

The Power of Questions

“Be patient toward all that is unsolved in your heart and try to love the questions themselves... Live the questions now, perhaps you will then gradually, without noticing it, live along some distant day into the answer.”

~Rainer Maria Rilke

10 Ways to Harness the Power of Questions

Source: <http://litemind.com/questions>

Our brains love questions. They have the power to engage us and to shift our mindsets. They drive knowledge and growth, and fuel both creativity and critical thinking. Here are some ways to ask questions more intelligently you can start using today.

Questions for Creative Problem Solving

- One of the most effective ways to approach any problem is to ask questions about it. The greatest thing about questions is that your brain automatically starts working on them as soon as you ask them. Not only that, but it'll keep working on them in the background, when you're not even aware of it.

Questions for Shifting Your Perspective to a Problem

- Just like it's useful asking questions about a problem, so it is turning the problem itself into a question. We know that properly defining and stating problems is essential for great problem solving, and framing problems as questions is one of the techniques that can definitely boost your effectiveness as problem-solver. We must put the question into simple, easy to understand language.
- In general, statements trigger our brains' logical and analytical skills. Many times, they encourage you to try and reach conclusions as soon as possible. Questions, on the other hand, trigger our brains' imagination and creative thinking skills. They encourage you to take a more exploratory approach, which tends to foster a whole new set of insights.

Questions for Directing Thinking and Debate

- Questions guide and direct our thinking process. Depending on the situation, it might be more useful to ask “open”, or “expanding” questions: they elicit new ideas, opinions and grow possibilities. Examples include “What are your thoughts on this idea?”, and “Can you think of other usage scenarios?”.

Questions for Education and Leadership

- Great teachers and coaches know that true learning can only happen when students think by themselves. Questions are a great way to stimulate thinking — and, if used skillfully, work vastly better than just dumping knowledge into someone's head.
- Instead of simply showing concepts and solutions to students, teachers can use questions to instigate collaborative exploration: “What would happen if we increased the angle here?”, “How would it behave without air resistance?” and so on.

Questions for Creating Conversation and Empathy

- Questions are the glue of empathetic communication: they energize and enliven conversations, inviting people to participate and to share insights and opinions. When you use them properly, people feel included and listened to and, therefore, will be much more likely to engage in meaningful and productive conversation.

Questions for Critical Thinking

- Skillful use of inquiry is the cornerstone of critical thinking. Again, it's only through questioning that we can truly think by ourselves — instead of blindly accepting whatever we're told as the right thing to do or the only acceptable answer.
- When I say 'skillful use of inquiry', this does not mean necessarily getting fancy: oftentimes, it means being playful and "thinking like a child". Great critical thinkers don't get embarrassed to ask seemingly naïve questions: these are usually the most effective — as well as the ones snob intellectuals are more prone to overlook.
- As an effective initial set of questions to use, it's hard to beat the famous 5Ws (what, where, who, when and why). "Where did you see it?", "What are the causes of it?", "Why is the emperor naked?"

Questions for Shifting Your Focus

- Reframing self-limiting situations as questions has long been celebrated as an excellent way to instantly changing the way we feel.
- Suppose you're feeling down but, even so, you dare to ask yourself "What am I excited about?". At first, you'll get irritated by the question. However, if you put honest effort in answering it, you will indeed find something worth feeling better about. And that's not denial: it's just shifting your focus.

Questions for Inspiration, Goal Setting and Action

- A great way to set goals is by asking yourself "What if...?". This question alone has the power to direct our imagination to create a vision for ourselves — and then spawn the thought processes that help it become reality.
- A technique I use to think about "higher-levels" goals — as well as roles and areas of responsibility — is to turn them into questions. Statements may work fine for to-do lists, but I find that for thinking about the big picture they're overly dull and uninspiring.

Questions for Self-Reflection

As powerful thinking tools that they are, questions can help you examine your life and help you get in touch with your inner self. They work very well with standard self-reflection techniques, such as many forms of journaling.

Questioning as a Way of Life

- Developing the habit of questioning is perhaps the greatest hallmark of highly-developed minds. I believe that questioning is the ultimate tool to stimulate thinking and, as such, it's hard to dispute the usefulness and importance of cultivating this habit.
- But how do we develop the habit of questioning? The answer, just like everything else in life, is practice, practice, practice. Always carry a notebook with you and keep writing questions down

as they come to you.

- Question everything. Become comfortable with unanswered questions. Don't see them as problems, or as a necessary evil in your way to answers. Welcome them. Play with them. Your brain will thank you.

Why? Questions

Source: <http://www.hidden-wealth-keys.com/questions.html>

Questions are an excellent way to access your subconscious mind, and the process is a simple one.

