

Using PQ & PA in a Non-PQ & PA World

One of the most common questions we hear during the Precision Questioning workshop is, “How am I going to use this when I get back to my office, where almost nobody else will be using PQ & PA?” It’s an important question. Because Precision Questioning’s rules turn the rules of everyday discussion upside down, you are very likely to encounter some natural resistance to PQ & PA with people who don’t yet understand its structure.

In everyday discussion the answerer controls the discussion—long answers have high value, and following up looks aggressive, if not rude. After a workshop, however, here you come, assuming that the questioner is in control, that concise answers are valued, and that following up is expected and necessary! The theme of this Skill Sharpener is to help you avoid becoming the bull in the conversational china shop.

Here are some suggestions for continuing to use your new PQ & PA skills without straining your work relationships.

1. Frame and Explain

Start your use of PQ & PA by explaining what you’ve learned and why you’re using it. Labeling what you’re trying to do will decrease others’ defensiveness and teach them how to use PQ & PA along with you. Here are some examples of framing and explaining:

- “I’d like us to use more precise questions and answers now.”
- “I have several questions to ask in the next few minutes, so your short answers will help me greatly.”
- “This is an area where your expertise will help me, so allow me to ask some follow-up questions.”

2. Use a Conversational Style

As you use PQ & PA more often, your style will likely become increasingly concise. You may begin valuing discussions that use only the essential words. But if your colleagues don’t know about PQ & PA, they may misunderstand you. Here are some ways to keep your style conversational:

- *Give enough context.* Explain your purpose in using questions, so they understand what you are trying to accomplish and why you are asking.
- *Slow down your pace.* The faster you ask, the more impatient you sound. Pauses not only keep the tone more friendly, they give you time to put your best thinking into each question.
- *Be sensitive to your impact on others, and adjust appropriately.* Watch their body language. Are they withdrawing? Crossing their arms? Looking for an exit? If so, adjust your tone, pace, and framing. For example, you may say: “I’m sorry, I know I’m asking several questions on this one topic, but I think your answers are really helping us get to the core issue.”

3. Show appreciation

You know it can be hard to learn this new way of discussion. Let people know you appreciate that they are working on getting better at PQ & PA. For example, try using these:

- “Thanks for your concise answers. You’ve really helped my thinking here.”
- “That was a great discussion. We covered a lot of ground quickly.”

4. Paraphrase with PA

You might feel uncomfortable explicitly teaching the skills you want others in your workplace to adopt. One way to teach PA by example is to provide the precise answers you want. For instance:

- “So I think I heard you give three reasons: 1) ... 2) ... and 3).”
- “You mention one cause, the slip in shipping. Any other reasons for the delay?”

5. Take It Off-line

Asking someone precise questions in a meeting when they don’t understand the format can make them feel put on the spot. If you feel the tension rising in the room and you can’t create a teachable moment, you may want to stop and wait until you are in a one-on-one situation. Progress can be slow. Changing lifelong habits takes perseverance!

Your Plan for Using PQ & PA in a Non-PQ & PA World

Think about how you are trying to use PQ & PA in your work interactions, and how people may misunderstand your new skills. Then use the following chart to develop a plan for using PQ & PA with care in some of those interactions over the next week. We invite you to share your successes and frustrations at info@vervago.com.

My Plan for Using PQ & PA in a non-PQ & PA World for the Week of _____

Person with whom I will use PQ: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Colleague • Manager • Direct Report • Customer • Team Meeting • Executive 	How I will use PQ with care: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Frame and explain • Use a conversational style • Show appreciation • Paraphrase with PA • Take it off-line