

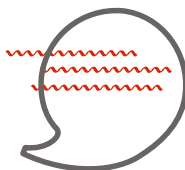
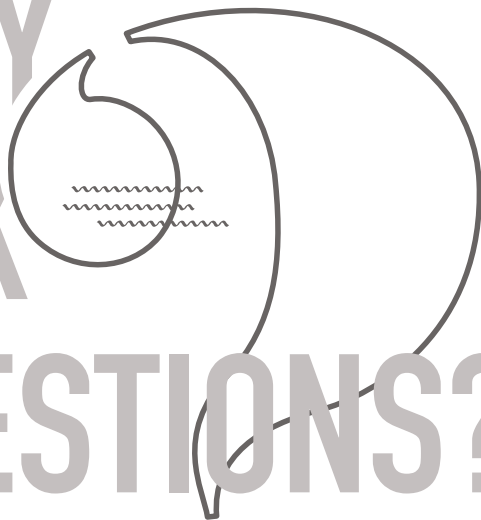
A small book on the importance of asking great questions.

WHY ASK QUESTIONS?



J.R. BRIGGS & MICHAEL E. SMITH

WHY ASK QUESTIONS?



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First Edition

*To all the courageous question-askers
and those who aspire to grow in
asking the best ones.*

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WHY AS
QUES

WHY ASK
QUESTIONS?

K

TIONS?



I never learn
anything talking.
I only learn things when
I ask questions.

LOU HOLTZ

LIST OF QUESTIONS

What is the best question you've been asked this month?

What is the best question you have asked someone else this month?

Who do you know who asks great questions?
What leaders do you know who ask great questions?

Why ask questions at all?
And why is it that people are so quick to give answers, but slow to ask truly compelling questions?

The kinds of questions that inspire us
The kind that grab us around the throat and
won't let go
That push us to new ways of thinking
And feeling
And being?

Why don't we ask great questions more often?
Is it that we don't know how to ask them?
Or is it that we know how, we just don't find
these kinds of questions all that important?

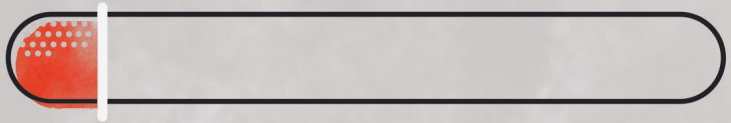
Why is it that we are often so confident in our
answers yet so insecure with our questions?



LOW

HIGH

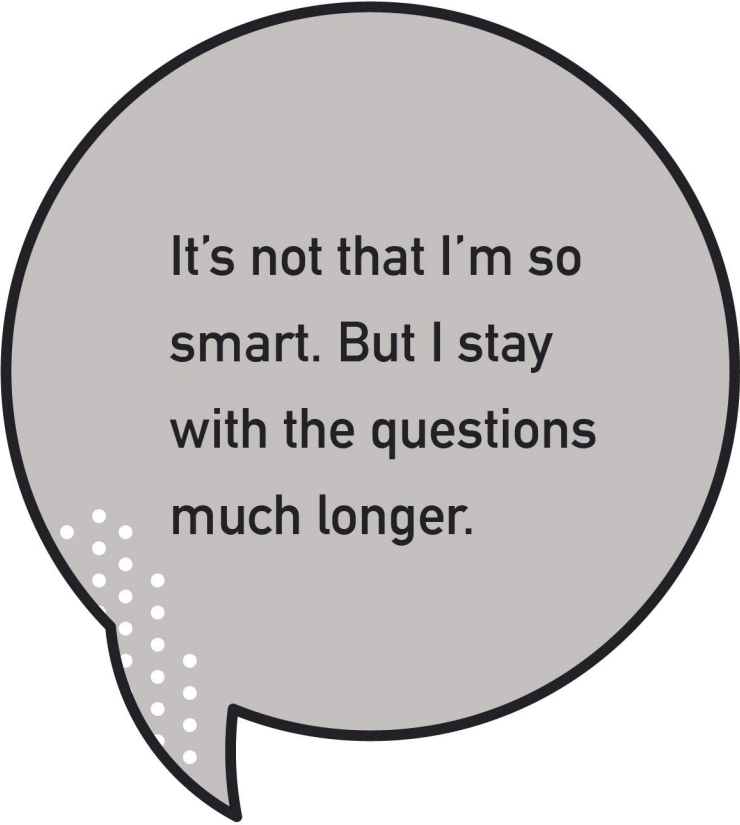
ANSWERS



LOW

HIGH

QUESTIONS



It's not that I'm so
smart. But I stay
with the questions
much longer.

ALBERT EINSTEIN

Are we too impatient?

Or arrogant?

Or uninterested?

Or unaware?

Or are we fearful – afraid of what we might find
out about others?

About the world?

Or about ourselves?

So, what is it about the power of a question?

Why do some questions grip us and just won't let go?

Why those questions?

What constitutes a good question?

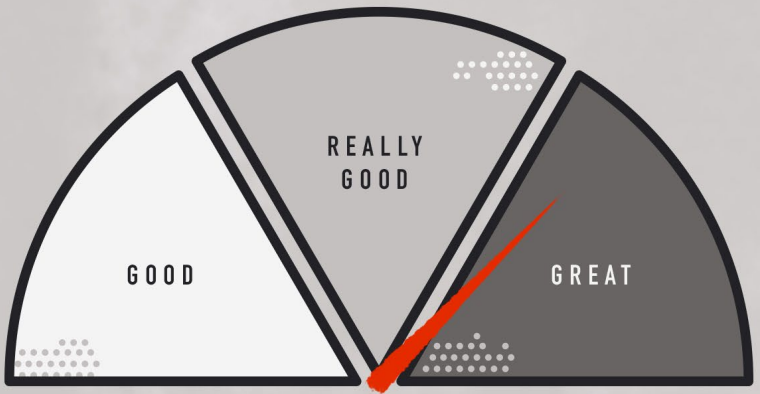
What constitutes a great question?

