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by Patrick T. Malone

## The Fear of Being Rude

Don't be afraid to ask "sensitive" questions.

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A recent George Mason University research project\* concluded that many business school students were reluctant to ask what were termed as "sensitive" business questions because of the fear of being rude. It's likely those fears are not limited to recent graduates.

Our fears of asking questions that feel too sensitive or personal are often overblown. Like the fear of missing out, the fear of being rude often results in behaviors that end in a business disaster.

*The best business decisions have their basis in information.  
While some of that information could be deemed sensitive, it  
is nonetheless essential to making a good business decision.*

Here are a few thoughts that will help you manage the fear of being rude.

Questions should be brief, concise, and open-ended.

Prefacing your question with a preamble to soften the question is never a clever idea. Your mission is to gather information, not to become enamored with the sound of your own voice. Open-ended questions get information, closed-ended questions only get confirmations.

**Example:** "With the scope of responsibilities you have described, what does the compensation package look like?"

Leading questions reveal your biases and solicit a desired response.

**Example:** Instead of "How well does your team work together?" consider "Describe your leadership style."

Always acknowledge the answer to your question before asking the next question.

Questions without acknowledgements sound very much like an interrogation which is rude, unless you are a police officer.

For more tips, see Establishing rapport, *Animal Health Digest*, May 2, 2023. [Link](#)

Have a question you are reluctant to ask? Send it to me and I will offer my suggestions.

\* Don't be afraid to ask 'sensitive' questions, School of Business at George Mason University, May 12, 2023. [Link](#)

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