Transcript for Frank Sesno | The Power of Questions (Episode 651)
Full show notes found here: https://theartofcharm.com/651/

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JORDAN: Welcome to The Art of Charm. I'm Jordan Harbinger and I'm here with producer Jason DeFillippo. On this episode, we'll be talking with Frank Sesno. Frank is a correspondent and talk show host with CNN, he's also a nationally renowned moderator. You've seen him on television for sure, you just maybe not familiar with what his face looks like but I guarantee you you've seen him engaging some of the world's leading personalities. Today we're engaging him.

On this episode we'll explore the different types of questions and lines of questioning that apply in different circumstances that lead to specific outcomes. If you've ever needed to get people on board with an idea or get the ground truth of a given situation, you'll want to use these tools. We'll also discover how listening is not only a crucial skill in conversation, but the specific types of listening and mindsets for listening the right way, and how doing so helps build trust and rapport, and we'll reveal how to get through to people that don't want to connect, how to frame the conversation, pitfalls to avoid, and specific tools you can use to keep your conversations effective, efficient, and on the level so you can get the outcome you want. This and more right now with Frank Sesno.

Frank, thanks for coming on the show, I really appreciate your time, of course.

FRANK: It is my pleasure.

JORDAN: I read the book *Ask More* and of course I was like, "Oh, a whole book about questions? I mean, how much can you possibly say about questions?" but of course, being in the business that I'm in, I'm a big fan of questions and getting to the bottom of issues

and using them to connect with people. But why write an entire book about questions? I mean there's a lot of folks who think, "Okay, just state their importance or make a bulleted list. How could there possibly be enough content to even create work around this?"

FRANK: Well you asked the question that I asked myself before I wrote it. Is there possibly a book here? And I was teaching a class at the time called The Art of the Interview and I was test driving the concept of whether there could be a book there and at the end of the course, I was absolutely convinced. What I discovered is questions, like air, are things we completely take for granted. We don't think about them.

We study -- maybe -- public speaking, those sorts of courses are offered. There are debate teams and if you choose, you can be on a debate team. But we don't have classes about how to ask, what to ask, how to frame a question -- we don't have classes about how to listen, what to pay attention to, what to zero in on, how to formulate a follow up question -- there are some professions that do something along these lines.

So, if you're a therapist, you need to know how to ask because you're helping someone dig down deep through a series of questions that you're posing. If you're a lawyer, you probably need to be pretty good at this because if you're going to cross examine the witness, you better know what you're doing before you stand up in front of the jury, but for most people, we don't do this. So that was part of it.

The idea was born of my experience doing what you do now, interviewing. I mean I've been fortunate enough to have an amazing career in journalism. I was there when Ronald Reagan said, "Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall," and I've had a chance to interview presidents and a bunch of other people. I still do this. And what I realized as I started thinking about the book was I would always go into these interviews curious, I would always go into these interviews knowing that I wanted to get an answer to something, but I didn't really have a -- what I'll call a

question strategy. I would block by themes, I would think about how I'd posed a question because I knew someone would try to duck it or something, but I thought and I wondered, "Is there something more to that?" And so that's why with that experience, plus the class, plus just a common sense appreciation for the fact that a lot of people are crummy askers.

Like, how many friends do you hang out with or do we hang with and they're seeing you for the first time in six months and they say, "How you doing?" and you say, "Well, not so great," and then they move on? They never actually ask five more questions down, like, "What's wrong? When did it happen? How are you feeling? Can I help?" So, all of these things and lots of personal experience along the way, motivated me to think that maybe there is something to be learned from professional questioners that we can all put to use in our lives. That's where the book came from.

JORDAN: Is that about the questions, or is that about listening and actually hearing what other people are saying? Or is there something -- a mix of both?

FRANK: It is a mix of both. What I would like to change, if I could, is I would change this familiar expression, this term we use, Q&A --

JORDAN: Mm-hmm.

FRANK: -- to Q&L. If it's not just question and answer, I'm going to ask -- because that implies I'm going to ask a question and then you're going to give me an answer and then I can move on. But if it's really Q&L, I'm going to ask a question and I'm really going to listen. I want to know what you're going to say, I'm going to use that as a springboard to deeper understanding, to a deeper knowledge, to a deeper purpose. I've got these 11 categories of questions and each connects with an outcome -- a very specific outcome. That listening is critical and I think the best leaders are the best questioners, the best interviewers are the best listeners, the best therapists are both -- so, I think listening is a

gigantic part of it, which is why that is a theme that I try to bring up throughout the book.

JORDAN: In *Ask More*, you discuss at length that connection in general is a skill that doesn't always come naturally or is taught by anybody in an effective way and that the right questions can help us understand one another and help generate social interactions that can actually make a difference. I, of course, focused on the interview angle because that's what I'm always interested in learning to become better at.

For me, it looked like inside the book there were different categories of questions, some of which apply to me better than others, and then I realized I'm doing kind of exactly what you said, which is tuning out things I don't think I'm going to be able to use the things I'm not interested in, and only going for what I wanted. And when I stopped doing that, I realized there was a lot more content in the book that was actually valuable. By what I mean is, I'm kind of like looking through a drawer for something and I'm throwing away all these old photos of me and all these old letters written by somebody interesting, and I'm looking for the one little gizmo that I thought I wanted -- some flash drive for example -- right?

The right questions and the right type of listening are, in a way, examining all the contents of that drawer and finding the value in each thing itself, and letting those maybe guide the conversation or guide the interaction. So, that I found fascinating because I found myself reading your book wrong, basically, in the beginning.

