

# Facilitate Needs



by Sharon Drew Morgen

**O**UR JOB IS TO HELP our clients find their best answers. We work to understand what they need. We study the problem and its ramifications, call a colleague or two to discuss it fully, and come up with an approach that we think will lead to the resolution.

Sometimes everything works just as it should. The client agrees to a plan, rallies internal support, and helps us implement the solution. Change occurs and circumstances improve.

Other times, however, things don't work out. The client does something different from what was discussed, experiences internal resistance that sabotages the work, or doesn't call us back for help. At those times, what stops clients from listening to us?

## Facilitative Questions

We need facilitative questions to help our clients discover a solution that has full, systemic, buy-in and a good chance of successful implementation.

Facilitative questions are neither information-gathering questions nor open-or closed-questions. These questions direct the client to a search for criteria-based answers rather than information-based answers. This distinction is important: People make decisions based on their values, history, and beliefs (criteria). Information (data, content, facts) is integral to decision making but will only be taken into account when it fits of an individual's criteria.

Facilitative questions teach people to revisit their beliefs and values and align them with current circumstances.

## Three Questions

Our clients need to address three questions before they decide on viable solutions to their problems:

**1. What's missing and how did this come about?** Until people understand

how they got where they are, they won't know how to change. The decisions that created the problem have to be re-examined, or people won't know how to do anything different.

### *2. How can we fix it ourselves?*

People always try to find a way to use what they've got. It's easier and cheaper. Before they will accept the use of external resources—and the upheaval this may cause—they must believe that such help is needed. They will examine all areas of possible help—internal groups, vendors, suppliers—to see if they can supply the fix without bringing in any new systems. Using questions to help clients solve the problem will lead them either to discover an internal solution, in which case they don't need you, or to discover that they cannot fix it internally and they do need you—now.

### *3. What systems issues must be taken into account before support for change can be marshaled?*

What historic practices, norms, or values must be adhered to for people to do something different? Until the issues that need alignment are addressed within the norms of the culture, change won't happen. Facilitative questions help clients define all possible issues and decide how to work best within the system to discover a win-win solution.

As salespeople, our job is to serve clients, not provide them with answers. Our role is to act as a guide, or facilitator, to help them discover what will work to achieve their aims. We need to teach clients how to make decisions in their own world, using our expertise, as one would use a torch—to illuminate the places where the answers might lie. When we do not facilitate, we end up selling clients on our solutions. But our clients need to understand all of their systems and how to align them so that change takes place. And they need to do it themselves, albeit with our help. **SME**

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**ACTION:** Use facilitative questions to help clients arrive at solutions.