

## FINE POINT

Council: Advice-free Zone

Thinking Environment

Nancy Kline

### COUNCIL: ADVICE-FREE ZONE

The Time To Think Council can be a brilliant process (thank you, Scott Farnsworth). And I think its brilliance depends on one fairly fine point: We avoid the use of the language of advice. We avoid, 'You should' or 'you could.' And especially, 'If I were you, I would.'

Instead we use the language of experience and knowledge. And so the Presenter can take in and process the comments from the Council Members, rather than rejecting them outright or sliding mindlessly into them.

One tip in constructing the language of experience and knowledge is that it is usually in the 'first person'. We say 'I' rather than 'you'. (Or we use the third person: they/it rather than 'you'.) This means that as Members our sentences will tend to construct like this:

I once had a similar experience, and I....  
The relevant information I have is....  
My understanding is that....  
People have found that....  
It seems that....

No 'you's'. No 'should's'. No 'could's'.

### 'IF I WERE IN YOUR SITUATION'

There is one surprising thing. Although advice teems in this construct: 'If I were you, I would...', it is absent in this one: 'If I were in a similar situation, I would...'

These sound the same, but they're not at all. The first asks the Presenter to become the Member. The second allows the Presenter to remain themselves. The Presenter hears clearly the Member's projected experience, knowledge and ideas as only that, no strings attached.

### PRESENTER'S WORDING

Further helping the Members to use advice-free language, the Presenter can take care not to word their question for the Members as: 'What do you think I should do?'

But regardless of how the Presenter words the question, the Members can reply in an advice-free way. They don't have to use the language of advice, even if asked for it.

### EQUALITY and ENCOURAGEMENT

I think that the key reason non-advice language matters so much is that it maintains the Components of Equality and Encouragement between the Presenter and the Council. And it is these Components that allow the Presenter to 'take or leave' the Member's ideas.

This is, I think, because Equality and our non-competitive definition of Encouragement create a psychological boundary that non-advice language provides. This boundary ensures that there is no subtext of 'requirement' for the Presenter to think like or be like the Council Member, nor does it spark agreement or disagreement between them. The Presenter is required only to think about what the Member has said, not to do it.

So, no one has to be someone else. Isn't that wonderful?

For sure the brain thinks so. :-)