And what's the difference between a good question and a truly great one?

What would have to happen for you to be accused of being someone who asks great questions?

And, at what point are questions helpful and when does asking too many questions become detrimental?

Which begs the question: at this point, are you tired of ours?



How do we ask questions that are both timeless and timely?

What will we do with the answers that we receive when we ask questions?

How will we steward these answers?

Will it compel us to ask even more questions?

But what if we don't receive any answers to our questions?

Will we be satisfied with that – content?

And if we are looking for better answers, should we not start by seeking to ask better questions?

Have you ever asked yourself:
why do I have the right to lead?

It has been said that questions develop leaders.
But is it more true to say that leaders continually
develop questions?

What might it say about a leader who doesn't
ask questions?

**What if the role of the leader of the future wasn't
in giving all the answers, but instead was about
asking all the right questions?**

What if the current paradigm of leader-as-expert
was replaced with the paradigm of
leader-as-lead-questioner?



What might questions provide in leadership roles that answers simply cannot?

What questions continually guide your life?

What questions guide your life as an employee?

A boss?

A leader?

A child?

A parent?

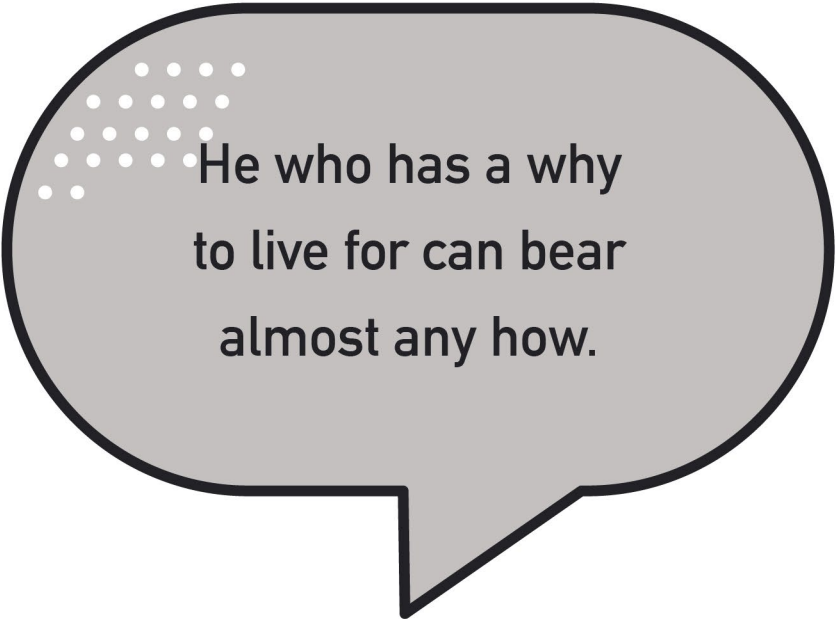
A friend?

A neighbor?

A human being?

How might the discipline of asking significant, poignant, probing and courageous questions expand the human experience?

And, if you desired to grow in your ability to ask better questions, what would be next steps toward that goal?



He who has a why
to live for can bear
almost any how.

FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE

LEVELS OF QUESTIONS

The word question, of course, contains the word quest.

A quest sends you on a journey, often in search of something valuable.

A question also sends you on a journey, often in search of something valuable.

Something deeper, something more meaningful than what lies on the surface or what currently is.

Questions take a lot of courage.

To ask a question is to be confident in your lack of knowing.

QUESTION

A **quest(ion)** sends you on a journey,
often in search of something **valuable**

To willfully admit you are ignorant about a particular topic.

To ask a question is to have the ability to think clearly about what you don't know.

At least what you don't know yet.

Sometimes it is more important to question the answers than it is to answer the questions.

Some questions are even more important than answers.

The quality and depth of our questions determine the quality and depth of our lives.

And the ability and desire to ask a good question – to ask the best question – is oftentimes more than half of the journey to the answer. Few things can bring about change more effectively than the right question. But nothing is as simple or as complex as asking the right questions.

Asking the right question takes as much attention, skill and energy as offering the right answer.

Questions are a tool that can be used every day of our lives.

HOPE

NEW POSSIBILITIES

VALUE

CONNECTION

Parker Palmer wrote, "We are exploring together. We are cultivating a garden together, backs to the sun. The question is a hoe in our hands and we are digging beneath the hard and crusty surface to the rich humus of our lives."

But questions are also a gift we give to people. When people ask you questions – and truly care to know you and your story. It is a gift – a valuable gift – isn't it?

Asking great questions gives hope.

Asking great questions opens up new possibilities.

Asking great questions adds value.

Asking questions creates healthy spaces for connection to occur.

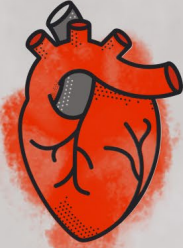
Questions give worth and meaning to others – and to ourselves.

Like a surgeon uses a scalpel to make an incision on a patient in the operating room in order to provide healing, leaders use questions like a scalpel on people's hearts.

The greatest questions asked are personal – so personal, in fact, that they draw blood, not to hurt or cause damage, but in order to bring healing.

So, what is a great question anyway?
And how do we know if we're asking great questions?

NOT TO HURT,

TO  **BRING**

HEALING

If it brings meaning?

If it creates change in others, in the world or
in ourselves?

If it draws us closer to others?

If it leaves us in wonder and awe?

It is when it forces us to think differently and
in new ways we haven't thought, felt or
believed before?

Or when it demands a response?

When was the last time someone said to you,
"You know, you ask really great questions"?

When was the last time someone thanked you
for asking thoughtful, caring questions?

Imagine if the requirements for a completion of a degree from college or to be offered a job was not based on how well you answered questions on a test or in an interview, but on how well you developed thoughtful, engaging, wise and incisive questions?

