



## *The Power Of – Truly – Open Questions*

A person at the bus stops asks another: “Can you tell me what time it is?” The answer “Yes”, triggers laughter from other people also waiting for the bus. Our societal convention tells us to answer the question with a quick look at our watch – or phone these days – and answer with the indication of the time at the location we are at.



In this example it is very apparent that we would not answer such a closed question [per definition a question that can be answered with “Yes” or “No”] really with Yes or No, but that we answer to the intent of the question. In more complex settings, it might not be as easy to realize how little information we glean when asking closed or leading questions instead of truly open questions.

Usually, questions like “Can you...?”, “Would you...?” or “Do you want...?” garner responses other than plainly affirmative or negative, but often they already narrow down the breadth of thinking and hence also the potential answer from the other side.

To really open up a topic and push divergent thinking, we need to ask truly open questions such as “What are your thoughts on....?”, or “How do you interpret...?”



I facilitate many classes about giving feedback and coaching - asking open questions is a key element of those leadership capabilities. I am always amazed (as are the participants), how much we rely in our day-to-day conversations on closed or leading questions. Of course, there are many situations where closed questions are the right ones to ask; it should just not be our all-time-automatism.

***Take time to be more selective about which question you ask and when. Have the courage to start an experiment today: Make it “Open-Question-Day!”***