

QU-Qu: The Questioning for Useful Questions Approach to Therapy

- **The Time-Oriented Questions.** A way of initial and partial empowering of clients within their sessions and letting them choose the current direction of the conversation is by asking them *‘What do you think is most useful for you to talk about now – your past, your future, or how things are for you right now?’* or *‘Would you like me to ask you about your future, your past, or about the present now?’*
When a client chooses... the past, for example, the therapist may clarify *‘What about your past is most useful to talk about now?’*, or he may ask in response Exceptions-Finding and Coping Questions; when the future is chosen by the client, *‘What is most useful about your future to ask you about?’* may follow, or questions about Miracles, best hopes, and goals may fit; and when a client choose the present, again *‘What should I ask you about your present that is most useful for you?’* follows, or else the therapist uses Scaling, Next Steps, and Relationship Questions from the traditional SF-toolbox.
- **The Multiple-Choice Questioning** is a way of providing clients with ‘ready-made’ questions, but still ensures their active participation in the conversation. In its primary form it looks like *‘You know, while listening to you, several questions come to my mind, but I am unsure which one of them (if any) fits you best right now.’* Then a number of (usually two or three, rarely more) questions are listed to the client (maybe written down, sometimes by the client herself), and she is invited to choose the most appealing one to her. She is also warned *‘If you find none of these questions useful for you right now, please just let me know!’* If the last happens, the client is provided with another set of questions until she decides on which one to answer, and then proceed with other questions from the list if she wants.
- **The Mind-Activating Question** is one of the first and most often used Simple Therapy (ST) tools. Currently the Opening variant is stated in forms like *‘You know, my job is to ask questions, and they have to be as useful as possible, in this case for you... (almost all clients agree verbally and/or non-verbally)... so, what do you think is the most useful question you can hear from me now?’* The Closing variation of the same question at the end of a session/therapy looks like *‘Please think about what will be the most useful question for you the next time you come here (the next time you face a similar difficulty)?’*
This question seemingly provides clients with the possibility to state any question they wish, similar to the ‘free associations’ in analytic conversations. In fact, however, by asking a client to **THINK** of **THE MOST USEFUL** question she can come up with **NOW**, the therapist sets a very rigid (Zen-like) frame for her, and she has to use her creativity to carry out this task (to ‘solve the koan’).
- **The Delayed-Answers Questioning.** When a client states an obviously useful question (like *‘What are my resources?’* for example), but faces difficulties in responding to it right away, the therapist may postpone the answer by *‘Since this question of yours is so useful and important, we should not go anywhere else before answering it first. So, please think about it* (handing the written question to the client) *and come back here when you have a useful answer!’*

These developments change HOW conversations are structured – they are ‘*changes in the body of rules governing the structure and internal order of therapeutic conversations*’. Practicing them is ‘*change of change*’, or second-order conversational change.

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THE ADVANTAGES OF USING CLIENTS’ QUESTIONS

Each and every client’s question has at least three advantages over any therapist’s question:

1. It is stated in the client’s own language, so it is understandable to her. Every therapist’s question can be misunderstood by any client, while we all (clients included) seem to understand our own utterances.
Miller, G. (2016), however, proposes another viewpoint: *‘I see the issue of understanding as less straightforward than you. I would say that clients’ own language appears to be understandable to them (this is good reason for asking them to form their own questions) but that upon further reflection clients might discover that they misunderstood what they were asking. I think the key word here is discovery. When the therapist asks a question that the client does not understand, it may be interpreted as a bad question, as a brilliant question that exposes some aspect of the client’s psyche, etc. But when the client asks a seemingly understandable question that turns out to have really been a misunderstanding on the client’s own part, it is a discovery and potential source of insights into one’s self that immediately expands clients’ sense of personal agency, knowledge, skills, and perhaps strengths.’*
2. It is always on time! A therapist’s question may happen to be on time, and may happen to be out of time (since therapists cannot know what time it is NOW for the client), while a client’s own question is obviously always fitting her timeline.
3. The more clients PRACTICE the skill of asking useful questions, the better they become in this. The ability to do it effectively helps clients not only find solutions to their present problems, but also deal effectively with tough situations in their future.

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Simple Therapy

has been taught by Dr Plamen Panayotov
in courses for helping professionals in Poland, Bulgaria, Finland,
Macedonia, Holland, Romania, France, Belgium, Germany, Sweden, and Austria.
Training and supervision are available for all interested persons and groups.
Contact plamenpan@mail.bg or +359 878435014 to arrange your training