

Killer Questions

WHAT ARE KILLER QUESTIONS?

Killer Questions help us confront our fears, learn ways to get to the root cause of issues, and take a hard look at how to successfully move things forward. The queries provided in this tool enable you to reveal candid information, uncover problems we can fix, and discover competitive opportunities—just by approaching topics in a new way.

HOW IT WORKS

STEP 1. Specify the goal of your ideation session.

STEP 2. Review the eight categories of the Killer Questions and choose the one(s) most closely aligned with your challenge.

STEP 3. Choose an Approach:

- **Variation A (Pre-Select):** Pre-select and send 5-10 Killer Questions to participants in advance of your meeting. Use these questions to generate solutions to your challenge and guide meeting discussion.
- **Variation B (Group Selection of Key Questions + Create Your Own):** Based on your challenge, share category-specific worksheet(s) for relevant categories of Killer Questions (or use the entire tool) at your meeting. Ask group to select a few relevant questions to answer. Additionally, ask participants to create their own Questions at the bottom of your selected worksheets. Answer selected and newly created questions as a group
- **Variation C (Design a Killer Interview):** Ask participants to individually complete the Killer Interview worksheet. First, have them select their interviewee and top 5 interview questions they'd love to ask to solve their challenge (questions can be selected from the Killer Questions tool, or they can be inspired to now create their own).

STEP 4. When complete, have people exchange their worksheet with a partner for feedback. When ready, share answers as a larger group. What did you learn? What holds you back from asking these questions? Are there certain questions that can be asked immediately?

FACILITATION GUIDE



SUGGESTED AUDIENCE

- Relevant for managers, senior leadership, and all levels of staff
- Small or large groups depending on approach selected (see *How It Works*)



RECOMMENDED TIMING

Step 1.	Define the Challenge:	5 mins.
Step 2.	Select a Category:	5 mins.
Step 3.	Choose an Approach:	
	Variation A:	50 mins.
	Variation B:	40–60 mins.
	Variation C:	20 mins.

60 – 80 mins.



SUGGESTED MATERIALS

- **Worksheets**
Enough for each participant
- **Whiteboard or flipcharts**
Write down all group ideas; no idea is a bad idea
- **Colored markers, pens, and pencils**
Separating color helps organize thoughts

FACILITATION GUIDE (Cont'd.)

GUIDING QUESTIONS + CONSIDERATIONS (1 of 2)

Want better answers? Ask better questions. Innovations like Hulu, iPhone, and Tesla didn't come to market because their creators asked status quo questions. They didn't happen because somebody began a meeting by asking: "Who has an idea for improving our product/ service?" or "How are we going to increase sales?" Those innovations exist because disruptive, creative, even uncomfortable questions without easy answers were asked. As a result, minds were stretched, assumptions were questioned, and old ways of doing things were eliminated.

The process of provocative inquiry transforms brands and entire industries, and using Killer Questions will build your ability to ask disruptive questions that can lead to real innovation.

Use open-ended questions. What do smart questions look and sound like? They usually begin with "how," "which," "why," or "if" and are specific without limiting imagination. Note the differences between the questions below.

CLOSE-ENDED QUESTIONS	OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS
<p>Closed questions typically prompt a simple "yes" or "no" answer:</p> <p>Example: "Have you finished the project yet?"</p> <p>Answer: "No."</p>	<p>Open-ended questions encourage creative and useful responses:</p> <p>Example: "What are some other ways for us to complete this project?"</p> <p>Answer: "We could eliminate some steps in the process. Or, we could outsource some of the workload to a vendor."</p>
<p>Advantages: Gets to the point, enables quick/short answers</p> <p>Disadvantages: Doesn't identify root causes or provide explanation</p>	<p>Advantages: Provides details, ideas, potential solutions</p> <p>Disadvantages: More time-consuming; can be met with initial resistance</p>
<p>Closed questions typically start with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is Can/Could Do/Did Should Would Where 	<p>Open-ended questions typically start with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> How else can/might we... Which... Why... If we... What else... In what ways can we... What would/could...

Examples of creative, open-ended questions are:

- "If we could acquire anyone...?"
- "Imagine it's the year 2025. What would we do to...?"
- "You're writing a tell-all book on the topic of XYZ. What would it...?"



FACILITATOR NOTE

Provocative inquiry like this is designed to get teams out of their comfort zone, which can make people uncomfortable. If you're met with resistance, explain the goal of the exercise; for example, getting a new angle on a product/business model. If they still resist, try a different question or shift to a less personal line of questioning.