FRANK: That's very interesting actually to hear you say that. I suppose there are different ways of reading this book. You could read the book and walk away, maybe, with an understanding of the role that questions play, simply thinking about, "What happens if I turn the period or the exclamation point at the end of a sentence into a question mark?" Instead of telling somebody you were upset at the staff meeting and you raise these questions, let me tell you -- or you raise these issues, "Let me

tell you what we're doing," turn that into a question. "I noticed you were upset at the staff meeting, tell me more about what you were upset about." So, an understanding about the role of the question itself, to incorporating a different understanding about what I like to call our question diet, right? Our food diet. We're supposed to eat fruits and vegetables and cereals and proteins and all this kind of stuff. Well, questions are the same way. We should ask to obtain information, we should ask to think strategically, we should ask to think creatively, we should ask to think empathetically -- each is driven by a different approach and so, perhaps people will take different things from the book, depending on where they are, but I like this idea of the diet.

Coming from the media, this is one of my observations about what's happening in the popular media now -- not to go too much off on a tangent, but just to illustrate the point. So, if we think of our questioning as a diet, we need to ask diagnostically to figure out what's wrong, informationally to figure out what's going on.

We need to ask strategically to look over the horizon -- all these things I was just saying -- we need to ask caringly to bridge ourselves, to bridge differences because the way we question someone who's suspicious or hostile is going to be different than the way we talk to somebody who loves us. If we think of it as a diet, much of the media is binging on one particular type of question -- that's what I call the confrontational question -- and the media is dominated by confrontation now and it's one of the reasons I think that trust in media has dropped. So that's a bit of a lesson to all of us that this diet needs to be a balanced diet in the way we speak to people.

Just another funny aside, when I was putting this thing together, a long time friend of mine, a woman who'd gotten married young and the marriage quickly --

JORDAN: Disintegrated?

FRANK: Yeah, or worse. And she was trying for years to find another partner in life and she was going online dating and all this kind of stuff and she was hysterical because she would tell me about these incidents where she'd meet these men for a drink or something like that and sit with them, and all they wanted to do was talk about themselves. And she said, "They never ask me about me," thinking okay fine, there's a little love life part about this too.

JORDAN: For a lot of folks listening, they're like, "Great, okay, I get it. I've got to ask these different types of questions or I've got to ask more questions or I have to ask and then listen to the answer, no kidding. Where's the beef? I know these things, this is common sense." You've actually done a great job of breaking down questions into different categories. Would you mind briefly going over these categories of questions? I think these are brilliant. They're something that most people don't think about. I certainly hadn't thought about it. And they allow us to arrive the general concept of question into more precise tools that we can use.

FRANK: Sure. I start with what I call diagnostic questions and each of my chapter is written around a character or characters. And diagnostic questions are what? Diagnostic questions are the questions we ask when something has gone wrong or something's not right. When we go to the doctor, we go to the mechanic to figure out the problem, fundamentally what we're doing here is we're looking for bad news. That means we're opening our minds, we recognize there's a problem, we understand something needs to be done about it but we don't know what.

So what do we ask? The three characters in this chapter: 1.) A nurse practitioner in Appalachia, 2.) a Wall Street turnaround artist. He goes in and he grabs and tries to save companies when they are truly on the ropes -- life support, 3.) My neighbor, Al. He's a roofer. I actually was talking to Al just the other day because we had this last big rain. I had a leak inside. That's what people do, you go to Al when there's a problem. He starts

asking me questions. He says, “Look at the peak up there, have you had this before? Was the wind blowing?” and all this kind of stuff. What diagnostic questions share, if you’re a good diagnostician, you ask first about the symptoms. “What’s wrong? Where does it hurt? What’s not happening in the business?”

Secondly, all of these folks ask about patterns. They ask about what you’ve done in the past or what you notice. So, does the roof leak when it’s raining? Does the roof link when the wind is blowing? Does the roof leak when it’s a hard rain? What have you done before? In this company what have you done before? How long have sales been lagging? What have you done to address them? What has worked? Did it work? Do you have the data to support it? Where does it hurt? Essentially. Those diagnostic questions also require a very interesting kind of listening.

You’re listening for detail, you’re listening for description, and you’re listening, essentially, for pain. You’re especially tuned in to that. You’re also trying to figure out -- as I said -- and match up what doctors call history taking. In the medical profession, they call it history taking. So, how often have you had this allergic reaction? When were you last at the doctor? Was anything prescribed? Are you taking your medicine as prescribed? Have you missed any doses? So it’s a lot about the past.

And the purpose here, as I say, is to identify a problem, which means you’re open to the fact that a problem even exists. Now that’s very distinct. If we think about our civic discourse, if we think about what happens in our families sometimes, we don’t want to even acknowledge that there’s a problem. In relationship -- so going looking for the problem is the first and fundamental thing about diagnostic. I call this the ground floor of questioning. Next chapter that I write about is strategic questioning.

JORDAN: One of the brilliant pull quotes that I grabbed from your book is, “If you confront a problem, you have to go looking for it and cannot avert your eyes when you find it.” I love that because I feel like not only are people often not really looking for a problem because they don’t want to deal with what they might find, but when they do find it, it’s kind of like, “Can I get away with not pointing this out? Can I get away with not highlighting is?” And it reminds me of -- we had General Ann Dunwoody on the show recently and one of her primary directives was never walk past a mistake. This line of questioning allows you to find problems and then actually deal with them instead of just either burying your head in the sand or making sure that you can pretend that you don’t see an actual issue. So if you’re not using diagnostic questions in your personal life, relationships especially, and of course in your business if you run one, you’re essentially making sure that you cannot identify issues and that they will go unaddressed.

FRANK: It is so right. This is something that we all do. It’s human nature. You get in the car, you hear this rumble and you think, “Oh, that’s just -- maybe that won’t come back. Maybe I won’t have to deal with that.”

JORDAN: Right.