Max DuPree said that the role of a leader is to define reality. **Few things define reality more than when the right question is asked at the right time to the right person for the right reason.**

Oftentimes it's the right questions – not the right answers – that bring about the most influence in other people's lives.

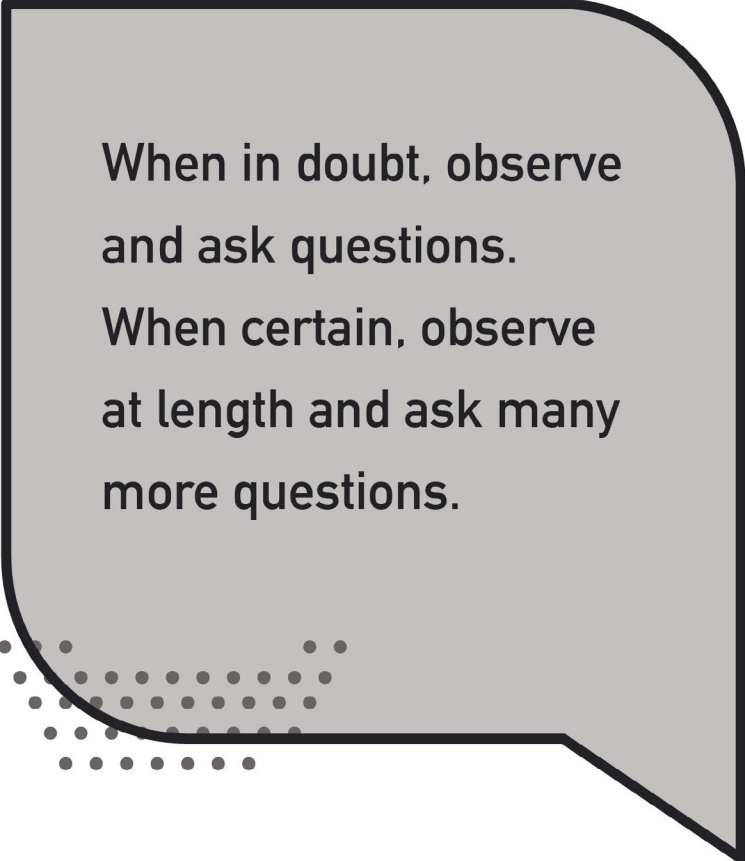
And leaders are the ones who bring about questionable influence.

A leader is a cultural cultivator.

Language is one of the most important tools leaders have to create and cultivate culture. Good leaders are attentive to language.

Cultural cultivation through intentional language can be created in several ways, but two significant ways stick out:

1. The types of stories we tell
2. The types of questions we ask



When in doubt, observe
and ask questions.

When certain, observe
at length and ask many
more questions.

**GENERAL
GEORGE S.
PATTON**



4

**intimacy &
vulnerability**



3

desires & passions



2

thoughts & emotions



1

simple facts

There are four levels of questions one can ask. The higher the level, the higher the risk – and the higher the possibility for deep, meaningful connection. The higher we go up in level, the less amount of people we can truly ask these questions of.

Level 1: simple facts.

These questions can be asked of just about anybody, even strangers. **The goal with this level is information transfer.**

What time is it?

Where is the nearest gas station?

Do you know when the show begins?

Level 2: thoughts and emotions.

These questions are asked of others that we care about, where we **seek to create empathy and express to others that we care about them and value what they think and feel.**

How have you been doing lately?

How are you feeling going into today's meeting with the boss?

What have you been thinking about lately?

Level 3: desires and passions.

These questions create connection with others.

It invites others to open up more about

their hopes, their dreams and even their disappointments. It pushes them to reflect back on their past and to ponder their future.

What are your hopes for your children?

What holds you back?

What would you love to be doing five years from now?

Level 4: intimacy and vulnerability.

These questions – usually asked of those we know the best, and those who know us the best – **require courage to be truly ourselves with others.** It risks being hurt, but it also risks deep

connection, and even transformation. They can be asked – and answered – in the midst of loving safety and care.

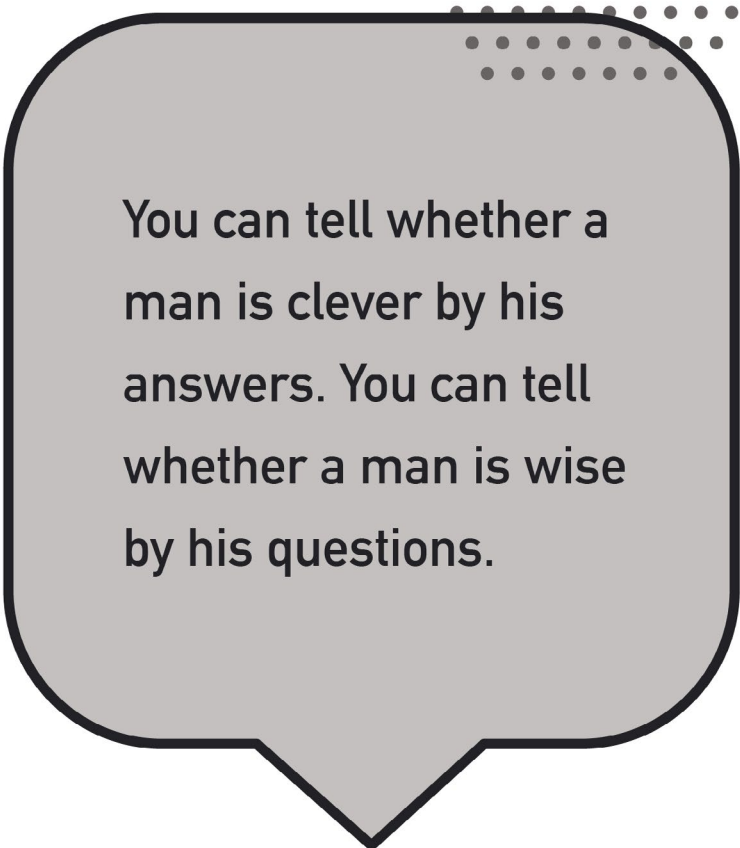
Who are you – really?

