

THE EXTRA POINT

BY JERRY ROBERTS



977 Are There No Stupid Questions?

When you first heard someone say, "There are no stupid questions," did you believe it? I didn't, but began to think about the message the person was trying to get across. I'm Jerry Roberts, and let's talk about why this could be important to the place you work, next, on The Extra Point.

I'll repeat the statement...there are no stupid questions. Do you believe that, yes or no?

The late Carl Sagan, noted astronomer and someone who used the media to try to make complex science simple enough for average folks to understand, weighed in on the issue of whether or not there were stupid questions.

Sagan said, "There are naïve questions, tedious questions, ill-phrased questions, questions put after inadequate self-criticism. But every question is a cry to understand the world. There is no such thing as a dumb question".

A woman, recounting a story about an old man who used to answer all the questions she thought were stupid, explained to her, "if you ask a question it makes you look stupid for five minutes...but if you don't ask, you stay stupid for 50 years."

A 1970 Dear Abby column in The Milwaukee Sentinel said, "There is no such thing as a stupid question if it's sincere. It's better to ask and risk appearing stupid, than to continue on your ignorant way and make a stupid mistake."

So, perhaps it's safe to say that, even if you have a question that you feel could be judged as dumb, maybe you should go ahead and ask it anyway.

If you're looking for some language that might lead into your question, here's something you can use when asking a question about your work:

"Boss, I'm working my way through an issue

and I've got a question on something, and I'd like a second opinion. Have you got a minute?"

Here's a way to dress it up, by actually using the term "stupid question":

"Boss, at the risk of asking a stupid question, I've been looking at something and I'd like to run it by you."

If your work is normally good and you haven't made it a habit to ask questions that waste the boss's time, there's no reason he/she will look at this question in a negative light.

One more thing. Whatever the question is, take time to work out the answer before you ask anyone else.

I've had managers who didn't mind fielding my questions, but the first thing they would ask is what answer I came up with. My first boss, Big Ed, drove that point home. He wanted me to think something through before asking for help.

Can your question be answered with a simple Internet search? If so, do that.

Can the question be answered by one of your team members? If so, ask one.

I want to save my best questions for the boss, and then show I've tried to get the answer on my own, and what I want is a second opinion.

This issue of "dumb questions" isn't relevant only at work. At home, kids may also want to ask questions. The good news is that the same basic rules apply.

We want kids to feel free to ask questions, too. Yet, we want to teach them how to work issues out on their own. It's a good idea to ask, "What did you come with?" This makes them value thinking, and that helps everybody. (Con't.)

A couple of thoughts to close with.

One, if you have a question, there's a good chance somebody does as well.

Second, what happens if what you thought was dumb and don't bring it up, then a big problem follows?

I've been in a meeting that was held to sort of "mop up" after something went wrong, and somebody said, "You know, I was thinking about this just the other day." Then, the boss chimed in with, "Why didn't you say something?"

That question was met with pure silence.

I hope something here helps the next time you think you've got a stupid question to ask.

That's the Extra Point. Be responsible and make something good happen today. For 93.3 and the Ray Gibson Show, I'm Jerry Roberts.

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