FRANK: Your partner says something that is disturbing to you and you say, “I’ll just let that go this time.” We are better when we go looking for those problems because you can’t fix a problem if you don’t face it. And being able to ask about that and ask about it comfortably because you need to identify it in order to fix it -- that’s why I refer to this as the ground floor of questioning. We wouldn’t have made it out of the ground floor of the caves if we hadn’t asked, “What is that big hairy beast going to do if I step out there?” This is a human response but it’s very easy to walk by the problem, as you say, and it’s often much harder to acknowledge it. I think it’s easier to deal with a problem through questions sometimes than through statement because it allows us to try to figure out what’s going on and pair that with the symptom.

I've been through this, it's interesting, with my father who is in his nineties now and in a certain denial about getting older, believe it or not, and everything else. And it's led to some really tough moments. I try to use my own advice here and I say -- rather than telling him what he needs, I say, "Dad what happens if you fall and you hit your head? What do you think is going to happen?" When he answers that by virtue of him putting into words, rather than me -- and the research shows that we remember what we say more than what we hear -- by having prompting him to say that, it's helped us do some planning that frankly he was avoiding for a long time.

JORDAN: I actually did not know that we remember what we say more than what we hear. It makes perfect sense now that you say it but I had never thought about that.

FRANK: I was on the phone the other day with a colleague and talking about something that had to be done. And at one point this person said, "I understand that this is my responsibility. I need to do this," and the fact that this person said it rather than me, gave it an authorship that it never would have had if I had uttered those words.

JORDAN: I like the idea of deciding which category of questions we need to dive into. I'd love to give some more examples of the different types of questions as well. Diagnostic, we started with, you were mentioning strategic before I jumped in, can we continue down that path?

FRANK: Strategic questions are really fascinating to me and we all have strategic questions, I think, when we face major questions or crossroads in our lives. You're going to get married or you're going to end a marriage, you're going to change jobs, you're going to decide which job to take, you're going to move out west and truck it all and start all over again. And there's a certain degree of risk, of uncertainty perhaps, there's a life decision or a personal decision, work decision that's got implications down

way into the future. There's uncertainty around it because nothing is guaranteed in life.

How do you know what to do? How do you know what's your own bias and what you're just inclined to do versus what might be a warning flag? How do you break your own conventional wisdom or if it's a case of a company, group think? Strategic questions, I think, help you look over the horizon and they are meant to challenge yourself and those around you, and as I say, conventional wisdom.

The person I write this chapter around is General Colin Powell. I have a great deal of respect for him. He has dedicated his life to the country, he's a very thoughtful man, but he had two very dramatic moments when he was using or not using strategic questioning and both of them were wars, the first gulf war and the second gulf war. Before we went in and invaded and went in and invaded and went after Saddam Hussein after he invaded Kuwait and put ground forces on the ground. Colin Powell who is Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff at the time came to the president of the United States, then George Herbert Walker Bush, with eight questions.

He said, "Mr. President, only if we can answer yes to all eight of these, should we go," and the questions were positively brilliant and fundamentally they were to test and to challenge the assumptions of the moment. "Do we have the American people with us? Have we considered all alternatives? Are we backed by world opinion? Do we know what success will be like? Do we know how we're going to get out of this?" and those were very important questions, were all yeses, the answers were answered very clearly and dramatically because the administration of George Herbert Walker Bush really did their homework.

They built an international coalition, they had dramatic public support, congressional support, all the rest. And the challenge was very narrowly defined, push Saddam Hussein out of Kuwait. They could define success. Eight yeses, they went in on

the ground, the ground war lasted 100 hours. In the second Gulf war, going into Iraq, those questions were not asked. They did not define success. We are still there.

JORDAN: Yeah.

FRANK: And Powell says, "I'm the guy who went to the U.N. and talked about those weapons of mass destruction and I'll be left holding the bag on this." He's not the only one and these aren't the only reasons that we are in the mess that we're in there but it's a very interesting lesson. Asking questions, challenge yourself, test yourself, push the boundaries, think about what your ultimate goal is, be able to define it -- that's what they did. That's what we need to be able to do.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

JORDAN: Yeah, of course it makes sense. Looking at the type of questions we should be asking, of course diagnostic, empathetic, strategic -- you look at what types of questions we should be asking but first we need to define the outcome. What am I looking for? How do we actually do that because I think a lot of times people don't even know the answer to that, which was the problem that you just described.

FRANK: So if you're going to sit down with your adolescent son or daughter and have a difficult conversation about behaviors or about what time they're supposed to come in at night, if you're going to sit down with your boss and talk about a great idea you've got for a new product, if you're going to sit down with your friend who's going through a divorce or facing a very difficult medical issue and you think they just need to speak, each of those is a different outcome. Each of those would fall into a different category of questions.

So, that's where you start. You start by saying, "Well what do I want out of this exchange? What am I trying to end up with? Am I trying to end up with a better understanding? Am I trying to connect more deeply with this other person? Am I

challenging them and holding them to account because they've done something that I don't like or that needs to be held to account? Am I going to a town hall and the mayor is going to be up there and the mayor hasn't filled a pothole on my street and I'm furious about it and so are my neighbors, and we're going to hold the mayor's feet to the fire because she promised to fill all the potholes when she ran for office?"

So having that sense about what it is you're after, that's where I think you start?

JORDAN: We start with the outcome in mind, we decide then what type of question we need, and then what do we do? Do we develop some sort of strategy, once we know what we're looking for, our desired outcome? How do we decide to unpack the tools and put them into action?

