

# Conquering Client Conversations

## Are you asking the right Questions?

By Neil Osborne



“Curiosity should be incorporated into every step of your client routine, from consult through the basin, bench and on to the register.”

– how do they feel – and how will this new style, cut, or colour help to shape and create that story for them?

### CURIOSITY = SERVICE

To provide amazing customer service and have deeper conversations with your clients, you need to be curious. (No, not nosy ... just genuinely interested). And your weapon of choice, is to ask questions. By asking curious, open questions (rather than closed, judging questions), it will help remove your own fear of being seen to be ‘selling,’ and allow you to better understand your clients.

### Four starter questions to ask a client during your consult:

1. When and why did you hate your hair colour/cut the most?
2. When and why did you love your hair cut/colour the most?
3. Do you use any styling tools?

4. Each morning, how much time do you spend on your hair?

### CURIOSITY = LISTENING

Curiosity isn't just a childhood gift. It's a lifetime habit. But the mental muscle that supports it needs to be regularly exercised for it to become part of your skillset. That same skillset needs to include another habit ... listening. However, you need to listen with the intent to understand – zoning out is not an option – and never judge your client's answers.

### What do you do with your client's answers?

First, you listen. Then you figure out what will work for that client. Hidden within their answers, will be almost everything you need to know – to suggest a suitable style and the products you can recommend during and after the service – to ensure they feel fabulous when they walk out of the salon (after rebooking, of course).

### CURIOSITY = HUMILITY

Great client conversations require that you to talk with them, not at them. Sadly though, we live in a culture of ‘tell’ and find it difficult to ‘ask’, especially in a humble way. So what's wrong with telling? It subtly puts the other person down. It implies they don't already know what you're saying and that they ought to know. On the other hand, asking empowers the other person and implies they know something that you want or need to know. In short, it opens the door to a relationship being built through successive cycles of being told something in response to asking.

### What's the value of open, humble questions?

They build trust. Clients need to feel seen, heard ... and that they are an equal partner in your conversation. Humble, empathetic questions are asked in a neutral manner and come from

a place of authentic, genuine concern for them as a person. They're ones that don't lead to ‘an ask’ for something in return – and they build trust on the client's end, because you've shown an interest and paid attention to what you've been told.

To make the transition from know-it-all to question asker, you need to revive your sense of curiosity. And once you start looking, you'll find it's in almost every experience, every day. Its very presence (or absence) can be the magic ingredient that changes a simple client exchange ... from colourless to vivid, and back again.

In his book *Humble Inquiry: The Gentle Art of Asking Instead of Telling*, author Edgar H. Schein, characterises humble inquiry as “the fine art of drawing someone out, of asking questions to which you do not know the answer, of building a relationship based on curiosity and interest in the other person.”

For me, that epitomises the job of a great stylist. Yes, you need to be skilful at understanding hair, face shapes, hair health, grooming habits, lifestyle and individuality ... but most of all, you need to conquer the art of client conversations.

Ask. Listen. Understand. And be humble.

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Everyone is born curious. As a kid it comes naturally, but it's later buried... beneath your older, busier, multitasking life. Or maybe you've held on? Perhaps you're one of the few who still explores, learns and asks questions? If that is you, your client conversations are probably deep and connected. And they likely lead to positive long-term relationships...

**Do you consider yourself to be curious? To be honest, most people say yes, especially considering that the opposite traits – closeminded and dull – are not very flattering. But just how curious are you? Are the most ordinary of experiences – like talking with your client – often changed, by your innate urge to ask them more?**

If you answered ‘Yes’, that's fantastic. Because to be honest, as a stylist, unless

you put curiosity to work for you, you won't be very good at your job. Huh? You see ideally, curiosity should be incorporated into every step of your client routine, from consult through the basin, bench and on to the register.

Let's find out why...

### CURIOSITY = INQUISITIVENESS

The true power of curiosity is that it injects everything with a sense of possibility.

Albert Einstein, famously said “I have no special talents” and yet he developed the general theory of relativity – one of the two pillars of modern physics. But he also said, “I am passionately curious” which was where his lifelong obsession with questioning was put to work for science.

### What are you looking for in your client conversations?

Their story. What are their loves, hates and distractions? What's happening in their life