



STRATEGIC QUESTIONING

**Dr. Gilbert Brenson-Lazan - President
Global Facilitator Service Corps - GFSC**

One of the models of questioning I have found to be most effective across cultures is one developed ten years ago by Fran Peavey of Oakland, California, who works with social change activists around the world in what she calls “heart politics”. The model is taken from her magnificent and challenging book *By Life's Grace: Musings on the Essence of Social Change*, published by New Society Publishers in 1994 (ISBN 0865712840).

While Transcultural Critical Incident Debriefing - TCID (see other article) is designed as an effective intervention when there is potential or manifest posttraumatic stress, Strategic Questioning is a tool for individuals and groups to move beyond the immediate survival and security needs, toward fulfilling personal group autonomy and transcendence needs. It has been especially useful in the first stages of social network reconstruction after a disaster, either in focus groups or as part of Open Space methodologies.

Although the sequence can be changed depending on cultural variables, and if the model is used immediately after TCID the first question need not be repeated, I have found it to be very important to use all of the ten elements where possible.

1. **Observation Questions** deal with sensorial information.
 - What do you see?
 - What are you hearing people say about the situation?
 - What do you read about this situation?
 - What information do you still need to gather about this situation?

2. **Analysis Questions** deal with thoughts, logic and conclusions.
 - What is the relationship of xxx to yyy?
 - What are the main economic structures that affect this situation?
 - What are the main political structures that affect this situation?
 - What are the main cultural structures that affect this situation?
 - What are the main social structures that affect this situation?

3. **Feeling Questions** deal with continued emotional reactions.
 - How is this situation affecting your body?
 - What feelings of sadness do you continue to have?
 - What feelings of fear do you continue to have?
 - What feelings of anger do you continue to have?

- What feelings of guilt do you continue to have?
 - How is this situation affecting feelings about your family, community, the world?
4. **Visioning Questions** are concerned with identifying one's ideals, values, and dreams.
 - How would you like things to be?
 - What is the meaning of this situation in your life?
 - If all goes well, what will your collective situation be in one year.
 5. **Change Questions** address the person's view on change, which will greatly impact their strategies for change and how to get to a more ideal situation.
 - What are some ways that the changes you would like to see could happen? Name as many ways as possible.
 - What are changes you have seen or read about?
 - What changes are other people promoting that you are agreed with.
 6. **Alternatives Questions** explore all the different ways to achieve the changes desired.
 - What are all the possible ways you could accomplish these changes?
 - How could you reach that goal?
 - What are other ways?
 - What would it take for you to do XXX?
 - How could you and your group best go from XXX to YYY?
 7. **Consequences Questions** explore the previously unthought of consequences of the desired changes.
 - How would your first alternative affect the others in the context?
 - What would be the effect on the environment?
 - What political effect would you anticipate from each alternative?
 - How would other groups and communities be affected?
 8. **Obstacles Questions** consider the obstacles in the way of the desired changes.
 - What would need to change in order for alternative XXX to be done?
 - What keeps you from doing XXX?
 - Decisions become clear around this point.
 - What kind of sense of what you want to do are you becoming aware of?
 - What is in the way of clarity?
 9. **Personal Inventory Questions** explore the resources and support needed to make the changes.
 - What resources do you need to do XXX?
 - What specific skills do you and your group need to sharpen?
 - What support would you need to work for this change?
 - What can I/we do to help you along?

10. **Personal Action Questions** ask for decision, commitment and a plan.

- Who do you need to talk to about your vision?
- How can you get others together to work on this?
- What will the next step be?