FRANK: Exactly that. So, let's say I'm going into a brainstorming session, I want my team to come up with a great idea for something, and I really want them to be really crazy and imaginative and go for it. So that's the first thing I have to say, "Okay, I'm going to a brainstorming session. What do I want out of the brainstorming session? Do I want something I've never thought of? Do I want them to ratify something I've already thought of but I just want them to have ownership of it and make them feel it's their idea? Do I want to put an idea I've got on the table and have them go after it so I can think about what the weaknesses are in it? Or do I want them to take the idea that I've got and make it better because we're going to do this one way or the other?" It's asking yourself a series of questions actually to really identify what you want out of a particular situation.

I write about empathetic questions and my characters in the empathy chapter, one is somebody a lot of people know, Terry Gross. She's a radio interviewer for NPR, does Fresh Air, she's been around for a long time, loves talking to artists, musicians, authors, creative people, and she likes to get at what she calls, "The essence of someone," through her -- what I think is very empathetic questioning. And where does that creativity come

from? Often it comes from adversity in their lives. And she will draw them out on this.

The other character is Betty Pristera. Betty Pristera is a family therapist. She's amazing. I love Betty. She's just incredible. And when I met up with Betty at the airport in North Carolina in Raleigh Durham. She picked me up and she met me at her car and before we were off the premises she had me talking about my mother and my father. "Frank, you know you're writing this book. Well, why now in your life?" This is amazing. When she sits with a client and a patient, there is a very specific purpose. The person is depressed or their marriage is dissolving or they're having some problem with a child or a partner or whatever. And so she's trying to get them to identify what is happening and maybe what's happening within to discover about themselves and that's based much of their discussion on trust.

Helen Riess, who is the other character in this chapter of empathetic questioning, she studies empathy and she works with doctors and how can doctors develop more empathetic relationships with their patients because research shows that empathy in a doctor/patient relationship leads to better outcomes, actually healthier happier patients. Often doctors don't have the time or they have their noses in their computers and they don't make eye contact or whatever. And there are little things and big things that lead to more empathy.

JORDAN: We talk about this at our life programs where we teach a lot of these skills in L.A. in a life setting. One of the advantages that doctors get from having more empathy or more empathy and better relationships with their patients is actually, they get sued less for malpractice and directly translates into a better outcome for the patient as well as for the doctor because if the doctor leaves a sponge in you after surgery, there's actual case studies from insurance companies that say things like, "Even though it might Doctor Sesno that left the sponge in you, they like him so much that they don't want to sue him." So they sue the sponge manufacturer instead.

FRANK: I promise not to leave the sponge in you next time I operate.

JORDAN: Very much appreciate it, yeah. They like you so much, they're just like, "Well, all right. I need to get some compensation from this but I don't want it to come at the expense of this person that I like because this doctor is great. He wouldn't have done that on purpose." Or, they say, "Well, I'm sure it was an accident," versus, "What a moron."

FRANK: This is a lesson for us, I think, that is so important across the board. Empathetic relationships pay dividends in virtually every case, whether it's the doctor, medical outcomes, or if something goes wrong, your colleague at work -- what difference does it make if you know that your colleague has a very sick elderly patient or elderly parent that they're dealing with and they may have to miss some work or they're late b y10 minutes, or they're a single parent, or they're starting a new business and having trouble making a payroll.

If you understand what someone is enduring or going through, it changes not only the relationship in that moment but many aspects of the relationship as you proceed. I think it's something that we've lost a little bit in our culture. We all move so quickly and we have so many virtual interactions, that having genuine interactions where we really learn about one another and can walk in that other person's shoes -- in empathy we talk about perspective taking, what I call, "Intimate distance."

Terry Gross when she's interviewing or therapists when they're working with you or a doctor, if they're very empathetic they can be empathetic, so that drives the intimacy but the distance is going to have to come in when someone sits back and tells you something you may not want to hear or asks you a question that challenges you or makes you a little uncomfortable, or gives you the space to be emotional, recognizing that emotion, but not becoming emotional themselves.

JORDAN: How do we develop that type of intimate distance. What questions is Terry Gross maybe asking yourself? And of course this is happening subconsciously with her. But, what can I do to turn on my little inner Terry Gross when I'm interviewing somebody and I need to become more empathetic? Is there a set of questions I might ask myself or a set of instructions I might give?

FRANK: Yeah. First of all, I think a lot of it also comes back to the listening that we were talking about before. So, understanding what kind of a listener you are and being comfortable with silence. In empathetic questioning, if you're going to ask somebody something, especially that goes to a place that could be difficult or challenging or painful, you may have a very difficult moment that you encounter. And that other person, as you're listening, may hesitate or may need to gather themselves up or may grow very emotional. How do you deal with that?

The most emotional moment I had in the book was when I was talking to Doctor Anthony Fauci, for the chapter on science questions. This exchange with him I did not put in the science. I put someplace else in the book. I put it at the end of the book for reason. He was very early in the HIV AIDS research and he was dealing with this issue when he was losing young men all the time, before there was anything that he could do about it. And I asked him about what it was like to experience that while he was reading headlines claiming the gay plague and God's revenge and really harsh awful stuff out in the world of politics. And he had just told me a story about a young man who he had had as a patient, and it was, I thought, remarkable but it was very clinical the way he told the story.

And I asked him this question, and he paused and then he started crying. Then he just erupted in the most phenomenal way and I remember sitting there, and it was the most emotional experience I've ever been part of in interviewing somebody. Maybe it was because there weren't cameras in the room, because it wasn't on television, and I could just sort of let it happen, I don't know. But I just did, and his eruption and what

he said about himself and the world and the people he worked with and what motivated him and why he'd work those 18 hour days, was just extraordinary and I felt so privileged to have learned something at that level from this human being who'd dome so much and still does, even in his seventies now. He's still out there, he works 18 hour days -- 12, 16, 18 hour days. But I had to let those moments hover. I wanted to reach out them and say, "It's okay," or, "Change the subject," or, "Move on," at some level but I think that is a very important part of it is letting people have the space and then staying with it.

