



Using Inquiry (not Advocacy) to Manage Your Mental Models

One way to manage your mental models is to use inquiry, rather than advocacy. How are they different?

Advocacy is...	Inquiry is...
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Stating <i>your</i> point of view• Expressing <i>your</i> opinion• Urging the action <i>you</i> think is best	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Asking questions• Clarifying information• Being curious

As a leader, there are times when it is important for you to promote an idea or action that you think is best. In those situations, you need to use advocacy. Advocacy reinforces your mental models. However, working with others to solve complex problems with many different perspectives is one of those times when it is especially important for you to manage your mental models and open up your mind to new possibilities. One way to do that is to use inquiry.

The graphic on the next page and the explanations on page 3 describe four approaches to using inquiry and advocacy in your work as a leader.



	Low	Inquiry	High				
High	<table border="1" style="width: 100%; height: 100%;"> <tr> <td style="text-align: center; vertical-align: top;"> <p>High Advocacy–Low Inquiry</p> <p>1.Telling</p> </td> <td style="text-align: center; vertical-align: top;"> <p>High Advocacy–High Inquiry</p> <p>4.Generating</p> </td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center; vertical-align: top;"> <p>Low Advocacy–Low Inquiry</p> <p>3.Observing</p> </td> <td style="text-align: center; vertical-align: top;"> <p>Low Advocacy–High Inquiry</p> <p>2.Asking</p> </td> </tr> </table>			<p>High Advocacy–Low Inquiry</p> <p>1.Telling</p>	<p>High Advocacy–High Inquiry</p> <p>4.Generating</p>	<p>Low Advocacy–Low Inquiry</p> <p>3.Observing</p>	<p>Low Advocacy–High Inquiry</p> <p>2.Asking</p>
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Advocacy							
Low							

1. High Advocacy/Low Inquiry (EXPLAINING/TELLING) This is one-way communication which is good for sharing your perspective with others based on how you think the world works and why (your culture, your mental model, your experience), giving directions, explaining, and asserting. This is appropriate when bringing already-conceived ideas to a group of people (e.g. an organizational strategic plan to be used as the basis for a departmental strategic plan). High advocacy/low inquiry cannot be used alone if your ultimate goal is to enhance understanding of diverse perspectives or build common ground. If used incorrectly, (e.g. dictating and imposing, which does not offer an explanation as to “why” and the underlying common values) you are likely to create resistance.



2. High Inquiry/Low Advocacy (INTERVIEWING/ASKING) This is one-way communication which is useful for gathering information, for discovery, and for exploring others' points of view and the reasons behind them. The speaker can also ask for clarification as in "what is the question/problem we are trying to address?" If you use this exclusively, (e.g. not providing any input or feedback) you can appear as though you are interrogating others, which can make them think you have a hidden agenda.

3. Low Inquiry/Low Advocacy (OBSERVING) Very little conversation occurs when you are primarily observing. You will be in a watchful mode; highly sensitive to process and watching the conversation flow without saying much. However, in this stance, you are keenly aware of **all** that happens. You are paying attention to and observing mostly process and not focused as much on content. This is useful when you need to observe what is happening to see the big picture. It can create difficulty however, when you withhold your views for too long and therefore appear to have "checked out" or not be paying attention (withdrawn).

4. High Advocacy/High Inquiry (MUTUAL LEARNING/GENERATING) This is two-way communication which provides a high level of learning; both parties state their views and ask the other's view. This is skillful dialogue where there is a strong balance of inquiry and advocacy. You suspend all assumptions and create an environment in which collective thinking can occur. You are genuinely curious and make your own reasoning explicit. You ask thoughtful questions that uncover assumptions without being critical or accusing. When using high advocacy/high inquiry, you must take care to be real. Some leaders are so skilled that they can use high advocacy and high inquiry but, at the same time, already have their mind made up, be close-minded, or even manipulative. This can happen knowingly or unknowingly. Check yourself to make sure that you are truly curious, open to learning, and open to changing your mind.

Source: Kagen, E.B. (updated 2014) based on Sockalingam, S. (2010) "Balancing Advocacy and Inquiry for Dialogue", Senge, P. *The Fifth Discipline* and Isaacs, W. *Dialogue: the Art of Thinking Together*.