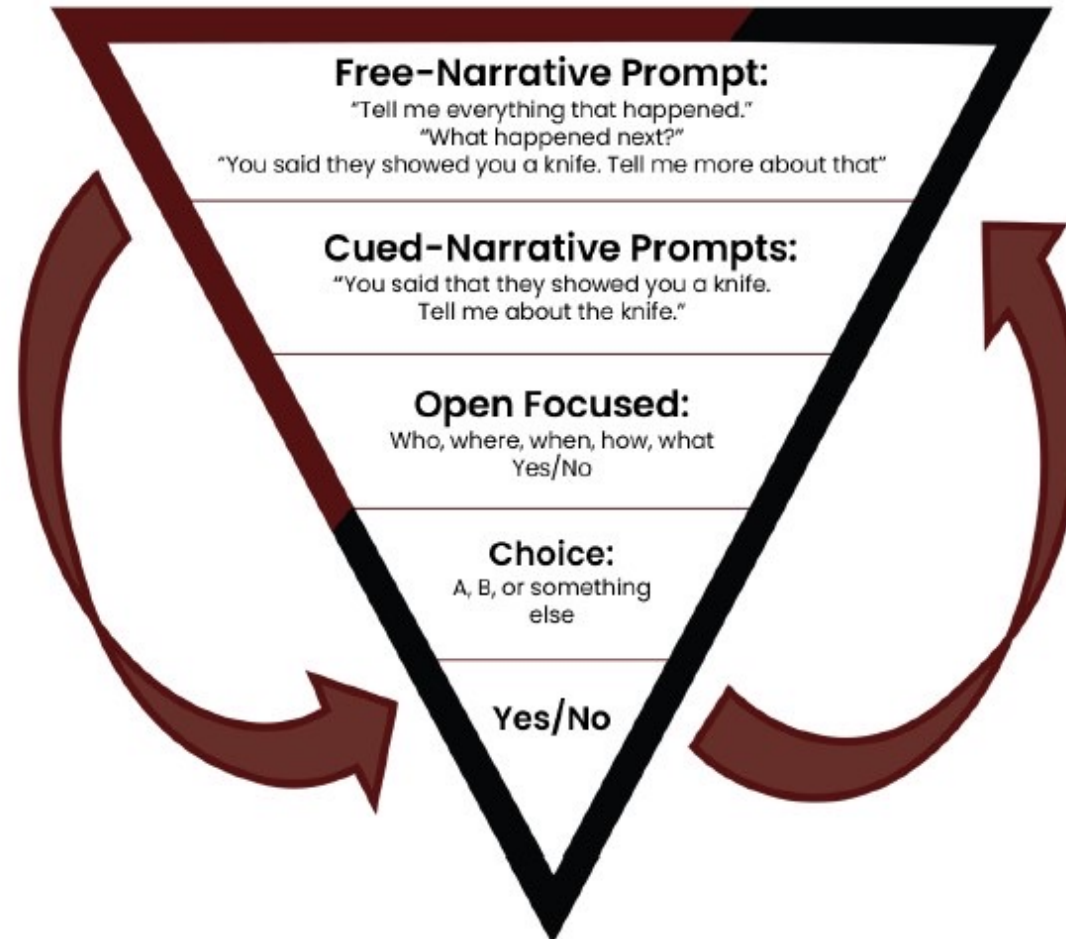
When

How

Why

High Yield vs Low Yield

High Yield



Low Yield

Breadth and Depth

Tell me everything about your morning today...