JORDAN: It seems very difficult to do because you have to then take on the pressure yourself as the asker. You can no longer be this sort of detached talking head, you're in the pocket.

FRANK: That's the intimate distance. Intimate enough to know that you're in this moment to see and to experience and to feel this credible emotion but distant enough to stand back just a little bit and let it play out. I remember when my mother was in hospice and she was dying, and I was so conscious, and maybe this was because of my background as a reporter. I was almost like two people.

I was there as her son and her family member and sharing this difficult but very intimate moment with someone at the end of their lives, but I was also kind of a reporter and I was so hyper aware of everything that was going on around me and other people and other rooms and the social workers who were coming and going and what they were saying and what my mother was experiencing, getting her that last iced latte that she asked for. So, that's this notion of intimate distance, that ability to be there and be totally present but have just enough of you step back to listen and to ask.

JORDAN: Terry Gross in your book -- I guess, you had probably broken this down from your discussions and your study of her in that you have a set of questions you can ask yourself to maybe, in an attempt other than listening, to become more empathetic, namely, have I ever been in that kind of situation? What is it

like to be in that kind of situation? What might they have felt at this point? And, imagine what the world looks like through their eyes. Now, when you're using these questions, are you actually trying to feel the same way, or are we just trying to intellectually understand what they might have felt in that moment?

FRANK: You are trying to put yourself in that other person's shoes. What would it be like if you had a couple of kids and they're growing and they've outgrown their shoes and you go to KMart and you try to buy them a couple pairs of shoes and you realize that your credit is up to the limit and you're not going to get another paycheck for 10 days, you do not have them enough money to buy them the shoes that they need. What does that feel like? What do you tell your children? What are you seeing around you? What do you think of the prices? Put yourself in a situation.

A lot of have experienced that, they don't need to imagine. But if you haven't, you imagine it. What does it feel like if you are told that your parent or your child or your friend has a particular illness? Do you have health insurance? Is it going to cover the illness? Does your doctor know what to do? Do you have access to a doctor? And what if you don't? What does that feel like? Where would you turn? What if you didn't have a powerful friend? And it's part of the job. What we talk about in journalism where you're trying to write stories, imagine situations from other people's perspectives. That's very much what this is about, I think. And it's a gift but it's also something that we can do by asking those questions that you mentioned. These are questions that help us put ourselves in that other person's shoes.

JORDAN: It almost sounds a little obvious. When I read that, I was like, "Well of course you're going to do that," and then I realized, even through years of interviewing, I rarely actually use that particular line of questioning until very recently. I think a lot of people think, "Oh, I do that naturally," but then when you're in this type of situation sitting across from somebody,

metaphorically or physically, it's real easy to forget to do that and just go, "All right, I've got 10 questions on my list here. Let me go to the next one."

FRANK: Right. Now, I have a sister -- and this may be where some of this come. I have a sister with down syndrome and throughout my life, I have spent time with her and other people with special needs and the remarkable challenges and the remarkable rewards that come of that. I think one of the things that this has done for me has been to really open my eyes, probably before I even realized it. People who were completely different than me, to see and really experience the unique challenges, if you cannot get from one place to another on your own, if simple mobility is not something you can take for granted, how does that change your world? So, if you're thinking like that with someone else, and putting yourself in those shoes, how does that change your perspective of everything around you? Pretty profoundly.

JORDAN: Yeah, of course. You view anywhere that you currently are, if you have no one there that you know, like, and trust, every place that you're in is essentially imprisoning you.

FRANK: Here's an exercise. Here's a game. Pick a person. A person with a disability, a person who's on welfare, a person who's sick, a person who's young, a person who's old -- someone different than you -- and ask yourself, "What would I see if I looked through their eyes? What would I see if I looked around me? What would I be going home to at night? What would my job feel like? What would I see as my challenge? What would be the hardest thing that I would face every day? What would be the most rewarding thing?" One of the problems we have in this country in our endless discussion about race and class, is this notion of otherness. But if we really work at putting ourself in that other person's shoes, and thinking about what that would be like, we would have a very different conversation.

JORDAN: It seems like there's a natural advantage to being more empathetic naturally, but did you find that you were able to

develop this throughout the course of your career, or did you find you came already equipped with this, or was it something in between?

FRANK: Probably a combination of the two. I mean, as I say, having grown up with a sister with disabilities and some other interesting things, I think I was fortunate enough to experience a lot of people and challenges that many others might not experience and perhaps that opened my eyes. But also, I do think it's something that you develop and it's something you develop when you want to. But, one of the reasons I wrote this book is I think that you can actually be focused on it and steer yourself to developing this. So, in terms of empathetic questioning and empathetic relationships, you go into something, you say, "Okay, I really want to try to understand this other person. What do I need to know? What do I want to figure out? What should I be asking about if I'm really trying to understand what it's like to be in that person's shoes?" So yes, I think you can develop it.

It's why my friend Helen Riess, who studies and teaches empathy, she actually teaches doctors how to have more empathetic relationships. And some of the things are really simple, and believe it or not, she's teaching them to docs and they love her for it. Like, making eye contact with a patient, not having your nose and your fingers in a computer through something, really tuning into facial expression and the body language of the other person. Are they showing stress? If so, how? So yes, I certainly think that we can all be much better at this and much more empathetic in the way we approach and listen to and ask other people.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

JORDAN: Going back to the listening strategies, you've got something called the commanders rule. Essentially, the questioner should be speaking for about 30 percent of the conversation. I'm super guilty of speaking too much. I definitely understand the grandstanding or the opportunity to take the platform and

things like a lot of reporters and journalists face. You also have some great, I guess you would call them introspective questions, when it comes to strategic questions and things like that. One that stuck out for me was: Is this strategy or is this idea something I can defend with facts or is emotion driving me? So you have all these rules of thumb for each line of questioning and it occurred to me that this is probably something that took years and years to develop, of course throughout the course of your career as a journalist. Is this something that you were developing throughout your career that you were cognizant of or did you go to write this book and then all of these little things started coming out of the woodwork and you're like, "Wow I actually have a body of knowledge here that's learnable and teachable," or was this something you were aware of the entire time?

