Cracking the Code: Chapter 5 – Digging Deeper

Leaders come in all sizes, ages, and walks of life. A perfect example of this is Steve Cauthen, a teenage jockey who made sports history when, at 17 years old, he won 447 races and then took the prestigious Triple Crown a year later. The youngest person ever admitted to horse racing's Hall of Fame, he is also the only jockey ever named <u>Sports Illustrated</u> Sportsman of the Year.

In the magazine's Sportsman of the Year article featuring the teenager from Kentucky, a reporter asked Steve what his secret was to leading so many horses to first place. The young jockey explained that the first thing he did each morning was weigh himself. Every day, his weight stayed between 100-105 pounds. Yet, each horse he rode weighed over 1,000 pounds or more than ten times what Steve weighed.

What he realized early on as a jockey was that he could not make those horses go anyplace they do not already want to go. His job was to help them do it faster than all the other horses.

Steve Cauthen, even as a teenager, knew what successful leaders know. You cannot lead people to places they do not want to go. The real mission for leaders is to help people discover where they want to go and help them get there faster and more efficiently than they could alone.

If you are going to help people get where they want to go, you must first understand how they see a situation, problem or opportunity. To do this, you must ask questions, probe in-depth, or literally dig deeper.

To direct people through this probing process, The PAR Group has developed a detailed question-asking procedure we call NIQCL. Pronounced like the word *nickel* (nĭk'əl), NIQCL guides you through the process of uncovering how others' perceive or feel about a given situation.

N = NEED

I = IMPORTANCE

Q = QUANTIFY

C = CONSEQUENCES

L = LOOK LISTEN

The first letter **N** in NIQCL stands for **N**eed, and a need is defined as either a problem or opportunity. The first step in your questioning process is to identify the problem that needs solving or opportunity that needs capturing.

The next letter **I** represents **I**mportance. With **I**mportance, you dig deeper to learn how serious, critical or sensitive a need is and you establish the priority of the need.

Q, which stands for **Q**uantify, is used to determine the size or scope of the opportunity or problem and to identify how much and/or how often.

C represents **C**onsequences. As you probe, you ask questions to discover the effect or the consequences of what might happen if you do or do not take action. Keep in mind that consequences can be negative or positive, but when they exist, consequences stimulate change.

L is for **L**ook/**L**isten, the transition which enables you to look at all possible solutions and/or options.

NIQCL is a natural, logical discovery process used every day. In fact, you probably used NIQCL several times today, without even knowing it, as you made ordinary business and personal decisions.

Here is how NIQCL works in a real-life situation:

> You hear an awful noise coming from the engine of your car. The loud, continuous noise sounds like a problem. *(**N**eed)*

> Your car noise sounds serious. (***I**mportance*)

> If so, is it a $100 problem or a $900 one? *(**Q**uantify))*

> What happens if you ignore the noise? Will it go away? Get worse? Cause an accident? *(**C**onsequences)* Could you live with that? No! *(Worse **C**onsequences)*

> After your quick evaluation, you decide a mechanic needs to examine your car (***L**ook)* and tell you what your options are. *(**L**isten)*

NIQCL, as you see, is an instinctive, information-seeking process. Here's another example of NIQCL at work, but this time in a business situation.

A co-worker at COMPLAIN comes to you and says, *"We have a problem."* Wanting to learn more, you undoubtedly would question him further, asking, *"What's wrong?"* (**N**eed); *"Is it serious?"*(**I**mportance); *"How much? How often?"*(**Q**uantify); *"What happens if it isn't fixed?"* (**C**onsequences); and then finally transition to *"Got any ideas how we can fix it?"* (**L**ook/**L**isten)

Obviously you can think of dozens of instances like this when you instinctively used NIQCL to review a situation, opportunity or problem. Now that you realize how intuitive NIQCL is, consciously using our sequence should be easy. After all, NIQCL is just a respectful way of helping others think through a situation, and a methodical way of helping you see the situation from their perspectives.

Of the five NIQCL questions, the one most overlooked or, in many cases, the one question most often not asked is **C**onsequences. Yet, knowing the consequences of an action is what usually determines the value or the willingness of a person to act or not to act.

Take dieting for example. Most everyone knows how important counting calories and carbs, limiting sugar intake, and eating right are toward healthy living. Yet, rarely does someone start living healthy or go on a diet because of long term health reasons. The consequences of not eating healthy - i.e. a heart attack, an upcoming class reunion, a vacation to the beach or a new bathing suit - are what usually drive someone to counting calories or a adopting a healthier life style.

Consequences motivate people in business, too. The Y2K computer bug is a classic business example of motivation by consequence. For three decades, information technology specialists knew that the software used by most mainframe systems had been programmed with a potential glitch that could stop those systems from working when the computers' date changed from December 31, 1999 to January 1, 2000.

Most CIO's and technology directors in the 1970's, 1980's and a great deal of the 1990's did nothing about Y2K because the consequences and the impact of the Y2K bug were far into the future. But as the year 2000 neared, businesses realized that the consequences of not repairing the Y2K glitch could result in all computers shutting down when the date turned to January 1, 2000.

