Toolbox Talk - Questioning Attitude

Todd Jerome Jenkins | v2.0 | October 13, 2026 | 5–10 minutes plus field checks

What and why

A questioning attitude means noticing when the work does not match the plan and seeking reliable evidence before relying on an explanation. Familiarity can make an unusual condition easy to explain away. A useful question makes the difference visible while there is still time to respond.

Objective: State an expected condition and an actual observation separately, then identify what evidence could resolve their difference.

When and where

Before important steps and whenever conditions, results or instructions conflict or leave a safety-relevant question unanswered. At any work location, including offices, stores, service areas and field tasks. Ask from a safe position within your role.

How to use it

- Compare the current requirement with the actual condition. Describe the step, what was expected and what was observed.
- Ask what is known, what remains unknown and what could disprove the first explanation. Use relevant records and the appropriate technical help.
- Hold the affected action through the task's safe pause process. Resolve required checks and authorization before proceeding.

Verify It in the Field

Use a paper plan showing route A clear and a mock status card showing route A blocked. State both facts without guessing why.

Ask what evidence would support a safe next step. Success means a defined check or authorized alternative, not assuming the obstruction will leave.

For real work, record the requirement, safe method, current finding, checker and time. Evidence must concern this item, place and condition.

Failure points and stop triggers

Guessing why something changed; accepting stale evidence; dismissing a newcomer; investigating beyond safe access. Pause for a mismatch, unexpected response or missing reliable evidence affecting safe work. Maintain required protection and obtain an authorized resolution; a plausible story is not clearance.

Toolbox talk questions

1. What should we expect at our next important step?

2. What evidence would challenge our first explanation?

3. Who can resolve this question safely?

Use the separate supervisor field check and attendance sheet. Practice is not qualification or work authorization.

Source: DOE-HDBK-1028-2009, Vol. 2, printed pp. 10–12. References and task-specific limits on the webpage.

Next step: Apply this skill to one step on the free JHA/JSA field-verification worksheet.

Expanded guidance and separate forms: toddjeromejenkins.com/toolbox-talks/questioning-attitude-field-mismatch

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