

Resolving to Build Your Skill

“Nothing relieves and ventilates the mind like a resolution.” John Burroughs

It’s that time of year. Vervago invites you to make developing your intellectual skills one of your resolutions for the new year. As you look for ways to take your work to a higher level, here are four suggestions for building your skill for asking and answering questions.

Set specific, challenging goals

Improvement at an intellectual skill like PQ and PA comes from resolving to use them in specific situations. Specify the setting and not just the specific behavior. For example: “I will give more bullet-point answers in this Thursday’s project review.” Your goal shouldn’t be trivial, but neither should it be impossible. For instance, if you want to improve your assumption questions, look for one dubious assumption you made in your last email to your manager, your last phone call to a customer, or your last presentation to senior management. After you spot one, challenge yourself to spot two the next time. Then three.

Work with a PQ partner

We tend to keep the resolutions we share with other people! Ask someone to be your PQ partner, then share your goals for improvement, discuss setbacks you encounter, and practice new techniques together. Test each other’s thinking before key presentations. Working with a partner is like looking into a mirror; it helps us size up our strengths and weaknesses so we’re better prepared and more likely to be successful.

Know why PQ & PA matters *to you*

An inability to be concise is career limiting. That’s a good reason for learning Precision Answering. Having the ability to ask Go/No Go questions can increase the efficiency of a discussion by a factor of 10. That’s a good reason for learning Precision Questioning. But these are *generic* reasons. What is your motivation? A clear understanding of why you want to improve can keep you focused on your goals. Develop a purpose for your improvement and you’ll notice that you improve even faster.

Celebrate small successes

Each time you stop mid-question in order to rephrase and make yourself clearer, you are taking a step on the path to becoming a highly-articulate questioner. Give yourself a little pat on the back. Each time you revise an email in order to sharpen some bullet points, you are one step closer to becoming a highly-articulate answerer. Reward yourself for taking the energy to improve. Building habits requires trial and error; there’s no way around it. But you will absorb lessons more completely if you take a moment to recognize what you are doing well.

Does your pace of improvement seem slow?

- Review past Skill Sharpeners at http://www.vervago.com/skill_sharpener.html
- Email the Question Master - QuestionMaster@vervago.com

Resolutions for 2008

Precision Questioning	Write down your specific, challenging resolutions for building skill in the coming year.
Precision Answering	Write down your specific, challenging resolutions for building skill in the coming year.
Working with a PQ Partner	Who is your partner? When do you plan on meeting with them?
Celebrating small steps	What are three things you will do to reward yourself for improving at PQ and PA?