

Hilltopping

The 3-Level Questioning Technique

This is a model of questioning which helps you get a better understanding of another's real concerns and issues, of their beliefs and values - of 'where they are coming from'.

As we go through life, we are subjected to many experiences, each building on the other. It is as if we build our own personal hill or vantage point from which we view the world. So, I stand on my hilltop, you stand on yours; our experiences will have been different, and so our hilltops will be too. When we both look at something, our perspective, that is, *how* we see it, may be quite different. Neither perspective can be weighted against the other to decide that one is right and the other is wrong. It is my perspective that is right to me; yours is yours, and is right to you.

The Hilltopping technique looks at levels of **open** questions; the levels relating to how far the response will take us up to the other person's hilltop.

LEVEL 1

These questions are simple data-gathering questions. They are relatively easy to answer, and they require neither a high level of rapport nor trust to be answered.

Examples of level 1 questions are

What? Who? When? Why? How? Where? etc.

e.g. **What** are you currently working on? **Where** are you spending most of your time doing your current work? **Who** is helping you with that? **How** much involvement is the rest of the team having?

LEVEL 2

These questions probe further. They want to know why we do things, what interests us about things, what value we place on things, what things mean to us, the implications. These need more thought and require a high level of entry and trust; we are starting to talk about what we think and feel about things.

Examples of level 2 questions are...

What do you think/feel about? What does ... mean for you? What are the implications of ...? What interests you about ...? What do you get out of ...?

e.g. **What are the implications** for you spending the majority of your day on the road? **What do you feel about** taking this project alone? **What interests you about** managing this project?

LEVEL 3

These questions move to our hilltop. They want to know **why** we feel about things the way we do, **why** things concern us, and **why** they are important to us. These need the highest level of trust and often require a considerable degree of thought because we do not usually think about **why** we value things.

Examples of level 3 questions are ...

Why do you feel that way? Why is that important for you/to you? Why does this concern you?

e.g. You mentioned the freedom that you had when out on the road - **why is that important to you?** You say that you don't enjoy working alone for long periods of time, **why might that concern you?** You say that you enjoy developing and growing people as a project manager, **why is that important to you?**