

SIMPLE BASIC THINKING



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FOREWORD

When you are sick, you go to your family doctor. For the preservation of your teeth, you go to the dentist. Your hairdresser makes sure that your hair looks good. For legal advice, you go to a lawyer, and for financial advice, to an accountant. Psychiatric problems send you to a psychiatrist.

But whom can you go to if you have trouble making a decision? What about solving a reoccurring problem? Who can help you decide if you should make that career move or not? Or which partner should you choose?

It would be great if there were someone in your neighborhood who could help you to make good decisions... quickly and simply... without lengthy sessions or psychoanalysis. You just ask your question and through a simple conversation, together you come to a fitting answer, often within a half hour!

I have met someone who can help you do just that: Edith Cohen. She gave me an “EDGE” or a “simple basic thinking” session which is what she calls her interactive process for problem solving. I asked my question and together we came to a fitting answer. It was amazing. Through her questions, I gained insight into the world of my own thinking. Then, I was able to conclude exactly what I needed to do.

Edith has been developing her dialogic method for simple basic thinking for ten years and the results are eye-opening. That is what this brochure is all about. Read and let yourself be surprised, convinced and inspired.

Jenny Swart
Houten, Spring 2008

Engelse vertaling Sherry van Loenen-Kent

INTRODUCTION

Edith first became interested in helping people find answers to their questions in the 1990's, following her contact with two people:

George, the 25 year old head of a call center, felt dissatisfied with his work. He knew what he wanted to do, which was to become a barkeeper in a trendy bar on the Leidseplein in Amsterdam. He asked Edith whether this ambition was a viable one. Edith helped George make the contacts so that he could apply for work in that trendy bar. He would have to start at the bottom of the ladder and work his way up. During their next session, however, George was having second thoughts. He confessed that now that the job was actually becoming available to him, he realized that he didn't actually want it. The idea of becoming a barman was a dream and he preferred to keep it that way. He said that he was actually comfortable staying at his current job at the call center and no harm done.

Then, through George, Anna, 40 years old, contacted Edith. Anna had the idea to set up a telephone help-line for people with mental health problems. She thought she could earn quite a bit of money doing this. While examining the possibilities, Edith informed Anna that a non-profit organization already existed that worked with insurance companies, providing this service at almost no cost. At first, Anna was disappointed. Ultimately she dropped her plans and was thankful that Edith had prevented her from struggling to create a program that was already available.

Both George and Anna found their interactions with Edith helpful. Edith felt moved to help more people in the decision making process and took on the challenge to develop a dialogic method which could find fitting answers to their questions.

Even before she had developed her method, Edith ascertained that if she listened carefully to what the other person wanted, a fitting answer would emerge naturally from the conversation. With experience, the amount of time it took to find a fitting answer soon decreased from two hours to one hour and then to a half an hour. In the beginning, the subject of the questions was limited to decisions about work. Later on, Edith extended this to include other types of questions, even philosophical or psychological ones about happiness, insecurity or competence.

From her consultation and mediation bureau, she worked with many authors, publishers and artists, who came to her through word-of-mouth. Questions from her clients gave her the opportunity to reflect with increased sophistication on her method for how people can arrive at fitting answers.

After years of development, Edith's method for simple basic thinking had crystallized enough to be put to the test. She chose a variety of different kinds of people, including a psychiatrist, a psychologist and a child psychologist to receive an EDGE and afterwards all the people were asked to judge its utility and (market) value. Most people found it invaluable, so after having given more than four hundred sessions, Edith began teaching her EDGE method to students at the Humanistic University, in Utrecht, The Netherlands.

People are rarely able to unravel their own thoughts or behavioral patterns by themselves. We know that not all of our behavioral patterns are directed by our conscious thought processes. Edith found that by focusing upon the particular formulation of the client's question, as well as their precise words, a fitting answer appears. The answer seems to be inextricably embedded within their question.

While in principle, everyone can undergo an “EDGE” session, it is not recommended for people with mental illness or psychiatric difficulties. For these types of problems, professional mental health treatment is recommended instead.

This procedure also is not efficacious in answering questions about life expectancy, or disease progression, prognosis, or outcome. Rather, the EDGE method was developed to address issues about how people normally function and perform in their daily lives... things that people can influence themselves.