What from your past have you never told anyone about? Why not?

What is that one thing that scares you the most?

How we use questions – and at what level – requires great discernment.

We must use our tools wisely.



You can tell whether a
man is clever by his
answers. You can tell
whether a man is wise
by his questions.

**NAGUIB
MAHFOUZ**

TYPES OF QUESTIONS

There are many different types of questions available to us.

There are direct and indirect questions.

Open and closed questions.

General and specific questions.

Narrowing and expanding questions.

Informative and emotive.

Hypothetical and concrete.

Provocative.

Rhetorical.

Sarcastic.

Silly.

Affirming.

Scolding.

Clarifying questions – or even questions used to intentionally confuse others...

Loaded.

Either/or.

How will you use these tools available to you?



ULTIMATELY, WHY ASK QUESTIONS?

Ultimately, why ask questions? What is the purpose of a question?

Sometimes it is for information.

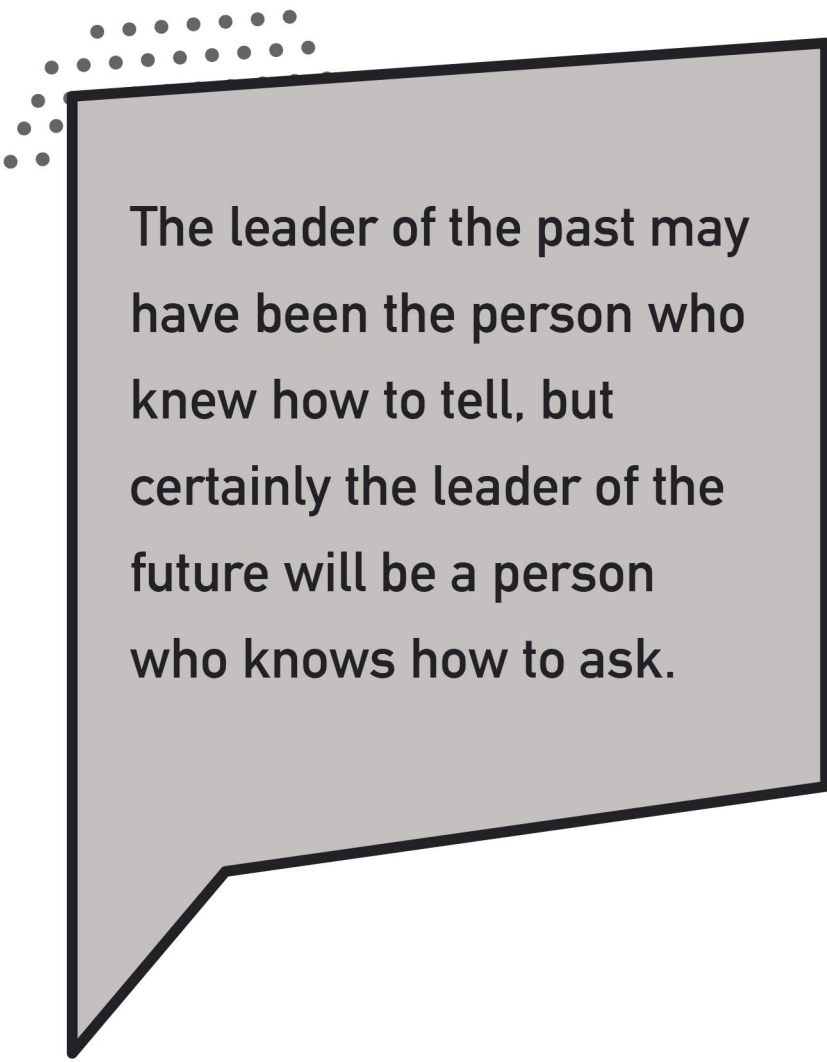
Others times it is for discovery.

Or to bring about connection or deepen a relationship.

To seek understanding about someone, some thing.

To clarify – or to provide mystery and suspense.

So, why do you ask questions?



The leader of the past may have been the person who knew how to tell, but certainly the leader of the future will be a person who knows how to ask.

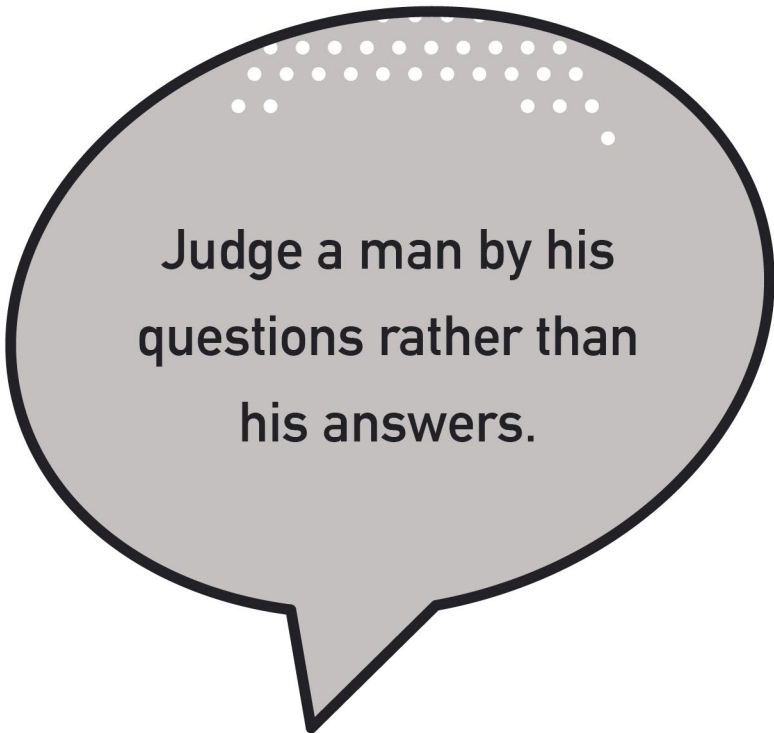
PETER DRUCKER

WHY AS
QUES

WHY ASK?
QUESTIONS?