In other words, your brain will always present an answer to any question you ask yourself. **The answer may not necessarily be true**, but your brain feels obligated to respond to your questions and will do its best to present you with some kind of answer, whether feasible or not.

How can you use this brain function to improve your life?

Train yourself to ask only positive questions.

Questions like "Am I honoring how talented I am?" and "How did I get to be so lucky?" will give you far more positive results than those that presuppose a critical answer. Often the brain recognizes that many of these questions are rhetorical, in other words they don't actually require an answer, but the impact is still positive. The questions imply that you *are* talented or you *are* lucky, thereby reinforcing the notion. In this sense they function the same way as affirmations.

WHY Questions

Asking, "Why do I always fail?" will inevitably lead to answers like "Because you're a loser!" "How can I succeed in this venture?" will lead to creative and useful answers.

Why questions are often circular in nature and are not necessarily helpful.. Replace them with questions like

- How can I do this?
- What do I need to do next?
- When do I need to finish this?
- Where do I need to be right now?
- What do I need to learn here?

The Value in Questions

Source: <http://kmwiki.wikispaces.com/Power+of+questions>

As facilitators we need to appreciate the role and power of questions because...

- Questions are very strong attractors in the chaos of ideas, they gather, focus, attract and energize the conversation.
- Only questions have the power to break our current mindsets, they set in motion the deep reflection needed to alter our beliefs.
- It is the place and the space 'between not knowing and our desire to know' where we are most attentive, self-aware and alive. Questions hold the key to this special area.
- Compelling and quality questions drive knowledge creation and expansion in a fundamental way. Knowledge emerges around good questions.
- Questions energize and glue our conversation, draw people into the circle to participate and gather diverse opinions.
- Questions keep the conversation moving forward, awaken dormant discourse and may be used to guide the subject back on course.

The Questioning Strategy

“Using the questioning strategies of A Living Curriculum means not being concerned about getting the “right” answer. Yes, for the question, “What happened in the story?” some answers may be incorrect. But for the rest of the questioning process, the answers will vary depending on one’s experience. We, as teachers, need to recognize that life is process. Our role is to acknowledge a child’s answers as they are learning and growing in life’s process. We want to continue to ask the questions as long as possible to allow each child time to grapple with their own questions and to seek their own answers. For God is within and we want to learn to go within for answers that are for our highest and best good. You may think that using just the same four questions every week becomes very boring. Each can be worded in different ways.” Unity Worldwide Ministries, *Youth and Family Ministry Guide*

The Questioning Strategy

1. “What is Happening in the Story?”

By asking these questions we have a chance to hear what facts the listener actually picked up and which ones they missed. You want to focus the children on what actually happened in the story not their interpretation of it for now. We are looking for the facts.

Examples of possible questions:

- What happened first? Then what happened?
- What do we know about (a character, the location...)?
- Describe what was going on between...
- What else happened?

2. “How are the Characters Feeling About What They are Experiencing?”

We begin to move out of the story bubble and begin to invite the children to think about what the characters might be feeling because of the experiences they are having.

Examples of possible questions:

- How do you think the disciples were feeling when the storm began to rock the boat?
- What do you think they wanted to do when they saw Jesus sleeping?

3. “How is This Happening in the World?”

This is a “bridging question.” It shifts the focus from the story to the present time. By doing so, the child begins to see how the story connects to life. The question is also impersonal. It is about someone else. Keep in mind that the younger the child the smaller their world.

Examples of possible questions:

- How do you see this happening in your friend’s life / your school / your community?
- How is this happening in the world right now?

4. “How is This Story Happening in Your Life?”

As the story comes alive within each child, the facilitator will begin to sense children straining to talk about it in terms of their lives. This is when it is time to step out of the story world bubble and into the world. We use the following types of questions:

“How is this story an event in your life?”

- With this question, a person begins to go beyond the story and considers applying a concept to what is happening to them. This step guides one to see themselves as part of the story.

Examples of possible questions:

- Tell me about a time you experienced a storm?
- How are you like...?
- Who do you identify with in the story? Why?
- When has something like this happened to you? Describe it.

5. “How Will You Use This Experience in Your Life?”

The main purpose of our teachings is to be able to apply them to our lives.

Examples of possible questions:

- What can you do this week that will help you understand how to...?
- Tell me a story about how this idea can change your community in just a small way.

6. “How Would You Like It To Be?”

This final question involves encouraging the children and teens to go beyond how something shows up in the world or in their life. It asks them to consider ways in which something could be different. It helps

them explore alternatives and possibilities. Then they can see that they have a choice – allow something to continue and do something about it.

Examples of possible questions:

- What would you have done in this situation?
- What power do you have to change things?
- How would you change the ending of this story? How else could this have turned out?