



## Author Q&A: The Quest to Ask Better Questions

In his new book **A More Beautiful Question: The Power of Inquiry to Spark Breakthrough Ideas**, author and journalist **Warren Berger** shows that one of the most powerful forces for igniting change in business and our daily lives is a simple, under-appreciated tool—one that has been available to us since childhood. **Questioning** can help us identify and solve problems, come up with innovative ideas, and pursue fresh opportunities. So why, then, are we often reluctant to ask “Why?” Berger answers that and more in this interview.

**What’s so important about questioning? Doesn’t the world really need answers, not more questions?**

We do need answers—but to get the best ones, we have to ask the right questions. Questioning is a critical starting point of problem-solving and innovation—whether in business or everyday life. Thoughtful inquiry can help us begin to see and understand the challenges around us more clearly. Questions also spark the imagination. And we’re now learning that questions (versus declarations) can help us motivate ourselves—while engaging the interest and support of others. Learning how to act on our questions can lead us toward solutions and creative breakthroughs. Einstein understood this; so do the people running Google and lots of other innovative endeavors.

**If questioning is a known positive force, then why isn’t it valued more? Why is questioning, as you say, “under-taught and under-utilized?”**

In our pressured society, we have an education and business culture that rewards quick factual answers over imaginative inquiry. Questioning isn’t encouraged—it is barely tolerated. In both classrooms and workplaces, questioning may be seen as a challenge to authority or perceived as a sign of weakness—an indication that one “doesn’t know.”

**Yet, as you point out, people who question tend to be very successful.**

That’s an interesting dichotomy I explore in the book. Society does its best to discourage questioning, but those who ignore that and remain

## Top 20 Questions in “A More Beautiful Question”

Warren Berger’s **A More Beautiful Question** explores more than 300 questions pertaining to innovation, business success, education, social issues, life improvement, and the importance of questioning itself. Below are twenty of the more critical questions the book covers. (Page numbers show where that question is discussed in the book).

- ✿ **In today’s world, why are questions becoming more valuable than answers?** (p. 23-28)
- ✿ **With so much evidence in its favor—and with everyone from Einstein to Steve Jobs in its corner—why is questioning under-appreciated in business, under-taught in schools, and under-utilized in our everyday lives?** (p. 3-9)
- ✿ **Why do kids ask so many questions – and more importantly, why do they stop?** (p. 39-70)
- ✿ **Considering that today’s schools were built on an industrial model, is it possible they were actually designed to squelch questioning?** (p. 48-60)
- ✿ **How can we rekindle the questioning spark we had at age four?** (p. 7, 71-134)
- ✿ **What can we learn from George Carlin and Louis C.K. about the art of questioning?** (p. 39-40, 83-88)
- ✿ **How can “stepping back” to question help us move forward?** (p. 76-83, 188-190)

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inquisitive often end up running our most creative and successful businesses while coming up with game-changing ideas. The latest research shows that the most innovative business leaders—Steve Jobs, Jeff Bezos and the like—tend to question everything. And it is through constant inquiry that they find new opportunities.

**Tell us about your own journey of inquiry—how does one tackle a subject as big and broad as questioning?**

Questioning is like breathing—it's something that seems so basic, so instinctive, that we take it for granted. But there's a lot we can all learn about how to question, and really do it well. So I sought out people who are "master questioners"—innovators, entrepreneurs, creative thinkers of all stripes—who are known for raising questions no one else is asking and doing this as a practice. I found such people in Silicon Valley startups and innovation hothouses like IDEO, but I also talked to teachers, artists, basement tinkerers, and social activists who question conventional thinking daily.

I was also curious about what's going on in our brains when we question, so I interviewed leading neurologists. I studied the way comedians, in particular the late George Carlin, use questioning to challenge assumptions and see the world differently. And I spent time at a fascinating place called The Right Question Institute, where they are developing techniques to help children and adults become better questioners. All of this informed the section of the book that focuses on how to get better at asking Why, What if, and How questions.

**You also went back through recent history, digging up stories of breakthroughs that began with a question. Can you share some examples?**

There are many. The Red Cross started with a question; so did the Internet. Questioning gave us car windshield wipers and instant cameras—the latter can be traced to the question, "Why do we have to wait for the picture?," asked by the 3-year-old daughter of inventor Edwin Land, who would later start Polaroid. Companies such as Netflix, Pixar, and many others can be traced back to a "founding question"—though my favorite, just because it's so odd, involved a college football coach who asked, "Why aren't the players urinating more?" That question led to the creation of Gatorade and a \$20 billion sports drink industry.

**So does the Gatorade query qualify as a "Beautiful Question?"**

Yes, though it might not seem a likely one. I define beautiful questions as those that are ambitious yet actionable—and that have the potential to bring about change. The book posits that we should all try to formulate our own beautiful questions and take ownership of them (as that football coach did). Generally speaking, a Beautiful Question cannot be answered quickly on Google—a different, much deeper kind of search is required.

A MORE BEAUTIFUL QUESTION by Warren Berger,  
Coming from Bloomsbury Publishing Inc. in March 2014.  
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- ✿ **What is the "Why – What If – How" approach to innovative questioning?** (p. 30-33, 71-134)
- ✿ **Why are the most dynamic business leaders also great questioners?** (p. 5-6, 158-165)
- ✿ **Why do great ideas, innovations, and breakthroughs often begin with a question?** (p. 29-33, 76-83)
- ✿ **How do the most innovative companies foster a "culture of inquiry"—and how can any business or organization do likewise?** (p. 165-174)
- ✿ **If we brainstorm in questions, will lightning strike?** (p. 152-158)
- ✿ **Should businesses replace mission statements with "mission questions?"** (p. 162-165)
- ✿ **What if a job interview tested one's ability to ask questions, as well as answer them?** (p. 173-174)
- ✿ **If you sleep with a question, will you wake with an answer?** (p. 106-112)
- ✿ **How do we move from asking to action?** (p. 115-134)
- ✿ **Why do we avoid taking the time to ask important and fundamental questions about our lives?** (p. 180-188)
- ✿ **What would you attempt to do if you knew you could not fail?** (p. 199-202)
- ✿ **How can a focus on questioning help us make progress on difficult and divisive social issues?** (p. 202-206)
- ✿ **What is a "Beautiful Question"—and how can you pursue one of your own?** (p. 8, 208-216)