Edith has coined the terms: “EDGE,” “edger” and “edgee.” “EDGE” is the name of her method. The “edger” is the person facilitating the dialogue, and the “edgee” is the person seeking an answer to their question.

For simplicity for the reader, the use of the words “he” and “him” have been chosen, however of course this refers as well to “she” and “her”.

DESCRIPTION OF THE METHOD

Having agreed to write a description of Edith's "EDGE: dialogue in simple basic thinking" method, it seemed to me an excellent opportunity to have an EDGE session with her myself. That way, I could experience how it worked. At the same time, I could also ask a question about an issue that had been bothering me for a number of weeks.

INTRODUCTION

"Jenny, you have asked for an EDGE and I would be pleased to give you one. I will explain briefly what the purpose is and how I work. You ask your question and I will write it down. I will repeat your question. Perhaps you will want to change or clarify your question. I will keep writing your question down and repeating it until I have correctly noted your question. Then, I will ask you a lot of questions and will be doing a lot of writing. Don't let yourself be distracted by that. Don't think too long before you answer. If you get stuck, I will choose another way to approach the subject and keep the conversation going.

At some moment, there will be what I call the "turning point". How the turning point appears could be just as surprising for me as it is for you. It is possible that it could startle you, or that you could cry or laugh. It doesn't matter. We will just let that moment happen because the turning point is necessary in order to achieve a good answer.

After a maximum of half an hour, we will have a fitting answer to your question. Then it is up to you to decide what to do with that answer. Maybe you need to let it sink in for a while, or maybe things will fall into place right away for you. It could even be that the answer resolves additional questions that you have had... or stimulates new ones to appear. It is your process and everything that happens is OK. It is up to you."

I then asked my question. Indeed, there was a surprising 'turning point' (see case study #4 on page 12-13).

Afterwards, I asked Edith to describe her method for giving an EDGE.

"I write continuously, while listening very carefully. I pay attention and attempt to understanding the crux of the question. This could entail a number of back-and-forth questioning before the issue becomes clear. If the "edgee" gets stuck in a particular theme or thought pattern, I look for another perspective, in order to elicit an answer that carries us forward. I don't get involved with the emotions of the "edgee," but try to understand what they mean by their words. I stay clear of my own desires and preferences, by concentrating solely on their question, their answers, and finding the fitting response. Typically, the conversation develops a rhythm that we can both feel comfortable with."

TECHNIQUE

After I asked my question, I noticed that you asked me to clarify things, for example, what I understood a "good person" to be (see page 12). Could you tell more about that?

"I asked that question because you might assume that you and I have the same understanding of what a 'good person' is, but that is not always the case. If I ask you to give me an example of when you have done a good deed, then you can come up with something that relates to you. Only when I clearly understand what *you* think a good person or a good deed is, can I go on to my next question or come up with a fitting answer.

I would like to give you some examples of various kinds of edges."

Case 1, an EDGE with some difficulty formulating the question

Harold, 52 years old, asks his question: "The question that matters is how the various football clubs in Roermond can develop genuine respect for each other and act accordingly. That's it."

After writing the question down, Edith feels that it is not yet fully correct and she repeats the question. Harold notices this too. "It is not formulated very well", he says. After going back and forth a few times, the clarified question appears: "The question that really matters is how can I get the various football clubs in Roermond, especially the Catholic ones, to be able to work together and to show understanding and respect towards each other? Yes, that is it, but it is still a difficult sentence. It is not getting any easier."

Edith asks: "What does 'that really matters' mean?" Harold says: "Yes, I understand where you want to go, but now I want to talk about the football clubs." He asks again for confirmation: "Is the question now OK?" Beginning to understand Edith's method, eventually Harold tells her "'that really matters' is the same as 'fundamentally important and feeling happy about it.'" Edith then asks, "when that happens, do you recognize it?" Harold replies, "yes, when things are almost impossible, it succeeds anyway." He gives an example of a work situation, "when something financial or organizational is almost impossible, I manage to do it anyway. I always manage it. I don't have any examples of when I didn't manage."

