



Getting it Right

Advanced Skills for Auditors

Workbook

Fact and Fiction

All characters and events in ***Getting it Right*** are entirely fictional. Any similarity to real people or organisations is coincidental.

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Introduction

Audits are an essential part of any management system. They are used to determine whether the management system is effectively implemented and meets its objectives.

One of the keys to understanding auditing is remembering you are examining the process, not a person's job performance or skills. To audit quality, environmental or safety systems professionally an auditor will need to use the right people skills.

As an auditor you will deal with a wide range of employees from senior managers to production line staff. These employees will vary in their communication ability, their understanding of the audit process and their understanding of the auditor's job.

You will find employees who understand and support your role and then occasionally you will find employees who are threatened by the audit process, shy, or difficult to deal with.

Your interpersonal skill will enable you to build a co-operative relationship with the auditee and to maximise the effectiveness of the audit.

Your people skills can always be improved. ***Getting It Right*** explains how to make the best use of your people skills in an audit. It begins with *Getting Off To A Good Start* and concludes with *Question Techniques*.

About The Program

Getting It Right is set in an actual work environment with actors playing typical employee roles of auditor and auditee. The video includes comments from real auditors and auditees. The program focuses on interpersonal skills rather than the audit process and findings.

There are two audit scenarios in the video. The first is with a difficult manager, Bill, and we see how Noel, the auditor, uses specific skills to turn the situation into a positive and constructive audit.

The second scenario shows how an auditor, Lesley, deals with three different auditees and uses a range of question techniques to ensure the accuracy and effectiveness of the audit.

Getting Off To A Good Start

Auditees are often apprehensive about an audit. Some are having a bad day, some have had negative experiences with auditors, others feel insecure about the audit process and others find the questioning process confronting.

The challenge in auditing is to get the auditee on side and to work together and it's not always an easy task.

Audits are about finding information on a process. A successful auditor is excellent at using a variety of skilled techniques.

For an audit to be successful it's important that the auditor gets off to a good start. Preparation and familiarising yourself with the process and past audit findings will give you confidence. It also conveys that you are professional and know what you are doing.

From the outset make sure the audit is an open process. The schedule, areas to be audited and scope of the audit should be agreed on by the auditor and the auditee. If the auditee knows the framework of the audit in advance they will be more comfortable and able to contribute more effectively.

Assume auditees have pride in their job and that they want to improve the work procedures.

Approaching an audit with a constructive attitude is important to the success of the audit.

Use the greeting to establish contact with the auditee - smile, shake hands and make eye contact. If you are relaxed then it helps the auditee relax.

Getting Off To A Good Start



Watch Noel and Bill. Observe the techniques Noel, the auditor, uses to get off to a good start.

Points to note

Body language is a strong communication tool. Both the auditees and the auditor unconsciously register the messages sent to each other by each other's body language. An auditor should be professional, confident and relaxed.

A successful auditor uses body language to make the auditee feel comfortable.

Show the auditee that you're listening. Don't fold your arms or turn away from them. Don't point or slump. These body postures can send negative messages such as you are aggressive, uninterested or bored.

Use eye contact with the auditee to let them know you are listening to them and interested in what they have to say.

As well as using your body language effectively, develop an awareness of the auditees body language which tells you how they are feeling.

Auditing is a team process between two people experienced in their respective roles. An auditee should feel confident that they have something to contribute.

Use language appropriate to your auditee. You might be very confident with jargon associated with an audit but it could be confusing to your auditee.

Checkpoint

Think about your own skills for Getting Off To A Good Start.

- Do I always have eye contact or do I get involved in my own thoughts and forget about the auditee.
- Do I fold my arms?
- Do I point?
- Do I find common ground on first meeting?
- Do I find something positive to say about the auditees business area?
- Do I smile?
- Am I creating a feeling of teamwork?
- Have I prepared?
- Have I familiarised myself with the process and past audit findings?

Using the Right Questions and Techniques

Once you have started an audit, your question techniques become important assets.

Accurate information is essential to an auditor, but it is often hard to uncover the facts because the auditee may be reluctant, vague, confusing or verbose. To quickly grasp the facts of a process, a successful auditor uses question techniques effectively.

Question Techniques

1. Closed Questions
2. Open Questions
3. Probing Questions
4. Challenging Questions
5. Reflecting
6. Summarising

Question Techniques

1. Closed Questions

Closed questions are used to direct the conversation and keep the auditee on track. They help clarity and check facts and generate short answers - usually yes or no.

Lesley to Michael

“Does every operator know the process and follow this procedure?”

Lesley to Maxine

“When was the last time you were tested in static discharge controls?”

Lesley to Frank

“Sorry to interrupt Frank, but what I really want to know is who updates the manuals?”

2. Open Questions

Open questions are used to get the auditee talking. They provide a lot of information on which to build more specific questions. They start with words such as....explain to me, describe or show me.

Lesley to Michael

“Now Michael I’d like to go back to training. Can you describe the procedure you have in place for training?”

Lesley to Maxine

“To help me understand it, could you show me what you do and I’ll follow it in the manual?”

Lesley to Maxine

“Could you explain what you use this for?”

Question Techniques

3. Probing Questions

Probing questions are used to uncover core issues. They are useful for obtaining more detail. Probing questions can sound like an interrogation and so they should be used in combination with other open questions.

