

GUESTS Framework

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The GUESTS process aims to be a highly flexible approach to communication. The aim is to focus the majority of energy on understanding others' needs and evaluating what would be the best solution for them and their unique situation.

This is not a script. This is a framework to guide a conversation, and help to *move it forward*. Helping you to understand where you are in the conversation, and what would be the next step.

GUESTS Stands for:

Greet - Understand - Evaluate - Suggest - Take Action - Support

Greet

Main Objective: Make the person comfortable and willing to open up.

It may seem simple, however, but we often forget that all conversations start somewhere. Make the person feel welcomed. The greeting will set the tone for the rest of the conversation, so it is important to be authentic and empathetic.

Over the phone: They can hear your smile and your energy. Of course, this is also a good moment to see what their tone is and begin to mirror their energy when appropriate.

Here are some examples:

Inbound call, standard opens:

- Example: *"Hi there, my name is ____, thank you for calling! How can I help you?"*

If you don't have it already, asking for someone's name is also a great way to make the conversation personal.

- Example: *"Hi there, my name is ____, thank you for calling! May I ask who I am speaking with? ... Great! How can I help you <<name>>?"*
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Understand

Main Objective: Dig deep into the needs of this person and fully understand their situation.

Understanding is not only listening to what the person is saying exactly but also finding out the real root of what is behind the words. What got the person to this point, and what drives them in this conversation?

Here, it is important to be patient, listen, and ask powerful questions to dig deeper. You won't be able to understand someone if you never let them speak.

There are two main aspects to this:

Active Listening

Active listening requires you to listen attentively to a speaker, understand what they're saying, respond and reflect on what's being said, and retain the information for later.

There are three kinds of listening that make up Active Listening

- Focused Listening: This part is listening to what they are saying with intention.
- Global Listening: This is listening to the surrounding context. What is their tone of voice or body language? Does it change when a certain subject comes up?
- Internal Listening: Listening to yourself and reflecting on what the person is saying. Listen to the questions or directions that the other two aspects are leading you to.

In combination, these will allow you to understand better not only exactly what the person is saying at face value; but also be able to understand the drive behind it.

Asking Powerful Questions

By asking powerful and more valuable questions, you can avoid 'fluffy' information that won't drive as much value in the conversation.

Powerful questions are:

- Open Ended - Avoid many yes/no questions at this point because simple yes's and no's won't prompt the other person to think further or dig deeper into the conversation.
- Exploratory - You are trying to find out more, so ask questions that will allow you to explore the context or reason behind something with this other person.
- Simple - It is important to keep questions simple so that the focus is not an explanation of your question itself but a way to dig deeper and keep the focus on them. A good structure to follow would be to keep your questions seven words or less.
- 'What' & 'How' - not 'Why': 'Why' questions can put someone on the defensive and create barriers.
 - When you read or hear 'why' maybe you feel like you have to "back up" or defend your reasoning. However, when you read or hear 'How,' maybe you feel like you have a chance to open up and explore your feelings further.

1. Don't rush your questions. If you need time to think about how to formulate your question best, take the time to think about what you would like to ask.
2. Ask one question at a time. Try to avoid 'stacking' questions to get the clearest answers.

By combining Active Listening and Asking Powerful Questions, you will be able to understand the full scope of the person's situation, needs, and what they truly are looking for.

Evaluate

Main Objective: Filter out the extra, and narrow it down. Evaluate what possible and best solutions there are given the situation. Tailor the value and experience to the person.

Evaluating is not just evaluating the person's situation. Evaluating is understanding what part of what you can offer to this person will bring them the most value and will be the most important thing for them.

The evaluation process should happen simultaneously while you are working to understand their full situation.

When evaluating a situation, keep these questions in mind:

- Does this person only care about the big picture, or do they want to know the specific details?
- What type of solution will bring more value for them?
- What is their communication style like?
- What is relevant for this person?
- What is irrelevant to them? (Filter these things out)

It is important to filter out the unnecessary parts of what you are offering so that you can discuss the most meaningful things with them.