K?

TIONS?



Judge a man by his
questions rather than
his answers.

VOLTAIRE

HORSEFLIES AND MIDWIVES

The Greek philosopher Socrates (469 to 399 BC) is considered one of the founders of Western philosophy. His method of question-asking, the Socratic method, placed a high value on inquiry-based dialogue that led to learning. Plato referred to his mentor Socrates as the “curious questioner.” His use of many different kinds of questions were used to draw out conclusions from others that could not have occurred through mere answers.

Socrates died at the age of 71 because people – specifically three men, Anytus, Meletus and Lycon – viewed him as a threat.

He stood trial and was found guilty, ultimately forced to drink poisonous hemlock.

Why?

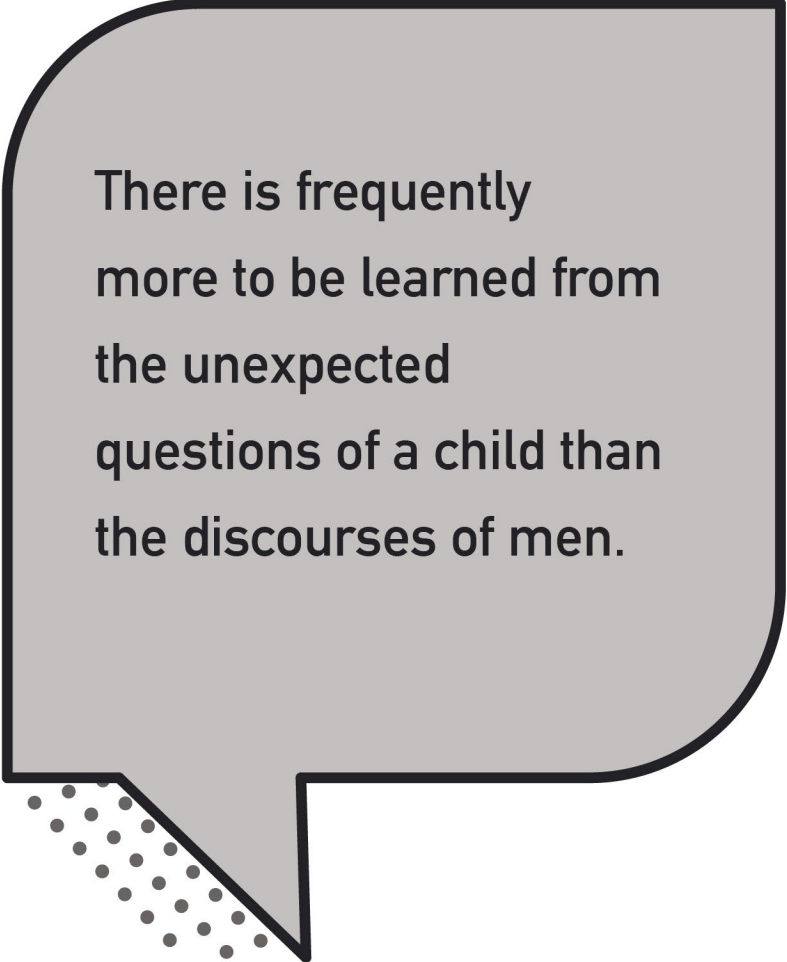
Because he asked questions.

People believed that Socrates' questions – not his answers – poisoned the minds of the youth of Athens.

Questions can be dangerous.

Socrates often used two metaphors to describe the role of questions.

The first was a horsefly, intended to sting people to get their attention – and to get them moving.



There is frequently
more to be learned from
the unexpected
questions of a child than
the discourses of men.

**JOHN
LOCKE**



MAIEUTIC

(may-oo-dek)

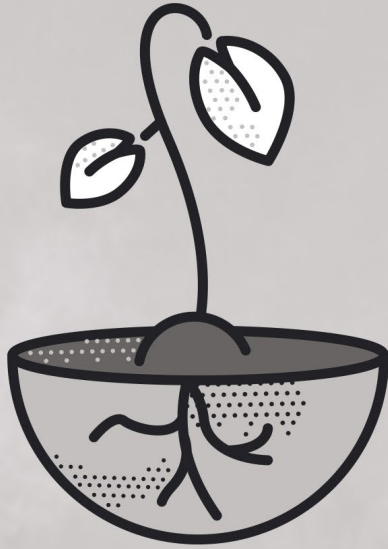
The second was that of a midwife. Socrates' mode of inquiry-based dialogue, a method that draws ideas and perspectives out of someone, is called the **maieutic** (may-oo-dek) method. Maieutic comes from the Greek word which means midwife.

Socrates' mother was a midwife. He, too, believed he was one himself – dealing with words and minds, instead of children and bodies.

He saw himself as a midwife, assisting other 'mothers' to help them to give birth to what is inside of them. He felt he could not give birth to wisdom, but assisted in helping others to give birth to wisdom that was inside of them.

He once wrote to a young man named Theaetetus saying that he believed he was “barren,” past the age of childbearing himself, but capable of serving as a midwife for others, including this young student. “These are the pangs of labour, my dear Theaetetus; you have something with you which you are bringing forth.”

Asking great, incisive questions can induce labor in other people that draws valuable things. Great questions can bring about new ideas, new thoughts, new perspective, new discovery.



THE BEST QUESTIONS ARE **SO POWERFUL** THEY
EITHER STING OR
BRING NEW LIFE

MOTIVATIONS BEHIND THE QUESTIONS

But because questions are so powerful, we must think carefully about the power we wield. We must be aware of the motivations of our questions.