Lesley to Michael

“How do you know that they do?”

Lesley to Michael

“OK - I’d like to talk about training a bit later. But what I’m really asking is how do you know this procedure is being followed by everyone, all the time?”

Lesley to Michael

“Yes. Good. But does this have broader implications for your quality control of the machines over the last six months?”

4. Challenging Questions

Challenging questions are used when the auditee answers contradict previous answers or observations. Care must be taken to make sure you do not appear argumentative or aggressive.

They are useful if you feel that the auditee is missing the point, generalising, exaggerating or being dismissive.

Lesley to Michael

“Michael are you saying that you rely on customer complaints to check procedures?”

Lesley to Frank

“I was told that the densitometer test had been in place for 4 months. Are you saying that you would have expected the update to have been done?”

Lesley to Michael

“Yes but I note that there was a similar finding in the last audit. Are you saying that you’re not too concerned about the performance of the system you have for up-dates?”

Question Techniques

5. Reflecting

Reflecting questions are used to test your understanding of what the auditee has said. You express what they have told you in your own words to confirm that you have understood it correctly.

Lesley to Michael

“So let me see if I’ve got this right - every machine is tested using this checklist and the production manager will only allow the machine to be passed on to distribution upon receipt of the quality checklist?”

Lesley to Michael

“So after the general induction, they come to your section have a short induction on the re-manufacturing process and then they’re on their own?”

6. Summarising

Summarising is used to concisely list or tie together the main points covered in a session. Like reflecting, summarising is a powerful way to show you have been listening and to test mutual understanding.

Lesley

“So at your monthly production managers’ meeting you review and proposed changes to the documented procedures. If they are approved then the changes are given to...”

“...however there is no check that all the changes are included and there is no regular review of the manuals to determine if the updates have been included.”

All of these question techniques can be used to uncover the facts or issues that your audit addresses.

The auditee’s behavioural style, attitude and communication skills affects your choice of questions.

Questioning Techniques Checkpoint

- Do you use open questions?
What words or phrases do you generally use to start an open question?
- Do you use closed questions?
When are you most likely to use these?
- Do you use probing questions?
What do you do to minimise the ‘interrogative’ perception of probing questions?
- Do you use challenging questions?
In what situations do you use them?
- When do you use the techniques of reflecting?
- When do you use the technique of summarising?
- Do you ask leading questions?
These questions are more like statements to which you seek confirmation. They do not yield new information and can be misleading if you are on the wrong track.



Questioning Technique Identification Worksheet

In the video scenes with the auditors, Noel and Lesley, identify the body language and questioning technique being used and ask yourself why the auditor is using this type of question at this point in the audit. What response does the question uncover?

Note how the auditor encourages the auditee and builds on the good start they establish.

Example



(at 17 minutes)

	Dialogue	Technique Used
Lesley	Michael can you show me the procedure for testing completed machines?	
Michael	Yes - Here it is.	
Lesley	Does every operator know the process and follow this procedure?	
Michael	Yes they do.	
Lesley	How do you know that they do?	
Michael	Well it's the way they are trained.	

Lesley	OK - I'd like to come back to training later. But what I am really asking is how do you know this procedure is being followed by everyone, all of the time?	
Michael	Well we would soon know from the service calls and customer complaints.	
Lesley	Michael are you saying that you rely on customer complaints to check procedures?	
Michael	No, of course not. We have a checklist procedure. The operator tests every machine and completes the job cards, check lists and diagnostic printouts. The checklists are returned to the production manager who ensures the procedure has been followed.	
Lesley	Could you show me the checklist used in the testing procedure for the last month?	
Michael	Sure.	
Lesley	So let me see if I've got this right - every machine is tested using this check list and the production manager will only allow the machine to be passed onto distribution on receipt of this quality checklist.	
Michael	That's right. And you can see that because the production manager sights all of the checklists he would know if the procedure was not being followed.	

Lesley	I see.	
Lesley	Now Michael I would like to go back to training. Can you take me through the procedure that you have in place for training?	
Michael	Well as you know each new employee goes through an induction course. They learn about their conditions, pay, OH&S and quality improvement. They also do an induction over here. We show them a video on the re-manufacturing process, show them their job, give them the manuals and so on. Part of this involves explaining the quality text procedures.	
Lesley	So...after the general induction, they come to your section, have a short induction on the remanufacturing process and then they're on their own?	
Michael	Not quite - after the basic induction they work with a section team leader for the first few shifts.	
Lesley	How do you know that they understand the testing procedure at the end of the program?	
Michael	They sign off on their training records.	

Lesley	Could I see those records?	
Michael	Sure (reaches for intercom...talks on intercom) Frank, I've got Lesley here and we're talking about the training for the testing procedure. Could you bring me up the training reports for this area? Thanks.	
Lesley	Thanks, I'll need them for the next part of the audit. What I'd like to do now is to go down to the production line and talk to some of the staff and follow up on what we've discussed.	

Conclusion

In this video, the auditors had a variety of different situations - a difficult manager, a confident manager, and operator and a talkative production manager.

The auditors adapted their people skills and question techniques to deal with each situation.

Throughout the audit they were positive and conveyed that the audit was a team process.

Each auditor has their own style and every industry and organisation has its own requirements. However, people skills are important for every auditor.

Developing people skills enables an auditor to get a positive response from the auditee and maximise the effectiveness of the audit.

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