# Being curious and asking powerful questions

Being a mentor involves more than sharing your knowledge and experience. It’s about getting your mentee to reflect on their own experiences and apply their own thinking to challenges and goals. Being curious and asking really good questions at the right moments are key skills to doing this effectively.

Being curious is about trying to really understand what someone is telling you, and in as much detail as possible; this means looking for assumptions (including generalisations, omissions and other inconsistencies) in what is being said and then carefully asking questions to uncover them.

Assumptions, generalisations and omissions are often subconscious things, and being able to get your mentee to talk can be hugely valuable in helping them see things from different perspectives. These perspectives may then provide alternative solutions to overcoming challenges and achieving goals.

Asking powerful questions is one really effective way of getting your mentee to explore their assumptions. Almost any question can be powerful, it depends upon the situation. There are some characteristics that are common to these:

* They are open ended - they encourage the mentee to explore an issue, rather than evaluate it in a simple yes/no fashion.
* They are context and bias free - it is important to try and avoid influencing the mentee’s answers by asking a question that is leading unless you are deliberately trying to lead them to a specific answer.
* They are clear and simple - the more complex a question the more likely the answer is to be confused or unclear which is unlikely to help the mentee develop their understanding of an issue.
* They happen in the moment - possibly the most crucial point is that they can’t be planned. You will probably find that when you reflect on a conversation you identify many opportunities to ask powerful questions that you missed at the time. Experience, and having a selection of good questions ‘ready for use’ means that you are less likely to miss the opportunity.

Remember, not every question needs to be powerful, it may be that only 2 or 3 in any conversation have real power, the remaining questions simply help to clarify the details.

And don’t forget, another really good way of getting someone to talk can often simply be by saying nothing yourself...