We must ask ourselves **the questions behind the questions.**

We must pull back the curtain in our minds, hearts and souls and ask ourselves a series of questions before we open our mouths to ask others.

Why do I want to know this?

What is my motivation in wanting to ask it?

What type of question am I about to ask?

Is it worth it?

Does this person want to be asked questions?

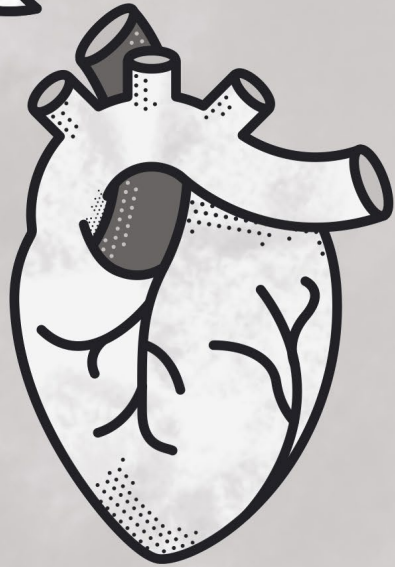
How might my questions reveal some of my assumptions or preconceived notions? Is it to lead someone in a way of thinking? Or will the question simply be an answer in disguise?

Do I want to know something in order to gain an upper hand, an advantage over others?

Is it to sound impressive?

Is it to be more knowledgeable?

Is it to enter into mystery?



Is it to serve others to help them discover what only they can learn themselves?

Is it to show empathy?

Or is it ultimately to love well?

The best questions are driven by love.

Many people have considered Jesus, the first-century Jewish rabbi who claimed to be Messiah, to be one of the greatest question-askers in history. Jesus had a clear desire to get to the root of issues and to the heart of people - and he did that through great questions.

Consider some of the questions he asked that are recorded in the Bible:

Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to your life?

Why are you so afraid?

What do you want me to do for you?

If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you?

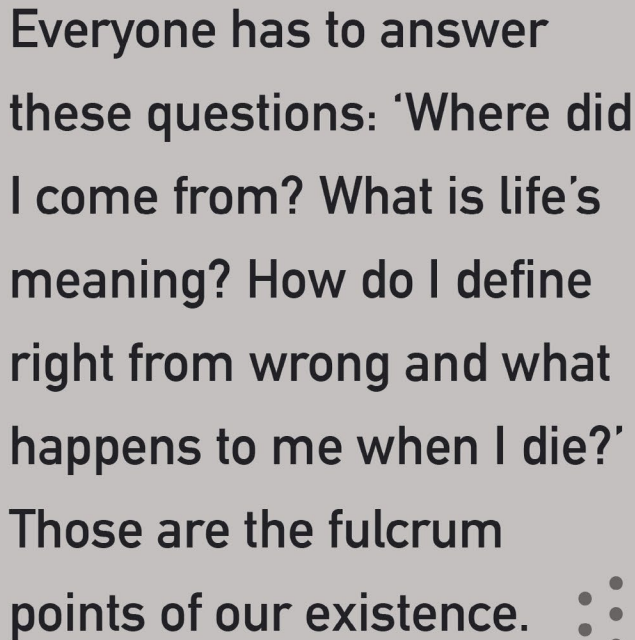
Do you want to get well?

But what about you? Who do you say that I am?

What are you looking for?

Do you love me?

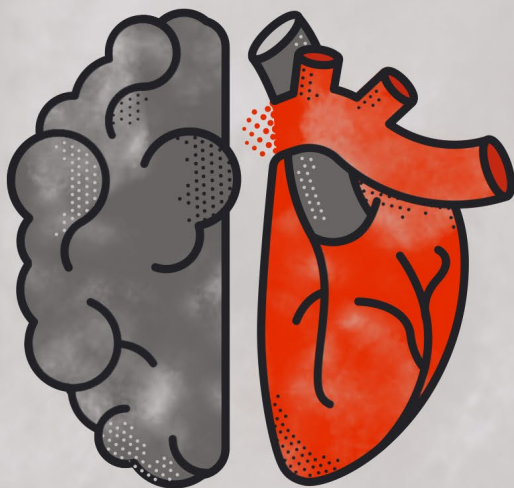
Why did Jesus ask so many questions?



Everyone has to answer these questions: 'Where did I come from? What is life's meaning? How do I define right from wrong and what happens to me when I die?' Those are the fulcrum points of our existence.

RAVI ZACHARIAS

IN-
FORM-
ATIVE



IN-
CISIVE

We often ask informative questions –
questions to gain more knowledge.
But Jesus asks incisive questions –
questions that get to the heart of the issue.

Scalpel in hand, Jesus' questions cut.
And drew blood.
And healed.

In the four Gospels - Matthew, Mark, Luke and
John - in the New Testament of the Bible, Jesus
asked over 300 questions.

It also records that He was asked 183 questions.

How many of those questions did he answer directly?

Jesus directly answered five of them.

Only five.

Roughly 1% of the time Jesus answered a question directed toward him. You'd think that someone who claimed to be the Messiah, who claimed to be the solution to all the world's problems, would want to do most of the talking. And yet Jesus was quick to ask hundreds of questions of others.

Why? He knew the power of questions. He knew that questions invite people to participate in life, not merely watch from the sidelines. He knew questions provoked, surprised – and even offended. Questions forced his listeners to think, to wrestle, to actively engage with his teachings.

He knew asking questions often was the best form of teaching. Better than simply give answers.

HOW MATTERS

What is the role of wisdom in the questions we ask?

Which is more important in the question-asking process: what we ask, who we ask, how we ask or why we even ask in the first place?
And how might we determine that?