The evaluation portion of this process will set you up for the next portions of the process, as this should be happening all throughout.

Suggest

Main Objective: Suggest the solution that makes the most sense for them, not just anything.

The point of the previous step is to help you suggest the most valuable solution. However, it can also help you avoid 'Over-communication.'

Over-communication can cause someone to doubt or have even more questions than when they started the conversation, so it is important to relay the most valuable information only.

Suggest the most valuable solutions for the other person utilizing only what will solve their query, and what they will connect with.

Generally recommend 1-2 possible solutions. Providing too many options can easily lead to further confusion by giving them too much to think about.

Avoid continuously listing all solutions, and answer questions primarily with the most relevant and specific information.

One way to do this would be to use phrasing such as: *"Because you told me___, I would recommend__"*.

Take Action

Main Objective: Move them to the next steps and take action towards closing the conversation with a purposeful solution in mind.

At this point, you have discovered the real needs of the other person and evaluated what will be the most important to them, and recommended a path for them.

The discussion leading up to this should have created a drive for the best possible solution with the given information. To make the most of the recommended solution, you need to take action.

If you don't take action here, you could lead to an awkward moment when both parties are wondering what's next, and it should be up to you to move the conversation forward, not the other person.

Keep it short and simple. It could be simply asking for a timeline or which of the suggestions they would like to go with.

Something like, "When would you like to get started with this?" or "Would option A or option B work better for you?".

Don't decide for them; let them make a choice. - This will create a sense of ownership over the solution they've chosen.

Support

Main Objective: Make them feel confident in their decision, and make sure it happens (and sticks)

After taking action, the other person may have additional questions, concerns. It is important to address these concerns and reinforce the solution.

You can always handle concerns by reinforcing their decision or leading them back to what they previously said in the conversation and why it is the best solution.

Referring to what they have specifically said previously in the conversation will reinforce that you were listening and you are paying attention to their needs.

By supporting the other person's decision, you will be able to make them feel secure and confident in their decision and you will lessen the chance that they have remorse for their choice.

The step is all about ensuring that they are fully taken care of and confident with the experience and the solution.

And with that, they should be confident and good to go! A reminder that this is just a framework to guide the direction and sections of the conversation, not a script. This should focus on humans helping humans and giving people space to stay flexible with their personality.

Supplementary Resources

There are also many supplements to this framework (*specifically surrounding asking questions*) that can go a long way in helping to guide the 'Understanding' portion of the framework.

Those are:

Funnel Questioning

The Funnel Technique is a good way to begin narrowing down the conversation if you start broad without much context. In case your conversation could also go in many different directions, this is also a great way to begin specifying the topic of conversation.

You can also use this as a tool to continue the conversation and avoid awkward pauses or silence by changing through different types of questions.

1. Ask Open Questions – Try to start with open questions about the subject at hand, as this will give you all

the information you require to take the conversation further. *Example: Where on the site are you going?*

2. Ask Probing Questions – These questions will allow you to delve deeper into their answers to your open questions, discovering the reasons and emotions behind those answers. *Example: What do you see when you get there?*
3. Ask Closed Questions - These questions allow you to confirm your and the other person's understanding of what has been discussed in that specific line of questioning. *Example: Do you see the ___ button?*

T.E.D. Questions

While there are many ways to ask open-ended questions to open the door to further conversation, using 'TED' Questions will allow you to clarify and ask for more context while progressing to a deeper conversation.

TED questions consist of 3 types:

1. Tell
 - a. Tell me, how will that affect you?
 - b. Tell me, has this happened before?
 - c. Tell me, what was your main motivation for calling?
2. Explain
 - a. Explain to me; what impact this has had on your....?
 - b. Explain to me; how did this situation begin?
 - c. Explain to me; what difficulties did you face when you tried to...?
3. Describe
 - a. Could you describe how you felt about that?
 - b. Could you describe how it looks?
 - c. Could you describe your ideal outcome?

With these supplementary resources, you'll be able to guide the understanding sections with more purpose and fullness, than asking general questions.
