



# Colour Coded for Success

GOOD QUESTIONS GET BETTER ANSWERS | *Part One of Two* : 5 Steps to Get Started

By Helena Kaufman, The Afro News Vancouver

You can communicate so many ways. You can speak, write, gesture and transmit messages with your body language. But, no matter what form your choice of communication takes it takes one of two forms: a question, or an answer.

As a writer I learned early that asking the right questions, and in the right way gets me the information I need. Here are my tips for you to acquire quality responses at work and beyond:

**Listen actively.** Ask one question at a time and wait for the answer. This shows your interest, helps you focus and gives you complete answers rather than partial ones by an overwhelmed interviewee.

**Give reasons why you are asking questions.** “I am here to understand or explore...” and your specific goal will encourage more cooperation and open attitude towards you and the topic. An informed person is less likely to feel defensive when you ask them to talk about themselves or their work.

**Stay open, and again, wait for the answer.** This shows respect for your conversation partner’s opinion. More importantly, you may hear new and important information that you would miss if you think you already know the answer, or answer the

question yourself. In this latter case, you are simply looking to the person to affirm what you have already decided.

**Mix n’ match your questions** as appropriate to the information you seek. Closed question have answers that are either Yes or No. Open questions are more general and will encourage people to give more detail or share opinions. What projects are you working on this week? What plans have you for your holidays?

**Confirm what you heard.** This critical step should be activated during the Q & A process. Even if you are speaking the same language, it is wise to restate the answer. Double checking eliminates misunderstanding. Be sure you heard what the speaker meant you to hear.

With any communication likely to include individuals from other cultures, native English speakers from other regions or non-native speakers who have their own version of English clarifying is key. Add to this the personal elements like confidence, vocabulary and education to the expression of messages and you can see why *step 1 – listening* leads into *step 5 – restating* usefully.

**VIP** – A very important point: Putting people at ease yields superior results.

Next issue, Part 2: specific question types and how to use them strategically to achieve results you want.

Mail your communications questions to me at [www.theafronews.com](http://www.theafronews.com). For now take the full five steps – speak and shine!

*Do you want one minute tips delivered to your email box 3x a month? Sign up at the soon to be RELAUNCHED website: [www.helenakaufman.com](http://www.helenakaufman.com)*

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If you can imagine it,  
you can achieve it; if you  
can dream it, you can  
become it.

–William Arthur Ward

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