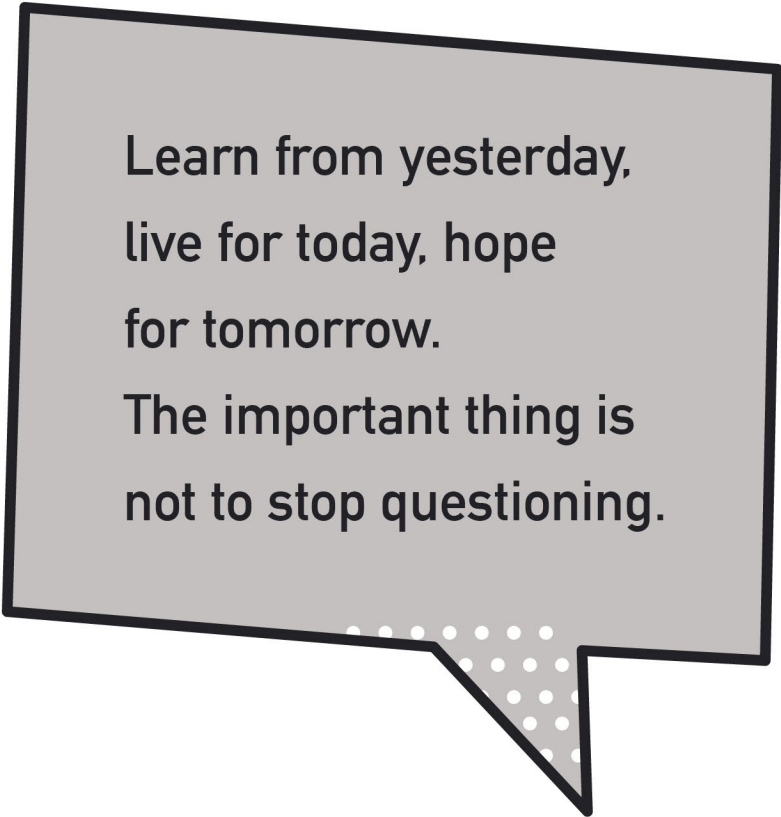
Doing the right thing the wrong way often becomes the wrong thing.

Especially with questions.

How we ask questions is often as important as what we ask.

Context is important with our questions.

So is timing, tone and posture.



Learn from yesterday,
live for today, hope
for tomorrow.
The important thing is
not to stop questioning.

**ALBERT
EINSTEIN**

But so is who we ask questions of.
Relationship matters when it comes to
our questions.

Asking great questions requires wisdom and discernment. (Although the key to wisdom is oftentimes knowing the right questions).

Consider how you might respond to your spouse
if he or she asked you to take out the trash.

Can you take out the trash?

Why don't you take out the trash?

How many times do I have to tell you to take
out the trash?

The trash doesn't take itself out to the curb,
does it?

Am I going to have to do everything around here
or can you at least take out the trash?

Honey, could you please take out the trash?

How would you want your spouse to ask you?

Tone matters.

Posture matters.

How matters.

In order to ask great questions wisdom and
compassion are required.

So, in a given situation is it better to offer...

a statement



a question



or silence

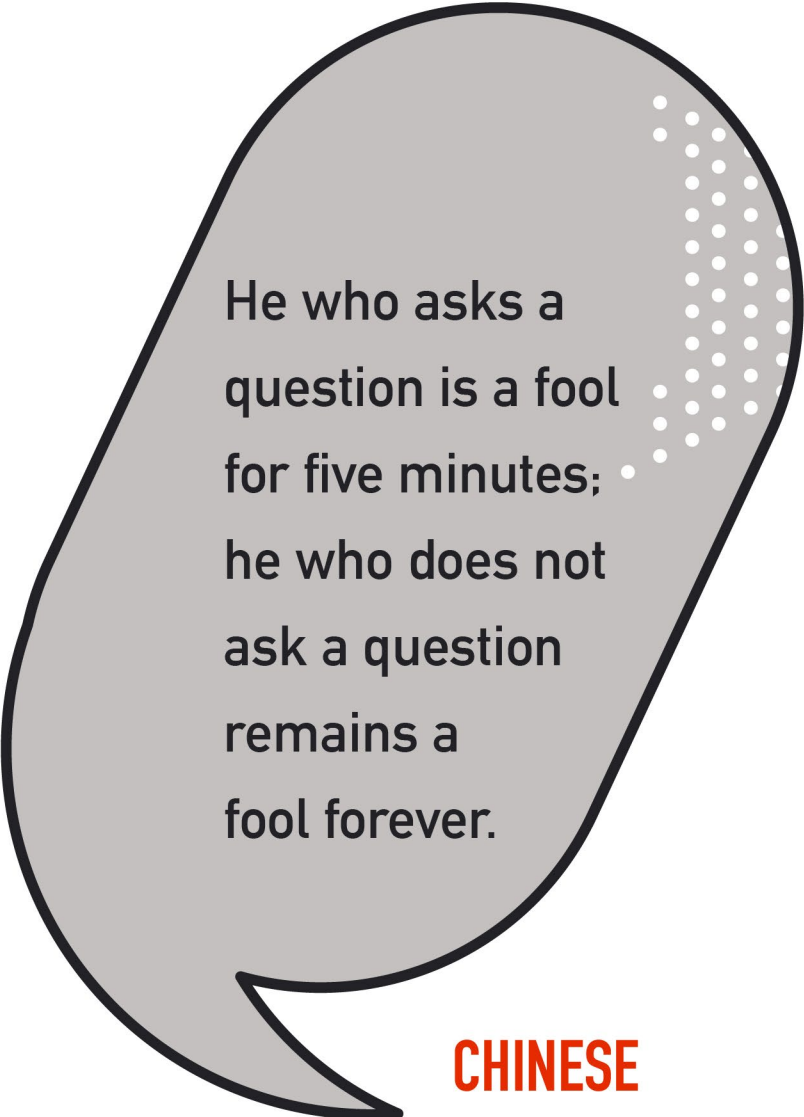


WHY AS
QUES

WHY ASK?
QUESTIONS!

K?

TIONS!



He who asks a
question is a fool
for five minutes;
he who does not
ask a question
remains a
fool forever.