So, ultimately, the fitting answer seems to evolve naturally out of the dialogue. "Because of his native tenacity and loyalty to the football clubs, he will work to help them develop genuine respect for each other." When asked whether he is satisfied with the answer, Herald reports that he asked the wrong question, and another more pertinent question has now come to the fore.

Case 2, a typical EDGE

Carla, a woman of 36, asked: "How should I deal with the death of my mother?" Carla, an only child, reports that she has not been able to come to terms with the loss of her parents. Her mother died eighteen months ago and her father five years ago. She says that she fears she will never make peace with the loss of her parents. Her grief feels inappropriate and overwhelms her again and again. Everything that she sees and does has associations with her parents, so her daily activities are constantly disrupted. Carla had a somewhat easier time with the death of her father because he did not suffer. The death of her mother was another matter. Her mother suffered a stroke, but had trouble obtaining the correct diagnosis. It seemed as though her mother just slipped away and then died, all within six weeks. Carla is upset because she didn't get time to say goodbye. She feels like an orphan. Because she has all of these associations, she has to cry constantly, and then she feels guilty. She has a loving husband and a good family life, but finds herself saying "I'm sorry" to everyone all the time.

Edith tells Carla that she doesn't have to say that she is sorry and that she is allowed to grieve for the death of her parents. Carla wants to move on with her life but does not feel that she has completed her grief process. She does think she is on the right path, however, because she feels less distraught than before. She reports that it does her good to care for the graves of her parents. Together, Edith and Carla come to a fitting answer: Carla decides to commit every Sunday morning to care for her parent's graves. That way, she has Sundays to directly address the loss of her parents and grieve undisturbed. She can then focus on other things Monday through Saturday.

THE TURNING POINT

At the beginning of my EDGE, you said that at a certain moment there would be a “turning point.” I still remember it clearly. At that moment, I laughed nervously because I could not believe that it could be so simple. It seems to me that the turning point could be different with different people. Could you tell me how you experience the turning point, and how you deal with it? Do you have some examples of different turning points in an EDGE?

“In every EDGE, the turning point and the reaction of the “edgee” are just as surprising for me as for the person themselves. In spite of the fact that I am working in a very concentrated way, at a certain moment I see emotion come up in the “edgee”. I don’t go into those feelings, but that is a moment for a natural pause. I put my pen down, pour a cup of tea or coffee, and depending on the setting, I may give the “edgee” time to stroll or look around.

But I don’t let the pause last very long. Attention needs to return fairly quickly to the EDGE, or the “edgee” could start to lose focus. After all, the fitting answer still needs to be given.”

Case 3, a turning point with a shock

Irene, 46, asks how she can get more self confidence.

Responding to Edith’s questions, Irene indicates that for her, self confidence has three parts: 1) certainty that she is doing the right thing and going in the right direction, 2) trust in her own abilities, whether social, rational, professional or emotional, and 3) her appearance. Irene says that she feels most confident about her social skills and least confident in her emotional reactions.

Responding to Edith’s questioning, she recalls an example: after the death of her boyfriend’s father, she felt anxious, while she would have liked to have felt more calm, peaceful and contained.

When asked to give an example of her social skills, Irene cannot give an answer. So Edith changes her approach and asks Irene what her other strong qualities are. Irene also has difficulty with this question. Edith then asks for an example of when someone gave her a compliment. Irene replies that it has not happened for a long time. However, Edith reminds her that when they sat down to start their conversation, she herself had complimented Irene on how nice her hair looked. Irene's first reaction is that she must not be receptive to compliments. Her second reaction is that she distrusts whatever is said to her. Then she realizes, with a shock, that she has harsh judgements about herself and wonders how true they actually are. She thinks that maybe her own image of herself is the problem, rather than that she does not trust what others tell her. At Irene's request, the session is terminated because she needs time to think about what she has discovered.

Case 4, a turning point with a smile

Jenny, a woman of 51, says that she plays in an orchestra, and asks herself whether she should stay with this particular orchestra. She likes the music and the performances, but she does not interact much with the other members of the orchestra. Her concrete question is whether she should stay put or move on. Edith asks what Jenny means by "should" and what else in her life is a "should." Jenny says she "should" work in order to earn money to pay for her house, and furthermore, she "should" be a good person. Edith concludes that the word "should" has a positive feeling for Jenny, and asks her for other example of when she had to choose between two things. Jenny says that she once had to choose between two supervisors, each with their own area of expertise, and that she chose the area where the nicer people worked, in spite of the fact that the other supervisor had indicated that she would also get a promotion.