FRANK: Some of the things that I did I have done deliberately or not as a matter of practice. And when I came to write the book, what I tried to do is draw from some of my experiences and some of the things that I have done or observed and then learn other things through the research and the interviews that I did to add to the book so that people could have tangible examples and things that they could employ in their lives. So, for examples, one of the chapters -- one of my favorite chapters -- is on creativity. How do we evoke creative thought through creative questioning? And I love this. One of the guys I interviewed for this is a fellow by the name of Ed Bernero. Ed Bernero is a director and showrunner out in Hollywood. He started as a cop, he had an incredibly difficult childhood and life. He goes off to Hollywood and becomes a really successful guy. I found him by calling a superagent friend of mine who knew everybody in Hollywood and I said, "Tom, connect me with the most creative, most curious questioning guy you know," and he said, "You've got to talk to Ed." So what Ed tells me is -- if Ed is talking to his writing team and he says, "I want more drama. I want more this," they will think what they think he wants them to do. And if he says, "Well, the taxi should be yellow," he said, "Yeah, yeah. The taxi should be yellow." Because he says everybody in Hollywood is kissing everybody else's butt because they want

to say what the showrunner wants because they all want to succeed. They want to get ahead. And so, he instead, will pose questions to his team and he poses questions in a particular way so that they actually don't know what he's thinking. But then he told a story too about getting performance from his actors. It's such a basic story but I love it because it's so simple and you totally get it. And it's about conferring authorship in a creative moment or decision. He's directing a scene, he's got a guy who's playing a detective and a woman who's the suspect in this cop show, and they're outside and it's very bright. The detective has his sunglasses on and there's a moment in the scene when he's got to take his sunglasses off and stare right into the eyes of the woman. And they can't get it right. It's this very awkward where the sunglasses are coming off. So finally Ed says, "Cut, cut, everybody cut," and told me, he said, "Actors think they're artists. They believe and they are artists. They do not want to be treated as puppets on a string." So he cuts the scene, he goes up to the actor and he says, "Look, when you take your glasses off, when you take those sunglasses off, that's the first moment we are going to see you make eye contact with that other person. That's when we capture that sort of human dynamic. When do you think you should take the sunglasses off?" He didn't say, "Take the sunglasses off at the third line where you say, "However.'" "When do you think you should take the sunglasses off?" And he explained to me that he does this very deliberately. That in doing that he is acknowledging the other person's sense of art and intelligence, he's saying, "I trust you," and he's challenging them to think it through and, like the commander's rule, he is offering a question and then letting the other person think and speak." And anyway, they went back and they shot the scene, and the way Ed tells it -- I wasn't there, I don't know, I can't attest to this -- but the way Ed tells it, they nailed it the first time because the way this person was thinking was entirely different. So this is how you can, I think, use questions to get people to think and to process and to project themselves in a different way.

JORDAN: What about people who don't want to connect? What about people who are avoiding or they're dodging the questions or

maybe as a journalist you're talking with somebody who they've got their agenda and they want to avoid any talk about Russian interference in this or, "Did you take money for that?" They really want to focus on what they want to focus on. How are you going to create that connection with those types of folks, or even just kids who don't want to tell you that they're the one that drew on the walls?

FRANK: I have a chapter in the book that I seriously want to entitle Terrorists and Teenagers, and then I decided I didn't want to impune teenagers like that. But, it's a chapter that's all about bridge building questions. The character here is a guy by the name of Barry Spodak. Barry Spodak was a young graduate student, psychology and all this kind of stuff, and he ends up as the group therapist to a guy by the name of John Hinckley, they man who shot Ronald Reagan in Saint Elizabeth's, which is a psychiatric hospital here after Hinckley was found guilty by reason of insanity and essentially hospitalized/imprisoned for years and years.

And what Barry went into was what's called dangerous threat assessment. And dangerous threat assessment is trying to figure out whether somebody who writes a letter saying that he's going to shoot the president is just writing a letter saying that or is really going to do it. And the FBI and the Secret Service and the U.S. Marshals question people like this all the time. Barry trains them, among other things, in how to talk to people like this. And for Barry -- for others in this chapter I address who are not so extreme -- this is about building rapport. What Barry is trying to do is to reach somebody who may feel angry, alienated, apart, ignored, marginalized, they may be wary, they may be suspicious, they may actually be hostile, potentially even violent. It's a little bit like a hostage negotiation.

You want to start by just getting that person talking. And by getting them talking you build rapport, and by building rapport you build trust and by building trust, you hope that person starts to open up, but you can also assess their seriousness. It's

utterly fascinating but the techniques are completely transferable to our lives. Tell me about yourself. Barry will start and so will FBI agents a lot of times, by finding something about this person, either where they're sitting, what they're wearing, what they've done, that you think they'll be proud of and that you may even share, and you'll ask them that, and it's to relax that other person. "I see you bought that new pair of shoes. That looks nice. Where'd you get those?" Or if you're talking to somebody and they're home, you'll see a picture of their family and say, "What a beautiful family." You get someone to open up.

