



"The Ladder of Inference" is adapted from Argyris and Schon, 1974

Balance Advocacy with Inquiry

1. Understand
2. Be Understood
3. Accept, Reject, Persuade, or Problem-Solve together
Even when we agree, we see things differently

LEARNING CONVERSATION LEADERSHIP

SKILLED INQUIRY GUIDE

■ **Step I: Cultivate True Curiosity**

- Understanding others does not require agreement - **what is their story?**
How could a reasonable person see the world that way?

■ **Step II: Earn The Right to Inquire**

- **Fill the intentions vacuum:** Explain our purposes: to understand, to help, to problem-solve (not-blame), etc.
- **Demonstrate your understanding** (to *their* satisfaction)

■ **Strategic Inquiry Examples**

- **Testing questions:** “So do I understand you to be saying...?” “Why?” “How?”
- **“Vertical” Inquiry.** The interests, experiences, standards, and frames of reference beneath conclusions.
- **“Lateral” Inquiry.** Other conclusions or issues on their mind.
- **Purposes questions:** “What are we trying to achieve today? In the year ahead?” “How would you define the issue(s)?” “Why?”
- **Options questions:** “How might we address this together?” “What else have you considered?” “What have others done in this situation?”
- **Cost/Benefit questions:** “If we do/do not address this issue, how could that help/hurt you?” “How does that make you feel?” “How could we make this better?”

SKILLED ADVOCACY GUIDE

■ **Step I: Seek Their Understanding**

- **We can persuade after, better.**
- **Offer them a face-saving “role” in the conversation.** They do not need to agree to understand you.
- **Offer appreciation of their differing views.** Even when disagreeing.

■ **Step II: Persuade**

- **Start where they are.** And where you may agree.
- **Share your Ladder:** Advocate from the bottom to the top.
- **Help them hear:** Frame advocacy within their story - their perceptions, values, needs, goals, etc.
- **Use *their* Ladder (data and reasoning) in our Advocacy.**

■ **Make Advocacy “Testable”**

- **As you persuade, be open to learning and persuasion yourself.** “Does that make sense to you?”
- **Test their understanding as you persuade, not just after.** Let them *help* you persuade.