FACILITATION GUIDE (Cont'd.)

GUIDING QUESTIONS + CONSIDERATIONS (2 of 2)

Consider the situational context of your questions. Will more insights be gained from a group setting or through an anonymous online survey? Note the considerations for the communication methods below.

METHOD	OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS
Email Survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quick, informal response Multiple recipients Impersonal
Online Survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides anonymity Enables range of questions types (yes/no, ranking, open and closed queries)
One-on-One Interview (phone, video call, or in-person)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Personalized Enables in-depth explanation Questioner's tone of voice can influence the response
Pre-Meeting Agenda Email	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Requires upfront investment of organizer's time Encourages participants to prepare Aligns group around problem or situation in advance Efficient use of meeting time
Team Discussion/Debrief or Focus Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Myriad responses Enables in-depth exploration Groupthink or dominant voice can overpower shy participants or dissenting views

Consider new audiences for your questions. Querying less conventional audiences can pave a short path toward innovation, so think outside the pool of usual suspects:

- Front-line employees
- Prospective/new hires
- Exit interviewees/former employees
- A competitor's employee
- Unsatisfied/former customers
- Individuals with similar issues in an unrelated industry
- Individuals in your industry who operate in a different country
- Outside experts with a broader point of view
- Vendors
- Kids

WORKSHEET 1: SELECT KILLER QUESTIONS

DEFINE THE CHALLENGE: _____

Select and answer the relevant Killer Questions for your challenge. You can also create your own questions at the bottom of each worksheet (individually or in pairs) and share favorites with the group. Have the group capture ideas on a whiteboard or flip chart to spur more discussion.

KILLER PRODUCT/SERVICE QUESTIONS:

- ☐ 1. When do people not buy our product/service? (season, economic climate, etc.) Why?
- ☐ 2. What would our target market say about our offerings in comparison to the leading competitors'?
- ☐ 3. What one feature should we have that our nearest competitor has? How long would it take us to incorporate it?
- ☐ 4. Are we overdesigning our offering to deal with exceptions? What features could be removed to create more value?
- ☐ 5. How can we reduce production costs by 50%? What would be the impact?
- ☐ 6. What could we do to our products/services to blow the minds of top Silicon Valley venture capitalists?
- ☐ 7. What two things could our competitors do to make our product/services irrelevant?
- ☐ 8. How can we customize our products/services to a local need, or vary them based on locality?
- ☐ 9. What do we hate most about our current offerings' functionality? How long would it take to make it better?
- ☐ 10. How can we offer the products and services that customers seek after buying/using our products and services?
- ☐ 11. How can we integrate offerings vertically and/or horizontally to create an end-to-end experience?
- ☐ 12. In what ways can we eliminate steps in our processes to make our service or product more accessible to the customer?
- ☐ 13. How can we change the size of our product (make it really small or make it really big) to change its value?
- ☐ 14. Which parts of our product could be brought back, or refilled, after it is consumed?
- ☐ 15. Which intangible parts of our product or service could benefit customers and enhance how they feel about it?
- ☐ 16. How can our services be turned into physical products? How can our products be turned into a service?
- ☐ 17. How can we create an aura of exclusivity that will drive even greater demand?
- ☐ 18. What level of service could we offer if we controlled the entire value chain for our product or service?
How would we accomplish this?
- ☐ 19. What are some unexpected uses for our product/service?
- ☐ 20. How would we describe our products/services to parents? Friends? The board of directors? How do these differ?
- ☐ 21. If we won a product or service award, what would it celebrate and recognize?

Compose three of your own Killer Product/Service Questions here:

DEFINE THE CHALLENGE: _____

Answer the Killer Questions below as a group and capture ideas on a whiteboard or flip chart. Create your own questions at the bottom of the worksheet (individually or in pairs) and share favorites in a group discussion.

KILLER QUESTIONS ABOUT THE CUSTOMER:

- ☐ 1. Who does not use our product because special abilities are required? How can we make the opposite true?
- ☐ 2. Who does not use our product when an analogous group uses it heavily? (young/old, men/women, etc.) Why?
- ☐ 3. How can we make our customer feel like a hero? How can our product/service help the customer be on-trend?
- ☐ 4. Who is modifying/disassembling our product to use a key component? Why?
- ☐ 5. Who spends an unnatural percentage of their disposable income on our product or something similar?
- ☐ 6. What are the unshakable industry beliefs about what customers want? What if the opposite was true?
- ☐ 7. We have 140 characters to instantly capture 100 new customers on Twitter: What is the tweet?
- ☐ 8. What new customer segments will emerge in five years? How will those customers discover our product five years from now?
- ☐ 9. What is our dream testimonial from a customer?
- ☐ 10. What conclusions might a psychologist draw after evaluating a focus group of our top three customers?

