

Session #5: Balancing Advocacy & Inquiry

Purpose: To understand the difference between advocacy and inquiry and to learn about and practice the Ladder of Inference. This model explains how we quickly and unconsciously move from the facts of a situation to a conclusion (and why our conclusions are sometimes wrong). This activity will outline how you can use the Ladder of Inference as a communication and decision-making tool.

Secondary Purpose: To understand that as mentors we often need to suspend judgment and to realize that there may be times when it is ideal to listen and not to fix.

Expected Outcome: This activity will help you to avoid jumping to conclusions when leading and participating in teams (including when mentoring) and help you to help others from doing the same.

Session #5 Resources: Balancing Advocacy and Inquiry

The 4 Actions can be combined to create two fundamental action strategies: A line between *Move* and *Oppose* is the line of advocacy or action. A line between *observe* and *follow* is the line of inquiry.

Together suggesting two central actions: Advocacy and Inquiry.

Advocacy: Sharing your expertise about a situation in order to influence how others see thing. It is also a way to be open about what you think and feel, your beliefs, priorities, and concerns, and your needs in relation to the subject of conversation. Advocacy can help build trust through openness.

Inquiry: Asking questions that are designed to solicit the other person's point of view, opining, judgments, concerns, priorities, and ideas. It is a way to discover more about the other person and demonstrate curiosity about their intentions, beliefs and concerns. It can help build trust through acceptance because, instead of judging the other on their behavior, you inquired into their intention.

Advocacy and Inquiry in Practice

Productive Advocacy

Speak for a particular point of view.

Reveal the thinking that leads you to have a point of view.

Illustrate your thinking with concrete examples that allow others to see how you arrived at your conclusion.

Be explicit that the interpretations you make about events, people, or yourself are just that – interpretations.

Be explicit about what you want from the other person

Be explicit that you want the other person to provide concrete ways to assess whether you and they have met those requirements.

Unproductive Advocacy

Speak unilaterally; provide no options for rebuttal or inquiry.

Do not reveal your thinking.

When asked for examples, give abstract, generic, and familiar ones, not the specifics of a particular case.

Do not claim your interpretations or attributions as your own, but belonging to everyone, “People say...”

When asked what you want, be abstract and non-specific in your feelings and attributions, and, if you make any requests, make them non-specific or hard to deliver upon.

Productive Inquiry

Explore other’s thinking, assumptions, and understanding about themselves or about some problematic situation.

Suspend judgment and look to how you might be missing what the other is doing that makes sense. Probe for another’s point of view.

State your point of view and encourage others to challenge it.

Ask: are there any other views? What are we missing? What will happen if we go in this direction?

Look for the thinking behind another’s actions.

Unproductive Inquiry

Ask questions when you actually have an answer in mind – a.k.a. “leading the witness.”

Disguise statements as questions (you don’t really want to do that, do you?)

Ask questions to avoid saying what you already think about the situation.

Ask unilaterally: Do you see what I see? (vs.. “What do you see? Let me tell you my view and get your reactions ...)

Make your own attributions about others’ actions without additional inquiry.

Phrases for Better Advocacy

“Let me tell you where I am right now.”

“This is what I am thinking while you are talking.”

“Let me tell you my reaction to that.”

“I’m uncomfortable right now, and I’d like to tell you why.”

Phrases for Better Inquiry

“How do you see this?”

“Help me to understand ...”

“What am I not seeing?”

“What is your reaction to what I have said?”

Conversational Recipes

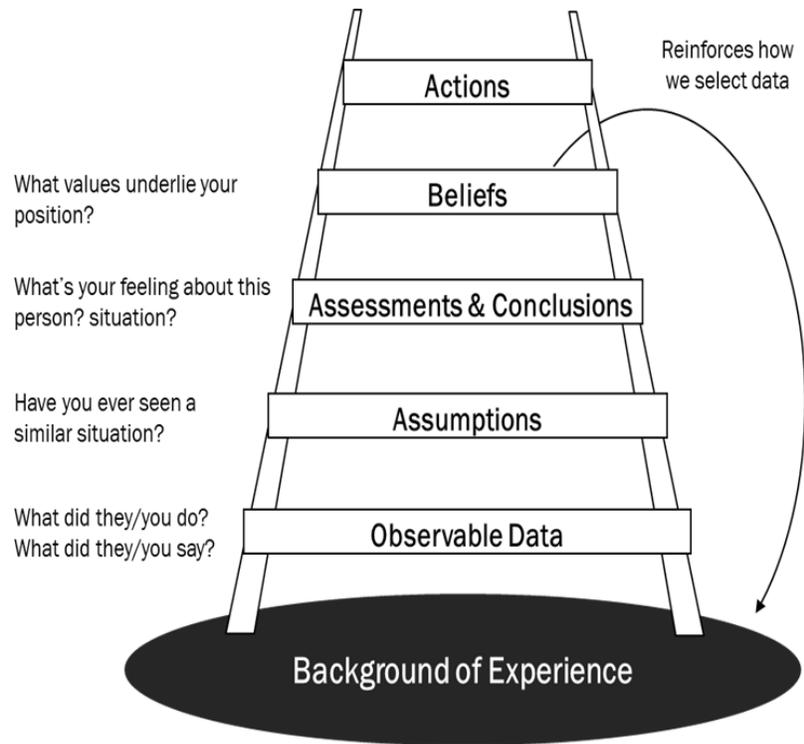
When you are first learning these skills, it is helpful to build a repertoire of phrases or *recipes*. It may seem unnatural at first but when your feelings emerge, it's helpful to have a phrase that will come quickly. With time, as with recipes, you will find that you don't need them anymore! Instead you'll be able to improvise and respond with your own natural voice.

Below, select two or three that you want to add to your repertoire. You may want to consult the list from the *Advocacy & Inquiry: in Practice* handout.

Advocacy

Inquiry

The Ladder of Inference



Using the *Ladder of Inference* to enhance advocacy and inquiry:

- Make your thinking and reasoning more visible to others. *Here's what I think and feel and how I got there.* Share your data and interpretive understanding.
- Inquire more effectively into others' thinking and reasoning. Be curious about their mental models. *Help me understand your thinking. What leads you to conclude this?*