But, beyond that and making further progress gets more challenging, and Barry has what I call questions without question marks, among other things. His questions without question marks are, "So you wrote this letter saying that the president is the antichrist, a lot of people feel this way. Tell me about that." He doesn't say, "Are you going to kill the president?" and he doesn't use the question to challenge someone or put them in a corner but a question without a question mark to provide them the space to speak. I think in this area of rapport building, that's very important.

The other important part is to realize that this is going to take time. You're not going to have this all out at once. You're not suddenly going to have a trusting relationship and someone's going to tell you exactly what it is you need to know. So that process of bridge building, 1.) Takes time, 2.) Requires a great deal of work including questions without question marks, 3.) Tremendous listening skills because you're listening for varying degrees of subtlety and we've talked about listening and it's very, very important in this category as well.

JORDAN: I would assume he has to avoid certain kinds of triggers or maybe he's looking for triggers to get an emotional reaction out of the person that he's speaking with.

FRANK: He doesn't start with that. He doesn't want to provoke, he wants to comfort. He talks about system one and system two in the

brain, that's something that Dan Kahneman has written about, and he wants very much to be in a system where the flags and the defenses are down. That's how you build that sense of rapport and that's why the questions he starts and a lot of people -- similarly in empathetic questioning. You want to start with open ended questions. "Tell me about that. How do you feel? What do you think?" rather than very pointed questions or specific questions that are yes/no questions or have quantifiable answers. You don't want to quote from someone's letter and say, "Did you really mean that?" because what are they going to say? Of course they're going to say, "Well,no," or, "Well, that's for you to figure out," or whatever. You're not going to get that. That's not where you want to start. You're starting and you're building in a very deliberate way.

JORDAN: So do you know what you're looking for before you start a line of questioning or are you actually open minded the whole time?

FRANK: You probably have a pretty good sense of what you're looking for, at least broadly. Barry is looking for, "Is this person going to give me any indication that they have the capacity, the intent, the deeper motive to carry out this action. Are there any indicators in their past behavior that would demonstrate that?" So, there's a very specific sense of outcome here in terms of trying to determine whether or not in Barry's case, this person is actually a threat.

If you're sitting down with your adolescent or you're the adolescent and you're trying to sit down with your parent to straighten them out, there's something, maybe specific but also maybe broader, that you're really trying to resolve. "Look, I understand you're off at college, I know you're busy, but I want to hear from you once a week or I want to hear from you periodically." I'm not just going to sit here and, "Why aren't you calling me?" You don't say, "Why aren't you calling me?" because you're putting the person on the defensive right away. But maybe there's another conversation about, "How would you like to stay in touch? How can I help you? Would you prefer to text or talk?" So there are a number of ways to come at these

sorts of things that are, as I like to say, building that bridge a piece at a time.

JORDAN: So instead of accusing, simply guiding them down a line of questioning that rewards them for participation.

FRANK: Barry's questions don't accuse, Barry's questions inquire. That's how he builds rapport. Once you accuse, you put someone on the defensive. I have a chapter about confrontational questioning which is designed to do just that. That's what you want to do with something like that. Here you want to, as you say, engage people, and it's very important to do that. Here you're listening, obviously, for something entirely different. Here you're listening for indications, for hints, you're listening for intent, you're listening for insecurity that might drive some of this behavior -- so you're keying into very particular indicators.

JORDAN: This sounds like a long game instead of just, "Hey, I heard you're writing these letters about killing the president. Are you going to do it or are you just a knucklehead?" There's obviously a longer play here. How long do these interrogations last? I'm just envisioning 45 to an hour and 45 or longer, and you're just B.S.ing back and forth and trying to dig to the bottom of this barrel.

FRANK: Yes, and sometimes longer. This is what Barry does -- the people that Barry trains -- but this actually applies to interrogation. So when we think about terrorists or potential terrorists, again there's a ton of research and this has come up in our very controversial discussions in this country about enhanced interrogation, torture -- that does not work as well as rapport building and the kind of questioning that is going to take time and a long a time, and over time, where you actually try to build a relationship, albeit with someone who is very hostile.

JORDAN: I was talking with my friend Robin Dreeke who was earlier on the show and he's one of the top FBI agents in terms of

counterintelligence. In fact, he might even be the top counterintelligence FBI agent currently. I asked him, “Hey, how do you learn interrogation skills and what sort of schools and classes do you have that I might be able to shadow or check out,” and he goes, “I’ve got disappointing news for you,” and I thought he was going to say, “Nothing’s open to the public ever. You’re out of luck.” And he said, “The best stuff is the stuff that you’re teaching at AoC on Art of Charm, which is developing rapport, getting them to know, like, and trust you, and then nurturing that relationship over time. There is no substitute for that. The shortcuts do not exist.”

FRANK: I think that that’s one of the things that questions can really help us understand, that we can build rapport and we build trust by asking. It depends how you ask, it depends on the tone of voice that you bring to the conversation and the types of words you use. You can ask a question in a benign way or in an accusatory way and they can be verbatim, the same thing. “What time did you come home last night?” “What time did you come home last night?” You know? But if we’re determined and we understand, and this is part of really why I did this.

I’ve interviewed people on radio and television and all the rest and the way I interview a scoundrel is going to be different than the way I interview a Nobel Prize winner and it’s going to be different than the way I interview a parent who’s lost a child but wants to talk about it because they want to help other people who may find themselves in a similar situation. Those questions and the asking and one of the reasons people actually go on the air after they’ve had some kind of tragedy in their lives is there’s a cathartic sense to it. For those who’ve heard Storycorps, or they’re familiar with that, people making an appointment with one another, literally and sitting down across the microphone, is incredible power in the ask. You are saying to that other person, “I care about you. I’m really interested in you.”

Actually in all the different types of questions that I outlined, in one form or another, you’re saying, “I actually care about you.”