KILLER QUESTIONS TO ASK THE CLIENT:

- ☐ 1. What would make you fire all of our competitors and give us 100% of your business?
- ☐ 2. If you were CEO of our company for a day, what's the first thing you would do?
- ☐ 3. What do you value most/least about doing business with us (me)?
- ☐ 4. In what ways are we (am I) holding you back from achieving your goals?
- ☐ 5. If you could change one thing about our business relationship, what would it be?
- ☐ 6. How can we (I) make your job easier? How could our product help you make more money?
- ☐ 7. What is the one product/service we need to add to our offerings in the next six months?
What if we don't get it done for a year?
- ☐ 8. What could we STOP doing that would make you jump for joy?
- ☐ 9. What goals would you like to see us (me) accomplish with you in the next 12 months?
- ☐ 10. What do you dislike about the process of purchasing our product/service?

Compose three of your own Killer Customer/Client Questions here:

DEFINE THE CHALLENGE: _____

Answer the Killer Questions below as a group and capture ideas on a whiteboard or flip chart. Create your own questions at the bottom of the worksheet (individually or in pairs) and share favorites in a group discussion.

KILLER LOGISTICS QUESTIONS:

- ☐ 1. How would you design our emergency or contingency plan to deal with uncertain demand?
- ☐ 2. Which process can be modified to provide a smoother, more continuous flow of product to the customer?
- ☐ 3. What is the shortest path to the customer?
- ☐ 4. Should we increase the frequency of offerings or product releases?
- ☐ 5. Will continuously refreshing our offerings drive demand?
- ☐ 6. How can we make our product—and service—chain more responsive to demand fluctuations?
- ☐ 7. Will less frequent, larger releases of offerings increase demand?
- ☐ 8. How can we shorten the process or wait time?
- ☐ 9. In what ways can payments be transacted faster?
- ☐ 10. What can be done to reduce the length of unpleasant experiences?
- ☐ 11. How might we use unpleasant experiences to create pleasant ones?
- ☐ 12. Which portion of our service or product could be outsourced?
- ☐ 13. How can we increase transparency in our operations?
- ☐ 14. What are the benefits of revealing the inner workings of the product/service to customers?
- ☐ 15. How can we increase the flow of customers in and out of the service or business?
- ☐ 16. How can the business be expanded along the supply chain?
- ☐ 17. What is getting in our way logistically? How much would it cost to remove it vs. what it will save?
- ☐ 18. Which suffers more breakdowns: Our products, process, or people? Why?

Compose three of your own Killer Logistics Questions here:

DEFINE THE CHALLENGE: _____

Answer the Killer Questions below as a group and capture ideas on a whiteboard or flip chart. Create your own Questions at the bottom of the worksheet (individually or in pairs) and share favorites in a group discussion.

KILLER TREND QUESTIONS:

- ☐ 1. What external wild cards could significantly impact our industry? What would happen?
- ☐ 2. Which evolution trends can be addressed through new service or product offerings?
- ☐ 3. What are the big shifts that our industry is undergoing? Which related industries should we be watching?
- ☐ 4. One year from now, if our company is not behind creating the next big trend, what will our excuse be?
- ☐ 5. What will the company be like in 5 years? 10 years? What trends made this happen?
- ☐ 6. Would you describe our corporate mindset as that of trend spotters, trend setters, trend trackers, trend fighters, or trend followers?
- ☐ 7. Which trend is most likely to uproot our business model? When will it be a reality for 20% of our customers?

KILLER PRICING QUESTIONS:

- ☐ 1. Could we offer our product at five times the cost if we improved a particular feature/function?
- ☐ 2. What would it take to sell our product at half the price? How would our competitors respond?
- ☐ 3. How can we offer less and charge a premium?
- ☐ 4. What can we offer for free that no one else does?
- ☐ 5. What if our competition cut prices by 50% or made their products free?
- ☐ 6. How can we offer customers discounts for buying in bulk?
- ☐ 7. From a customer's perspective, why would you continue to pay more for our product/service over XYZ competitor?
- ☐ 8. At what price point would we lose one-third of our customers to a leading competitor?

Compose three of your own Killer Logistics Questions here:

DEFINE THE CHALLENGE: _____

Answer the Killer Questions below as a group and capture ideas on a whiteboard or flip chart. Create your own Questions at the bottom of the worksheet (individually or in pairs) and share favorites in a group discussion.

