Questioning Your Answers

In a conventional classroom the mode of teaching centers on the lecture – the delivery of instructional content. In a PLI course, the lecture/content is delivered through the textbook, and the purpose of the chat room is to synthesize and apply the content of the readings.

The successful PLI chat session revolves around the eProf's skill in asking questions, not only questions to get the ball rolling, but follow-up questions -- questioning the students' answers. Probing, thought-provoking questions force students away from simply regurgitating what has been read in the pages of the textbook to an intellectual ownership of the material, relating newly-discovered concepts to other concepts, applying theory to real life. This article aspires to help students better interact intellectually with what has been gleaned from textbooks and the scriptures – learning how to think in order to incarnate ideas, doctrine, and vision.

DO answer questions with responses that are:

Personal-focused– Personalize your answer to include what YOU believe...what YOU understand...how YOU will apply the knowledge to a ministry context. This is a sharp move away from theory to belief and application.

Multi-Issue– Few ministry issues and theological doctrines stand by themselves, but are interconnected to other issues and doctrines. For example the doctrine of the virgin birth is connected to the doctrine of deity...and trinity...and salvation... Your answers should demonstrate that you are learning to connect the dots of interrelated issues and doctrines.

Practical, Cultural, and Contextual– Never let a learned theory float in the cranium without tethering it to reality. For example, a discussion of the seeker church model has to be probed to discover whether or not it fits in every social, ethnic, and cultural context. It must be probed as to how it succeeds ... or fails ... as a model in comparison to the traditional church.

Complex-answer Required – The flip side of this would be a simple, obvious answer. Think hard before answering any question. Don't be afraid to consider something "outside the box." Avoid "pat" answers or opinions. Be prepared to backup your answers with scripture or citations from your course textbook.

Assignment-oriented – Review material presented in reading assignments. This demonstrates that you've actually completed the reading and underscores the value of the textbook as a reference source beyond the PLI course. Of course, avoid "Punch-the-Dummy" responses. (See below)

Involvement-empowering – Remember that you are part of a group of learners, and your interaction with the other students is crucial in answering questions. It may take more than one student's answer to completely answer the question, so a "group-think" in the chat room is beneficial to all.

Behavioral-oriented – As you work beyond theory or textbook to application, try to relate your responses to actual behavioral situations. Include ideas of

what you will do with the information or truth learned, give examples of how it may affect your life.

Follow-up – Often the best and most revealing questions are not the ones first asked by the eProf, but follow-up questions asked by fellow students. These questions help clarify answers to move the whole group beyond the façade of understanding and may prompt sharing of personal applicational experience with others in the chat.

DON'T answer questions with responses that are:

Closed – Questions answered with a "Yes" or "No" rarely demonstrate your mastery of the material.

"Punch-the-Dummy" – We have all had our nauseating fill of small group workbooks that expect you to answer a question with the exact same words that are in the text. Don't be satisfied with an obvious response.