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Leading Questions

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One way of influencing a person is to ask them questions that are deliberately designed to make them think in a certain way. Leading questions either include the answer, point the listener in the right direction or include some form of carrot or stick to send them to the 'right' answer.

Note that not only words can lead the question. You can also lead people by your body language and voice tone effects, such as with subtle emphasis.

Leading questions are often *directional* in that, whilst they do not indicate an answer, they close off undesirable alternatives and guide the person in a desired direction.

Sometimes leading questions are desirable. At other times, they are very undesirable. It is important at all times to recognize them and only use them when there is a deliberate purpose for doing so.

Assumptive questions

Leading questions can use the assumption principle, for example by moving the subject of the sentence:

"How much will prices go up next year?"

This assumes that prices will go up next year - the subject of the question is about how much prices will go up. In fact it is very difficult to avoid assumptions. Even if you said:

"Do you think prices will go up next year?"

...you are still forcing the other person to think first and possibly exclusively about prices going up (If they answer 'no' then this may mean they will be stable, and a thought about them going down may not have been made).

Linked statements

You can also create leading questions by using the association principle around things you said previously and which are still in the mind of the person being questioned (hint: they will stay there longer if you put emotion into them). For example:

"I really hate this government!!...What are your thoughts about the XX party?"

You can also put something else of significant leadership within the question (note the social coercion in this statement):

"What do you think about John Richards? Many people are opposed to him, by the way."

You could alternatively add desirable carrots in the statement:

"Would you prefer to live in Alba or in Barta, where the crime rate is very low."

Note how the crime rate in Alba is not mentioned, but the link of low crime with Barta will still make it more desirable.

Implication questions

Asking questions that gets the other person to think of consequences or implications of current or past events links the past with the future in an inescapable chain of cause-and-effect.

"If you go to the party tonight, what will happen in your examination tomorrow?"

"If you vote for that party, then what do you think will happen to taxes? What happened last time they were in power?"

Ask for agreement

A very direct leading question is where they are closed questions that clearly ask for agreement, making it easier for the other person to say 'yes' than 'no'.

"Do you agree that we need to save the whales?"

"Is it true that you are happier now?"

Tag questions

Tag questions are short questions that are tagged onto the end of statements. They effectively make a command look like a question. They are short phrases and often include a negative element such as 'Isn't it?' or 'Don't you?' or 'Aren't you?'

Thus you might say:

"That's a good thing to do, isn't it?"

Or:

"You'll come to dinner tonight, won't you?"

Tag questions can be used to add a confusion element:

"I wonder if you're feeling better now, aren't you?"

Coercive questions

Questions that force specific answers can include implicit or explicit coercion. Thus:

"You are coming tonight, aren't you? If you aren't then there will be trouble."

"How can you say you won't come?"