KILLER MANAGEMENT QUESTIONS:

- ☐ 1. If a task is too large to accomplish, who can we partner with to lighten the load?
- ☐ 2. How can we conduct research to anticipate problems and find solutions early on?
- ☐ 3. Could the organization be better arranged for more efficient flow of work and information?
- ☐ 4. What is the worst-case scenario?
- ☐ 5. How can we anticipate common problems and have solutions readily available?
- ☐ 6. How can we empower employees to solve customer problems?
- ☐ 7. What customer "waiting time" or employee "downtime" can be made more productive?
- ☐ 8. If we could hire five more people, what skills would they have and why?
- ☐ 9. What three tasks would you love to delegate?
- ☐ 10. Which aspects of your job would you like to kill or eliminate?
- ☐ 11. What fears are holding us back from pursuing this project/idea/etc.?
- ☐ 12. If you were a competitor, what two things would you do to put us out of business?
- ☐ 13. At which level in the organization do our management messages/vision get misinterpreted?
- ☐ 14. Which acquisition would most impact our business?
- ☐ 15. How could we better motivate performance?
- ☐ 16. What is the best management decision you have ever made? Worst?
- ☐ 17. How many employees in your department are you paying...that aren't paying off?
- ☐ 18. When it comes to problems, out of 100%, what percentage do we (a) solve? (b) create? (c) ignore?
- ☐ 19. If we could acquire anyone, who would it be and why?
- ☐ 20. Our competitor is firing clients. Should we go after them and why?
- ☐ 21. What ideas would get us fired?
- ☐ 22. What idea would give our CEO a panic attack but is worth pursuing?
- ☐ 23. What's an example of an action our competition could take that would jeopardize our company's future?

Compose three of your own Killer Management Questions here:

DEFINE THE CHALLENGE:

Answer the Killer Questions below as a group and capture ideas on a whiteboard or flip chart. Create your own Questions at the bottom of the worksheet (individually or in pairs) and share favorites in a group discussion.

CULTURE KILLER QUESTIONS:

- ☐ 1. How can we create a more open culture in the organization? How can we break down silos?
- ☐ 2. What hinders our teams from taking full ownership of their projects?
- ☐ 3. Which aspect of our team's culture are we not working to change right now, but should be?
- ☐ 4. How could a competitor put us out of business?
- ☐ 5. If our three biggest clients just abruptly defected to the competition, what would we do?
- ☐ 6. If you could only work on one project for a year to transform the business, what would it be and why?
- ☐ 7. Which rules or processes are holding us back from being more effective?
- ☐ 8. What are the unspoken assumptions we have about our jobs? Our company?
- ☐ 9. What are the three most fulfilling aspects of your job? Most frustrating?
- ☐ 10. How would you describe the environment in which you do your best work?
- ☐ 11. What have we done that should have gotten us fired, but didn't?
- ☐ 12. It's 2025 and we're the best company to work for in the world: What two things did we do to earn this award?
- ☐ 13. Who are the rock stars in our industry? Why do they work at the places they do? How do they behave daily?
- ☐ 14. If you were CEO for the day, which two employee behaviors would you change and why?
- ☐ 15. What overall vision is our company striving toward and why?
- ☐ 16. What does management do that drives you crazy?
- ☐ 17. You've just written a tell-all book about this company: which secrets does it reveal?
- ☐ 18. Which time-consuming tasks do we spend most of our time doing that we hate/find annoying?
- ☐ 19. What's the worst that could happen? What if we're wrong?
- ☐ 20. If we could undergo a corporate culture exorcism, which three "evil" customs should be eliminated?
- ☐ 21. If Warren Buffet got into an elevator with us and asked what we do, what would we say?
- ☐ 22. What do we wish we could do at work that we can't right now? What would happen if we did it?

Compose three of your own Killer Culture Questions here:

WORKSHEET 2: KILLER INTERVIEW

Complete individually before exchanging the worksheet with a partner. Plan to share and discuss with the group afterward.

SECTION 1:

What is the key challenge you'd like to address with the interview?

SECTION 2:

If you could interview anyone that would give you meaningful insights and suggestions (customer, employee, key stakeholder, etc.), who would you choose?

Why?

SECTION 3:

What five questions would you ask him/her in order to identify problems or new opportunities?

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

SECTION 4:

Exchange worksheets with a partner and provide feedback below

I like that your Killer Interview includes/addresses...

I would also add/ask/consider...
