

From: *The Art of Focused Conversation: 100 Ways to Access Group Wisdom in the Workplace* (2002). Ed. R. Brian Stanfield for The Canadian Institute for Cultural Affairs. Gabriola Island, BC, Canada: New Society Publishers.

“The focused conversation is a relatively simple process in four levels. The conversation is led by a leader/facilitator who asks a series of questions to elicit responses that take a group from the surface of a topic to its depth implications for their life and work.” (p. 17)

The focused conversation uses questions at four levels:

1. *The objective level* – questions about facts and external reality uncolored by feelings or opinions; questions in relation to the senses; e.g. what is seen, heard, touched (what happened).

This level ensures that everyone deals with the same body of data and all the aspects. The right questions depend on what data is relevant. Ask the questions firmly in spite of initial resistance which facilitates the movement from resistance to participation. (paraphrase p. 26)

2. “*The reflective level* – questions to call forth immediate person reaction to the data, an internal response, sometimes emotions or feelings, hidden images and associations with the facts. Whenever we encounter an external reality (data/objective) we experience an internal response.” (p. 18)

This level acknowledges that we each have a response to any situation. The questions are concerned with feelings, moods, memories, or associations. (paraphrase p. 27)

3. “*The interpretive level* – questions that draw out meanings, values, significance, and implications.” (p. 18)

This level draws out the significance from the data for the group. The questions highlight the layers of meaning and purpose that people ascribe to situations and responses. These questions help people build a “story” of what is happening. (paraphrase p. 28)

4. “*The decisional level* – questions that elicit resolution, bring the conversation to a close, and enable the group to make a resolve about the future.” (p. 18)

This level makes the conversation relevant for the future. Implications and new directions are discussed. The questions allow people to choose their own self-conscious relationships to their situation by naming it. Here the names and titles people give to events or things reflect their choices about them. (paraphrase p. 28)