The possibility of dire Y2K consequences motivated companies, CIO's, governments and everyday people into action. Businesses spent billions on computer software updates and upgrades to correct the Y2K bug. Worldwide, people stocked extra water and food supplies, bought generators, and kept additional cash on hand. The United States government even grounded 75% of all air traffic on January 1, 2000. People

took action but only after they understood what the consequences were and those consequences were imminent.

NIQCL helps you determine consequences. By using **N**eed, **I**nformation and **Q**uantify, you can uncover the information you need to identify the **C**onsequences and size up a situation so that you can formulate solutions, ideas, or suggestions that will help you achieve your goal.

Here is another example of NIQCL used to probe for more information. You are assigned the job of finding out why a co-worker or employee is having a problem with a particular task. If you ask a general question such as, *"How is everything?"* the answer you are likely to hear is *"Fine."* But what if, instead of starting off with, *"How is everything?"*, you tried a different, more specific approach, like this:

> *What are you trying to accomplish? (**N**eed)*
>
> *What the biggest obstacle? (**N**eed)*
>
> *Is there anything else? (**I**mportance)*
>
> *Of those two issues, which is most critical? (**I**mportance)*
>
> *How often does that happen? How many times a day? (**Q**uantify)*
>
> *How much does it cost? (**Q**uantify)*
>
> *What happens if that isn't fixed? Or what happens if that is fixed?" (**C**onsequences)*

Sometimes, as this conversation illustrates, you have to ask several questions to get the information you need.

Asking the NIQCL questions in order is not always necessary because the order you ask the questions is secondary to your making the interaction conversational. Remember that what you are looking for are answers to help you understand the reasons behind a person's perception or point of view.

NIQCL is the tool leaders use to learn more about their followers. For example, in almost every PAR session we conduct, a manager will ask us, *"How do I motivate my people?"* Each time we hear that question, we know right away that the manager who asked that does not know enough about his people, because if he did, he would KNOW what motivates his employees.

Finding out what motivates someone should only take a five or ten minute conversation. A What-Motivates-You conversation, one every manager should have several times a year with his team members, could go like this:

> *"I just wanted to take a few minutes to talk about you. What do you like about what you are currently doing? (**N**eed)*
>
> *Have you thought about what you would like to do next?* (For new people or people just starting their new position the goal maybe to survive, but that will change as they grow accustom to the position.) *(**N**eed)*
>
> *What do you need in order to make that a reality? (**N**eed)*
>
> *Anything else? (**I**mportance)*
>
> *What makes sense to focus on first? (**I**mportance)*
>
> *Have you put any numbers or scope to it yet? (**Q**uantify)*
>
> *Once you reach that, what would that allow you to achieve?" (**C**onsequences)*
>
> *Let us look at some ways to make that happen. (**L**ook/**L**isten)*

NIQCL can be especially useful for managers to gather information on motivating their associates. After all, every employee – from stockroom clerk to CEO – becomes highly motivated when he understands how a project or assignment will help him get where he wants to go – to a higher salary, promotion, telecommuting, more responsibility, etc.

As you use NIQCL to delve deeper, remember there is a difference between scope and quantity. Also, not all information you receive from other people is easily quantifiable. A perfect example of this occurred in one of our PAR sessions when two programmers practiced using NIQCL in a conversation. The first programmer expressed his fear of speaking before a group at an upcoming meeting. The second programmer responded by asking, *"How scared are you?"* Then, he expanded hands and arms out, bit by bit, asking, *"Are you this scared? Or this scared? Or this scared?"*

Because fear is not easily quantifiable, a more probing conversation, one that would provide the information needed to help the soon-to-be presenter overcome his fears, might go like this:

> *Have you ever presented before? (**Q**uantify)*
>
> *How big is the group you are talking to? (**Q**uantify)*

*How long is your presentation? (**Q**uantify)*

*How well do you know the information you are presenting? (**C**onsequences)*

*Who will be in the audience? (**C**onsequences)*

*Do you have to demonstrate any technology? (**C**onsequences)*

*Is your presentation being filmed? (**C**onsequences)*

As you see, these answers do more than just quantify; they probe for both positive and negative consequences. The consequences revealed through this interaction could help the two programmers to transition to options (**L**ook/**L**isten) that would mitigate or eliminate some of the potential speaker's fear.

When you use NIQCL for probing, your ultimate goal is to obtain the other person's point of view. Remember that you are not using your questions to influence the other person to see your view point. You are probing to learn the other person's perception, and when you ask questions with this in mind, your questions have integrity.

Sometimes asking questions can sound like an interrogation so you need to respect and acknowledge the other person's answers before asking the next question. If you fail to show respect, people will think you are trying to trap them into answers or to accept your ideas. When people sense a trap, they generally shut down and end the conversation. Respecting other people's viewpoints and acknowledging the answers they give are crucial. By doing so, you open conversations and builds trust.