Barry is saying, “I care about you,” to people who’s threatened to kill the president. Terry Gross is saying, “I cared about you,” to people she’s interviewing to try to figure out their essence. My nurse practitioner is saying, “I care about you,” when she’s trying to figure out why they’re having dizzy spells. So that sense of caring and connecting and listening, there’s nothing more rewarding really or flattering than being listened to.

JORDAN: Frank, this has been extremely enlightening and I want to know, is there anything I haven’t asked you that you think you need to include?

FRANK: Well first of all, you get 27 points for that question because one of the things I tell my students and we learn as interviewers is that last question should be, “Is there anything else I haven’t asked you?”

JORDAN: Oh, great.

FRANK: Sometimes you get something revealing and sometimes you get somebody like me saying thanks. So sit down with somebody you know and you’ve known for a long time, for 20 minutes, and come up with a series of questions based on who they are and what you’d like to evoke from them, whether it’s information, whether it’s anecdotes and stories, a family history, reflection on adversity that they’ve faced and how they came threw it, whatever it is.

Write out those questions, spend 20 minutes asking them and listening, and there are two words you as the questioner may not use at any point during that 20 minutes, I or me. You’re not talking about yourself, it’s not self referential anyway, you’re going to just entirely focus on that question. And it’s much more rewarding and much harder than people often think because most of us are not natural interviewers where we just ask other questions of other people.

Don’t ask compound questions, ask one at a time. “How did you start your career and where did you start and what was the

hardest thing about it and what do you love about it?" Whoa. Which of those questions do I choose to ask? Which do I remember? If you ask one of those at a time and then with a series of additional follow up questions, that can take you deeper. So, some discipline here is what I hope people will get from the book and some ideas about how to become more successful through the questions we ask in relationships, in work, in civic life, and in learning. I believe so deeply in this. For me personally and professionally, this has been an incredible license to learn about people, places, and things, and I feel so much the richer for it and I know it works for others.

JORDAN: Frank, brilliant. The book, *Ask More: The Power of Questions to Open Doors, Uncover Solutions, and Spark Change*. I was telling my producer Jason about this book the other day. I was like, "You've got to read this. It's so great." He's like, "Eh, you're the interviewer. I do more of this other stuff," and Jason, what do you think of the book now?

JASON: I bought it half way through the show.

FRANK: Thanks, Jason.

JASON: I cannot wait to read it.

JORDAN: It's one of the greatest things I've read in a long time. I don't want people to think, "Well I'm not an interviewer so I don't need this. The idea that questions are only for people who conduct interviews professionally, this book blows that idea out of the water.

FRANK: Well thank you. That's why and I hope how I wrote it. I wanted to be inspired by what I've done as an interviewer but I want to share as much as possible, those techniques and the ones I learned from all these other people who are interviewers too without calling themselves interviewers -- master questioners, I'd call them -- in life so that we can all be better at it.

JORDAN: That was really great, Jason. This guy surprised me. The book was really good but I don't why I'm surprised that somebody whose professional career is broadcasting really brought the heat. I guess I'm just still in that mode where I think, "How much can you really talk about questions in a way that's interesting for other people, that is?"

JASON: It was a fun show and I liked a lot of the takeaways from this and I'm really going to dive into because when we were talking before the show, I didn't believe it was going to be that engaging. And halfway through the show, I immediately went out and bought the book. I am so excited to dive into this one because there's so many things that you can apply in your daily life, just by asking the right questions.

JORDAN: Yeah and I love the fact that there's different questioning tools for different specific outcomes. A lot of us just think, "Well we can ask things that we want to know and we'll get there," and it's really not the case, right? We know that. And if you have kids you know that all too well. But of course in our professional careers and our professional life, we're not necessarily employing these, so the book does a great job of outlining that. Frank gave us a great sneak peak into many of the tools available in the book as well. So, great big thank you to Frank. The book title, again, is *Ask More: The Power of Questions to Open Doors, Uncover Solutions, and Spark Change*. Of course that'll be linked up in the show notes.

If you enjoyed that, don't forget to thank Frank on Twitter. We'll have his Twitter linked up in the show notes. Tweet at me your number one takeaway from Frank. I'm @theartofcharm on Twitter and of course we'll be replying to your questions and your feedback for Frank on Fanmail Friday. If you're looking for the show notes because you have no idea what the hell we're talking about right now, tap your phone screen or go to theartofcharm.com/podcast.

I also want to encourage you to join us in the AoC challenge at theartofcharm.com/challenge or you can text the word AoC, well the three letters A-O-C to 38470. That's AOC to 38470. What

happens when you do that is you get access to the challenge, which is all about improving your networking and your connection skills, and inspiring those around you to develop a personal and professional relationship with you. It's free, a lot of people might not know that. That's the whole idea. It's a fun way to get the ball rolling and get some forward momentum. We'll also send you our fundamentals Toolbox that I mentioned earlier on the show. That includes some great stuff, right out of the box, that you can apply on reading body language, having charismatic nonverbal communication, the science of attraction, negotiation techniques, persuasion tactics, and networking and influence strategies. Basically, what we're teaching here at The Art of Charm. It's designed to make you a better networker, a better connector, and a better thinker. So, go to theartofcharm.com/challenge or text 'AoC' to 38470.

This episode of AoC was produced by Jason DeFillippo. Jason Sanderson is our audio engineer and editor, show notes on the website are by Robert Fogarty, theme music by Little People, transcriptions by TranscriptionOutsourcing.net -- I'm your host Jordan Harbinger. If you can think of anyone who might benefit from the episode you just heard, please pay The Art of Charm the highest compliment and pay it forward by sharing this episode with that person. It only takes a moment and great ideas are meant to be shared. So, share the show with your friends and enemies, stay charming, and leave everything and everyone better than you found them.