**CHINESE
PROVERB**

NOW WHAT?

Dale Carnegie wrote:

Don't be interesting. Be interested.

Those who ask great questions possess an
insatiable curiosity

of people

of eternity

of the world

and of ourselves.

Questions are the way forward.

As the African proverb goes, the one who asks questions doesn't lose his way.

Your life is a reflection of the questions you are asking and, more importantly, the questions you are living.

So, if asking great questions gives hope

if it opens up new possibilities

if it adds value

if it gives worth and meaning

if it creates spaces for meaningful connection

and deepening relationships

then doesn't the world need more questions?

THE ONE WHO
ASKS QUESTIONS
DOESN'T LOSE
HIS WAY



People who ask courageous, compassionate, curious questions – the kind that offer hope, show worth, create spaces for connection and add value to others – are worthy of being followed.

And people who are being followed are called leaders. The most effective leaders lead through the questions of their soul and through the soul of their questions.

And so, let us ask quite possibly the most gripping question of all: If great questions are so important, **why aren't we asking them more often?**

Why not proactively work to cultivate, develop and deepen the **gift** and the **tool** of questions?

If you choose to believe that leaders are to be the expert answer-givers, go ahead. Live in your inadequate and antiquated paradigm. But we will choose to lead with the conviction, the humility and the confidence of serving as lead question-askers.

And we hope you will join us in that effort. The world needs more questions. The more world needs more thoughtful, confident, curious and compassion question-askers.

So...

**WHAT'S THE NEXT
QUESTION YOU
NEED TO ASK?**

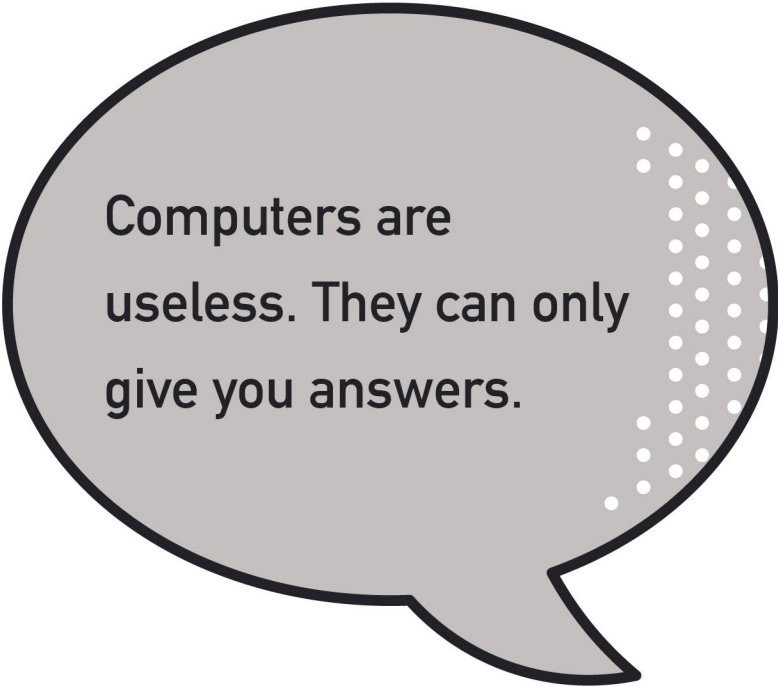
WHY THAT QUESTION?

POST

SCR

POST
SCRIPT

IPT...



Computers are
useless. They can only
give you answers.

**PABLO
PICASSO**

WHY DID WE WRITE THIS BOOK?

Passion (we love questions!)

Motivation

Provocation

Persuasion

Self-realization

Compassion

Self-awareness

Creativity and imagination

Collaboration

But **not** for:

Merely information

Accusing others

Personal attention

Impressing readers

QUESTIONS WORTH ASKING YOURSELF & OTHERS

What is it for?

• • •

How would you like to be
remembered as a leader?

• • •

Who was the best leader you've ever
been around? Why them?

• • •

What's your story?

How might you solve this issue?

• • •

What is wildly important to me?

• • •

How might I live beyond
myself today?

• • •

Where am I thriving? Where am I
struggling? What is confusing?
What is missing?

Who can I serve? Where can I serve?
How can I serve?

• • •

Why do I exist? What's my purpose?
Why did I get out of bed
this morning?

• • •

Where do I have hope?

• • •

Where have I experienced beauty?

What are my three biggest
limiting habits?

• • •

What are the five things I'm thankful
for today?

• • •

What risks can I take today?

• • •

Have I made a big enough mistake
today? If so, what did I learn from it?

What will I stand up for, even if it's
unpopular and costly?

• • •

How can I be fully present and
engaged today?

• • •

Where, how and with whom can I
add value today?

• • •

Who can I thank?

Where do I need to exhibit courage
in my life?



What is the story that is
guiding my life?



What do I need to embrace in this
season? And what do I need to let go of?



What hard things, challenges or risks
am I willing to try?



I would like to beg you dear Sir, as well as I can, to have patience with everything unresolved in your heart and to try to love the questions themselves as if they were locked rooms or books written in a very foreign language. Don't search for the answers, which could not be given to you now, because

you would not be able to live them. And the point is to live everything. Live the questions now. Perhaps then, someday far in the future, you will gradually, without even noticing it, live your way into the answer.

RAINER MARIA RILKE

1903, *Letters to a Young Poet*



WHAT ARE THE QUESTIONS YOU WANT TO ASK?

The best leaders ask some of the greatest questions. The kinds of questions that inspire us, that grab us by the throat and won't let go.

That push us to new ways of thinking...
and feeling...
and being.



What would have to happen for you to be accused of being someone who asks great questions? Who do you know who asks great questions? What is the best question you've been asked this month? Should you thank that person who asked you?

This is a little book asking a dangerous question: **Why ask questions at all?**

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Michael E. Smith: mesmith.co