When used as part of conversational rapport, NIQCL helps individuals and teams solve problems productively and create teamwork with customers, associates, employees, managers or executives. NIQCL is a proven tool that works just as well in the boardroom as it does in management meetings, on customer service calls, or on the shop floor. In fact, the more you use NIQCL in business, the more you will see that our PAR questioning process is effective in non-business situations as well.

A participant in one of our training sessions recounted how the PAR probing skills had helped her at home with her eight-year-old daughter. As she was getting her daughter ready for school, her daughter suddenly said, "*I don't want to go to school today because everybody always picks on me.*"

The mother said her first impulse was to march down to the school and find out what the problem was. Then she remembered the discussion we had in our sessions about acknowledging and probing in some depth. Using what she had learned, the mother acknowledged and probed deeper. What she uncovered was that the day

before her eight-year-old and best friend had a slight disagreement, one that probably would resolve itself at school that day. By acknowledging and probing in depth, the mother avoided a great deal of needless stress.

You can also use NIQCL as a tool for bringing people up-to-speed quickly on a situation. NIQCL works especially well for presenting a plan, action or decision goal to an audience that is unfamiliar with that plan or goal. Instead of immediately opening the presentation with a recommendation, you can utilize the NIQCL five step process to establish a mutual perception of the needs for your solution or recommendation.

In our PAR classes, to demonstrate how NIQCL works as a guide for presentations, we use two different examples. The first illustrates how NIQCL can introduce an opportunity, and the second shows NIQCL communicating a problem.

1. OPPORTUNITY

*"As you know, our department has been studying <u>opportunities</u> for expansion into new international markets. On the basis of our research and confirmed economic projections by the U.S. State Department, we find our most interesting <u>opportunities</u> for the next five years to be in Canada and Brazil." (**N**eed)*

*"Of the twenty top countries we analyzed, the most <u>important</u> growth markets in terms of sheer size are China, Japan and Brazil, in that order. However, Canada and Brazil become <u>priorities</u> when ease of entry into the market is considered. (**I**mportance)*

*"The <u>numbers</u> are impressive. Canada is approximately 10% of our domestic market, meaning $50 million in sales potential annually, based on a 12% market share. The market in Brazil is nearly the same as Canada, but Brazil has less than half the competition for our types of products and services." (**Q**uantify)*

*"The positive <u>consequences</u> are more than long-term gain. Because we already have a manufacturing facility and several affiliate marketing organizations in each country, we could be operating within eighteen months. The negative <u>consequence</u> of not moving now is that we risk government restrictions if our competitors move in ahead of us with manufacturing investments. That is very likely to happen in Brazil." (**C**onsequences)*

*"So with that in mind, what I'd like to <u>show</u> you today is how we could go about expanding into those markets." (**L**ook)*

2. PROBLEM

*"Most of the potential customers coming through our call centers are booking appointments, but then they fail to show up to those appointments. These 'no-shows' are driving up costs at our locations since we are staffing our centers in expectation of the scheduled customers." (**N**eed)*

*"Our call centers are an important aspect of new business because they represent 20% of our projected new business for this year." (**I**mportant)*

*"If you look at the <u>numbers</u>, the booking rate is 60% of the call volume of 1000 calls per month. Yet only 20% of the customers who book actually show up, giving us 480 no-shows. If we could double the number of customers who show up and multiply that number against the closure rate at our centers and typical sales volume – 120 customers x $4,000 x 50% closure rate x 12 months – we would experience over $2.8 million in new sales."(**Q**uantify)*

*"However, if we do nothing, we will lose millions just on our top line. The losses are even worse when we add in the additional overhead we have in anticipation of customers that don't show up." (**C**onsequences)*

*"I have some ideas on how we can improve call center effectiveness. Let me share them with you, and then you decide if we should implement them." (**L**ook)*

When used to present a problem, as in the above example, NIQCL brings out facts and figures that enable audiences to better analyze a situation. Without seeing the numbers multiplied and added, the audience may not see the seriousness of a problem or be open to hearing a recommendation for change.

One of the universal concerns in business today is the inability to see situations from other points of view. However, our clients tell us that when they use NIQCL, they are better able to understand how other people perceive a situation or feel about an issue.

What we have found is, that for most PAR clients, NIQCL soon becomes part of their every day business and personal lives. They use NIQCL when they analyze problems, when they want to see issues from others' points of view, and when they make presentations. NIQCL also helps them, our clients say, when they need to evaluate options and determine how to solve problems or opportunities without creating any new problems.

Two important points to remember from this chapter are that NIQCL is a tool to use to dig deeper for facts and that the NIQCL process is an essential part of PAR's **P**robing skills. Learning more about a person or situation, knowing a person's

momentary emotion, and knowing how to establish rapport are the building blocks of the **P**AR skill set. Once you understand and make these **P**robing skills your own, you are ready to move on to **A**ligning, which we detail in Chapter 6.