



## Using “Reasoning” (Socratic) Questions

It is said that Socratic questions originated from Socrates and his teachings. They’re known by many names, including “Socratic”, “Reasoning”, “Guided”, or “Discovery” questions.

The idea is to help the person/people answer a question that will assist their understanding and the perspective of others instead of just their own. Having someone come up with the answer themselves is more powerful than having it told or explained to them.

There are two critical elements to a Socratic question which are:

- **Clues:** To add hints, clues, or tips to nudge the person in the right direction
- **Softening:** A phrase built into the question, allowing the person to be wrong. Examples could include “How do you **think** it works?”, “Why do you **reckon** we do it that way? “What **could** the reason be for this”? Instead of just how or why.

**Clues** - Remember, the clue would help them think along the right track and use it to answer the question. The examples below show the clues/hints in **green**:

- “Given that **we need to finish by 4 o’clock** and are currently **spending a lot of time chatting about other things**, what do you think we should do?”
- “Whilst I agree we have had to cancel your move into your new home, how do you reckon you might have felt if you’d got there and there was **no water for anything for a week**?”
- “Looking at **the top of the screen**, and considering we’re trying to **insert something into our document**, which of the menus **at the top of the screen** do you reckon we should click on?”
- “I understand the reasoning behind your behaviour, but given that **your colleagues are also maxed out and had to cover your work too**, how might they feel about that, especially given **your decision not to come in yesterday**?”

**Softening** - Look at the two versions of the same question and compare them to see the softening work. Remember, it’s a way of almost asking for their opinion rather than the “right” answer. This lets them unconsciously relax and not feel pressured or threatened to answer the question correctly.

1. “How are we going to fix this? (Needs the correct answer = pressure).”
2. “How **do you think** we could fix this?” “**What thoughts have you got** on fixing this?” (More about asking for **opinions**, which means far less pressure).

Let’s look at the same sentences as above (in **Clues**) but this time with the “**Softening**” in **amber** and the clues, as above, in **green**:

- “Given that **we need to finish by 4 o’clock** and we are currently **spending a lot of time chatting about other things**, what **do you think** we should do?”
- “Whilst I agree we have had to cancel your move into your new home, how **do you reckon** you might have felt if you’d got there and there was **no water for anything for a week**?”
- “Looking at **the top of the screen**, and considering we’re trying to **insert** something into our document, which of the menus at the top of the screen **do you think** we should click on?”
- “I understand the reasoning behind your behaviour, but given that **your colleagues are also maxed out and had to cover your work too**, how **might they** feel about that, especially given **your decision not to come in yesterday**?”

Let me know if you have any questions or want to Zoom/Teams with a few colleagues.