

Health Promotion Practitioner

Practical solutions for health enhancement programming

Can I Ask You a Question?

I hate the mall — it has everything I don't want and nothing I do. I would never go there voluntarily unless I waited too long to get my wife's birthday present, as was the case recently... "I wanted to take you to the mall so we could pick out something you really liked, together" (guys, I wouldn't recommend this approach if you're on a budget).

While passing one of the many kiosks, a young woman approached us and said *Can I ask you a question?* Since I seldom get asked for anything other than money from my college-age children, I took this as an opportunity to impart my wisdom on a member of the younger generation. *What's your question?* I asked. *Actually, I wanted to ask her a question,* came the reply. Feeling somewhat dejected, I turned to my wife, who was some 30 yards past, acting as if she didn't know either of us. It turns out she was the target demographic for the lotion the young lady was selling, not me.

When I caught up to my wife, she educated me with *You can't make eye contact with them.* That's mall experience talking.

About 20 minutes later, sensing my growing restlessness, my wife suggested I hang out on a bench while she shopped in the nearby stores. *Are you sure?* I asked (oh, please say yes). Waiting on the bench gave me some time to reflect on my *Can I ask you a question?* experience. Why did I stop? What was it about that simple question that engaged me? Did I honestly think this person thought I had an answer? Well, yes... that's why I stopped.

It works. People like sharing their thoughts, opinions, and ideas — especially when it's not part of an ulterior motive like selling them some lotion on the spot. And if you develop a reputation for actually listening and taking action on their input, they're more likely to share their honest opinions in the future.

As you prepare your health promotion market research plans, try developing a Wellness Inquiries of the Month series — 12 questions you can ask potential participants — then respond in a way that benefits many. Here's one for January to get you started: *What's been the hardest part about keeping your New Year's resolutions in the past?*

The easy thing to do is post that month's question online in a poll format, then link it to an article on keeping your New Year's resolutions. But we favor a somewhat more personal, high-impact approach. Try setting up a table in a high traffic area the first week in January with a sign you can reuse each month: "Answer Our Wellness Inquiry of the Month for a Chance to Win!" Make the prize something tied to that month or the question. Select a winning entrant, take their photo, and tie their response to an already prepared article addressing the issue along with in-house programs, Internet tools, and community resources.

Use follow-up communication to let your audience know you'll be there next month at the same location, and even give a hint about the next question. 📌

Continued



Dean Witherspoon is President of Health Enhancement Systems, a leader in behavior change innovation serving organizations in North America and throughout the world. With 20+ years experience, Dean has served on the Board of the Association for Worksite Health Promotion, spoken at more than 70 conferences, and published hundreds of articles. Before founding Health Enhancement Systems he held health promotion management positions with Kimberly-Clark Corporation, Presbyterian Hospital of Dallas, and The Dow Chemical Company. You can reach Dean at deanw@hesonline.com.