



Handout: Reframing and Refocusing



General Information:

Reframing involves preserving the context of a communication but altering it in form so it can be heard by more people, and be more aimed at a solution of the problem being expressed. Refocusing is a kind of reframe that changes the focus of attention from the initial statement to a different perspective or to a solution. Reframing/refocusing does not imply a negative judgment of the speaker and/or is from a more neutral perspective.

Examples:

1. **Statement: I don't think we are getting anywhere with this discussion.**

One Reframe/Refocus by the Facilitator: This group has been working hard to try to respond to this issue and it is proving to be very challenging. Is there some additional information we can get that might help us move forward?

2. **Statement: I think the current policy was designed to be sexist.**

One Reframe/Refocus by the Facilitator: It sounds like we need to talk about how this policy affects people of different genders.

3. **I think this team is totally incompetent!**

One Reframe/Refocus by the Facilitator: What specifically occurred that didn't meet your expectations?

4. **I don't like the way this meeting is going. Everybody seems to be blaming me for what has happened.**

One Reframe/Refocus by the Facilitator: So, you would like us to discuss these problems without trying to assign responsibility at this point.



The Ten Commandments of Skillful Inquiry for Dispute Resolvers



- 1) **Never ask questions as a way to make a statement or give advice;**
if you haven't earned their trust enough to be straightforward with the statement or advice, they will likely be suspicious of your question anyway.
- 2) **Always seek first to ask questions to LEARN;**
If not, you risk building your own assumptions into the question.
- 3) **Only use HELPFUL questions to help others discover facts you've already uncovered with curious empowering questions;**
Otherwise you are attempting to influence them to frame resolution in terms of your beliefs, perspectives, values, assumptions and/or rationale, not theirs thus impairing their right to self-determination. The time for imposing your will on them is in an adjudicatory role.
- 4) **Never use questions to cross-examine another person;**
If this requires additional explanation see number 3.
- 5) **Frame curious questions as an invitation to help you understand;**
This is what questions are best used for; make sure your intentions are clearly known.
- 6) **Frame your questions in a way that makes it safe for them to not answer;**
Mediation is a voluntary process. Your questions should reflect that. People who feel safe will be less likely to respond defensively.



- 7) **Ask questions that probe the inner Ladder of Inference¹ rungs;**
This is where interests, concerns, values, perceptions, patterns, expectations, emotions, and needs are found.
- 8) **Check yourself for tone and body language that can telegraph judgment when asking questions;**
if your intent is a curious, empowering question, your tone and body language should not be sending conflicting signals. It is human nature, as a survival instinct, to give priority consideration to the negative when mixed positive/negative messages are received.
- 9) **If people respond defensively to your questions, assess first what you might be doing to cause that reaction, or what perceptions may be behind their feelings.**
It may not be about you, ... but then again it just might be.
- 10) **Make sure you have clarity about *why* you are asking a question before it leaves your lips.**
Self-awareness and conscious competence are the pathways to the Balcony Perspective.

¹ The Ladder of Inference is a theory by Chris Argyris which seeks to explain the sub-conscious decision-making process.