Edith concludes that “should” and “nice people” belong together for Jenny. At this, Jenny laughs nervously. The fitting answer now appears obvious, and Jenny concludes that if she wants to stay with the orchestra, she will have to build relationships with the people in it.

The Fitting Answer

How do people respond in general to hearing the fitting answer? Are they happy? Are they ever disappointed? Can they always do something with their answer?

“Everyone reacts differently. Some people are relieved because they already had the answer in their head, and just needed confirmation. Others remain relatively cool and say, “Well, thanks.” Others are very excited because they had not expected that particular answer. But most everyone is satisfied in the end. The fitting answer is usually sufficient. The fitting answer gives insight and a basis for reflection or action. Sometimes it even happens that once a client has an answer to their original question, they suddenly are able to come up with answers to other related questions. Their own habitual way of thinking can be freed up and often they can suddenly see various solutions.

By the way, a couple of months ago I gave a very special EDGE. I don’t want to keep this one from you.”

Case 5, a conversation about happiness

Jan, a 58 year old husband and father of three grown children, asks Edith, “Am I actually happy?” In turn, Edith asked him what he actually meant by “happy.” He mentions a number of things, like enjoying beautiful weather, or his wife and children, his house, a beautiful film, and being able to work independently, having the freedom to do what he wants, with no supervising boss.

Edith writes everything down, and then questions him one by one about the things he had mentioned. It soon becomes clear that Jan is not really happy with any of these things except the fact that he has no boss above him. The dialogue is repeatedly interrupted by Jan's crying as he realizes this. Still, there is no other conclusion than that Jan is happy only about his work situation.

At first glance, it seems a terrible thing that Jan is unhappy with so many things in his life. Doesn't that bother you?

"I try to stay philosophical about it. For me, it is important that there is an appropriate answer to his question. By the way, the result for Jan did not in fact turn out so badly. Initially, he was worried that he was unhappy about absolutely everything. Through the EDGE, however, he discovered that he was indeed happy about something. He found that reassuring. I see him more often, and I observe that the discovery that he is pleased with what he has achieved through his work gave him the impetus to enjoy even more things. He is now much more comfortable with his relationship with his wife and children."

"By the way, have you have decided about your orchestra?"

I let the answer from the EDGE settle for a couple of weeks while I observed myself during rehearsals. The music is still wonderful and the performances fun, but I don't have a connection to the people. Moreover, I do not feel like putting out the effort to build relationships with them. My husband plays in another orchestra and fortunately a place opened up there. I decided to transfer to that orchestra after the holidays. I used to play in that orchestra and I find the people there very nice. I probably would have ended up there anyway, but without the EDGE, I would have worried endlessly as to whether I had made the right decision. Now I know the problem was my relationship to the people in the first orchestra and not the music. So I am happy with my EDGE and happy with my decision.

TIPS FOR EDGERS:

- Approach the EDGE, the question and the “edge” seriously, so all your work is not in vain.
- At the end of the EDGE, always ask the “edge” to repeat the fitting answer. This ensures a better conscious awareness of the result.
- Record and transcribe your first 20 or 30 sessions and type them out, in order to discover patterns in your individual way of working and adjust where necessary.
- From each EDGE interview, write a report, so that you can build an archive of the work you have done. This not only provides you with a record, but ensures that the information is available in an organized fashion to the “edge,” should they request it.
- Don't address more than one question per session. A six week gap is recommended before the client's next appointment. The individual first needs process their answer, along with any insights resulting from it. Besides, the client who comes too often could become dependant and not learn to solve problems for themselves.
- If you suspect psychiatric problems, refer the client to a mental health professional for assessment.
- An EDGE can be given a variety of settings.

“In addition to being helpful for individuals, an EDGE can be appropriately utilized by larger entities as well, such as work groups or families. The method is not rigid. It has a format but within that it is flexible. It is not the truth, but one truth. It is a way of helping to analyze a person's thought processes, nothing more and nothing less. It is well supported, healing and it is easily learned and applied.”