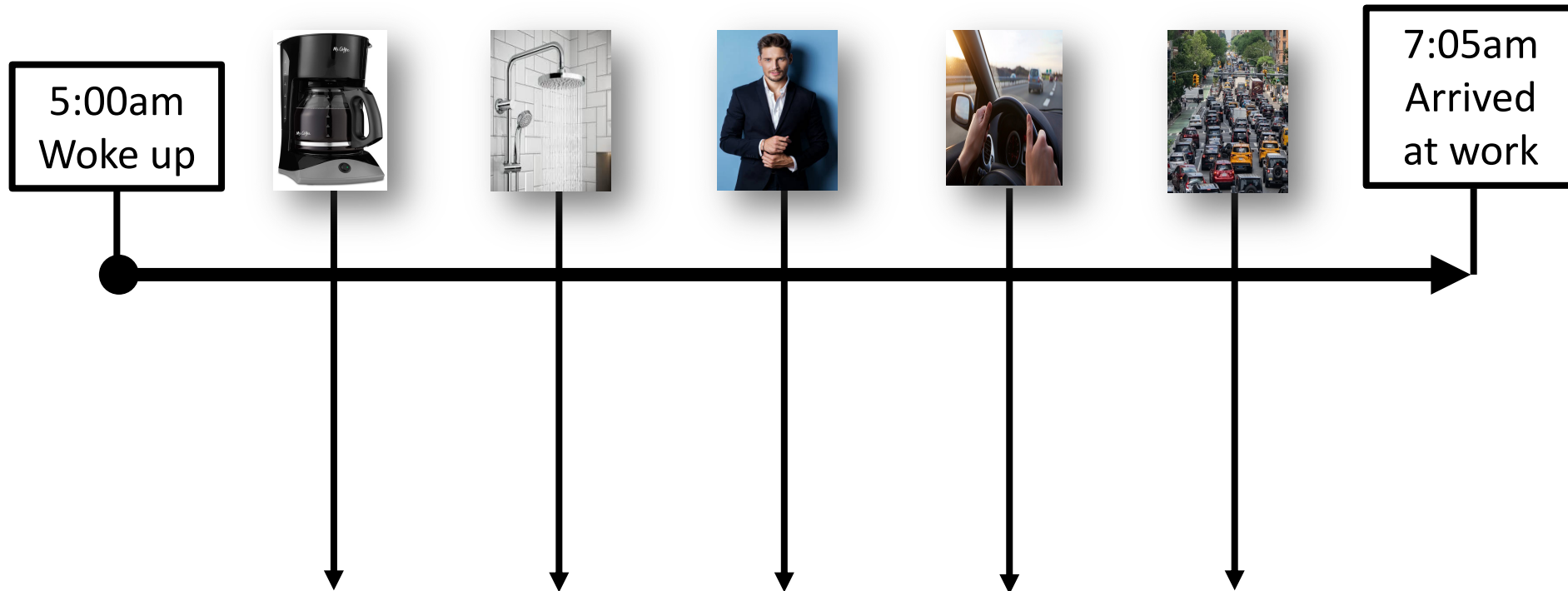
Breadth and Depth

“Tell me everything about your morning today.”



Breadth and Depth

“Tell me everything about your morning today.”



The Power of TED

Open Ended Questions: TED

Tell

“Tell me what happened before the meeting.”

Explain

“Explain what led to that decision.”

Describe

“Describe his behavior during the interaction.”

Why TED Works

Open Ended Questions: TED

- Will often elicit a narrative type of response.
- Encourages interviewees to do more of the talking.

Tell

Explain

Describe



The Biggest Interviewing Mistake

Talking Too Much

Common Problems

- Interrupting
- Finishing sentences
- Asking multiple questions at once
- Leading the person
- Filling silence too quickly

Result:

The interviewer becomes the primary speaker instead of the information gatherer.

Silence Is A Tool

Silence Used Strategically

After Asking A Question

- Pause
- Maintain attention
- Allow thinking time
- Resist the urge to rescue silence

Most Valuable Information Comes

- After the initial answer
- During pauses
- When the person feels heard

Key Point:

People naturally tend to continue speaking to fill conversational gaps.

Cognitive Load & Interviewing

Cognitive Load

- The overall mental demand placed on a person's working memory at a given moment.



Stress Impacts Communication

Causes of Cognitive Overload in Interviewers

- Monitoring the subject's verbal responses and inconsistencies
- Maintaining strategic control of the interaction
- Fatigue
- Time pressure
- Emotional stress
- Excessive multitasking
- High-stakes decision-making
- Managing multiple streams of information simultaneously
- Recalling case details

Result:

Can increase the mental burden on working memory and impair judgment, attention, and information processing.

Stress Impacts Communication

Under Stress, Interviewees May

- Forget details
- Speak out of sequence
- Become emotional
- Shut down
- Repeat themselves

Effective Interviewers

- Slow the pace
- Simplify questions
- Allow pauses
- Return to chronology

Key Point:

Reducing the interviewee's cognitive load can allow for better recall, which may increase the information yield.

One Question At A Time

Single-Focus Questions

Poor Example

“Were you upset and did you talk to him afterward and what did he say?”

Better Examples

- “Describe how you felt.”
- “Tell me what happened afterward.”
- “Explain what he said.”

Key Point:

Single-focus questions improve clarity and recall.

Avoid Leading Questions

Leading Questions

Poor Example

“You were angry because management ignored you, right?”

Better Example

“Describe how you felt about management’s response.”

Key Point:

Leading questions can: distort recall, create compliance answers, introduce bias, and reduce reliability.

Common Interview Pitfalls

Pitfalls

Avoid

- Interrogation mindset
- Rushing
- Over-talking
- Confirmation bias
- Asking “Why?” aggressively
- Emotional reactions

Key Point:

Your goal is information gathering, not winning the conversation.

Key Takeaways

Key Takeaways

Remember

- Open-ended questions produce better information
- “Tell, Explain, Describe” encourages narrative detail
- Silence is powerful
- Avoid interrupting
- Listen more than you speak
- Rapport improves cooperation
- Good interviewing is a science-based skill

Key Point:

“The person asking the questions should not be doing most of the talking.”

Thank You!

