



Are you ready to ask a breakthrough question and get a breath-taking result for your business?

Business owners are often so busy being busy, they fail to ask themselves the breakthrough questions.

Innovation, creativity and inspiration (and the results these things bring) all start when you ask a simple question.

Here's what happens when asking the right question breaks through the clutter of normal working life:

1. A 3-year-old asks her dad an obvious question and he starts a business that ends up with annual sales of £1.1 billion
2. A typist asks a simple question and builds a business she sells for £39 million
3. Joe and Brian ask a few simple questions in 2007 and just 2 years later take 1,000,000 bookings and a £80 million investment. The business is now valued at over £20 billion

If 3-year-olds can ask an obvious question...

...then can't we all ask great questions?

On a sunny winter's day in 1943 Jennifer Land (3-years-old) asked a question of her dad. Edwin Land had just taken Jennifer's picture with his favourite camera when she piped up:



"Why can't I see the picture (you've just taken) now?"

Like most 3-year-olds, Jennifer didn't want to wait!

Jennifer's question stayed with Edwin and resulted, in 1948, in the first Polaroid camera.

At the height of Polaroid in 1978 customers bought 14 million polaroid cameras and spent £1.1 billion (in today's money that's £3.7 billion) with the company.

All because of Jennifer's naïve yet valuable question.

Here's a proven solution for you...

To get a breakthrough for your business, use a proven 3-question formula so that you and your colleagues ask the simple, valuable and innovative questions.

In a nutshell

We're all hungry for better answers. But first, we need to learn how to ask the right questions.

Ask the right questions and you'll get yourself a breath-taking business breakthrough like Edwin did.

Such a simple question!

In the 1950s Bette Nesmith Graham was a typist in a bank by day and a commercial artist by night.

If you'd been Bette, you might also have asked yourself this modest question:

"What if I could paint over my mistakes when typing, the way I do when painting my pictures?"

Bette's question resulted in her taking to work a small bottle filled with a paint and water mixture. Bette's 'miracle mixture' made it easy to cover typing errors.



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It wasn't long before she was selling her correction fluid to hundreds of secretaries. Later, in 1980, Bette sold her company 'Liquid Paper' for £39 million!

Innovative breakthrough ideas start with 'WHY'...

Warren Berger, in his book 'A More Beautiful Question', has uncovered a 3-question formula. A formula that goes a long way to explaining how some of the best business ideas and innovations have been created.

Like Jennifer Land (the 3-year-old) you start the 3-step breakthrough question formula with a 'WHY' question.

Polaroid, Liquid Paper and many other inspired and profoundly valuable innovations start when you:

1. Ask a 'WHY' question

'WHY' wakes you up so that you become aware of and understand the problem.

"Innovative questioners, when faced with situations that are less than ideal, inquire as to why, trying to figure out what's lacking." – Warren Berger

Joe Gebbia and Brian Chesky were struggling to pay the rent on their San Francisco apartment. At the same time newspapers were reporting on the lack of hotel beds in the city... So what question would you ask given these two facts? How about asking...

"Why do people coming to our town have so much trouble getting a hotel room?"

Joe and Brian were problem finding with this question.

And so was born the idea of 'air bed and breakfast'. It's now called Airbnb and is valued at more than £20 billion.

"...find a problem before others do, and then successfully answer the questions surrounding that problem".

– Warren Berger

For more examples of breakthrough 'WHY' questions download the support tools – see back page.

The 'WHY' stage is about seeing and understanding the problem.

2. Ask a 'WHAT IF' question

A 'WHAT IF' question starts you thinking about possible solutions.

The 'WHAT IF' stage is about imagining.

"What if I paint over my mistakes when typing, the way I do when painting?"

Bette jumped straight into working out possibilities by asking "What if I could..."

3. Ask a 'HOW' question

A 'HOW' question signposts, stimulates and prompts you to act on the possibilities and solutions you dream up.

The 'HOW' stage is about doing, testing, prototyping.

Put them together and here's what's possible...

...in just 2 years a handful of questions creates Airbnb

Why? What if? How? All contributed to the creation of Airbnb – a business that now generates over £2 billion in sales revenue.

Here are some of the questions two of the founders asked in 2007:

"How are we going to pay the rent?"

They had no jobs and no money and were struggling to keep a roof over their heads.

"Why can't we find a place for these people to crash for a night or two?"

The city hotels were jam-packed because of a conference in their city of San Francisco.

"Why not our place?"

"...and what if we provide more than just a mattress to sleep on?"

They expanded the original thoughts to include a modest breakfast as well as the blow-up mattresses they used.

"What if we create our own website?"

Instead of advertising their place they built a website (they both had design backgrounds).

"Why not make a business out of this?"

"What if we could create this same experience in every major city?"

The challenge for the business was that according to traditional thinking and the views of investors, no one would want to stay in someone else's bed.

But Joe and Brian had experienced both sides of the problem – finding a bed AND needing money but with a bed to rent. They wouldn't be put off. And so, another 'WHAT IF' question sent them to Denver:

"What if we take this idea on the road and test it in another city?"

In 2008, Denver had a Democratic presidential convention, and a shortage of hotel rooms. And with a little clever PR and news coverage the boys proved that it worked in 2 cities!

A year later they achieved more than 1 million bookings and had received more than £80 million from investors.

Can it really be this simple?

It can. But few people take questions seriously enough.

Few people take time out to simply generate a whole raft of questions about their business, their customer experiences or the future of their products and services.

So why not open your diary now and block off half a day or a couple of hours away from work. And use this 'time-out' to build a list of questions like those the boys at Airbnb did in 2007. You'll then have started...

If a naive 3-year-old can stimulate a multi-billion-pound business who knows what your questions can inspire?

Book your time-out now and apply this 3-question formula to your business, your thinking and your actions!

TIME TO DISAGREE:

“Me and my team know our industry and know what we’re doing, so how come we can’t achieve breakthrough results?”

Berger puts it best:

“...many people overestimate their knowledge, put too much faith in their gut instinct, and walk around convinced they have more answers than they actually do. If you feel this way, you’re less likely to ask questions.”

He then helpfully points out how the British director at the innovation firm IDEO helps businesses achieve breakthroughs:

“I position myself relentlessly as an idiot (or like a 3-year-old) at IDEO, and that’s not a negative it’s a positive because being comfortable not knowing – that’s the first part of being able to question.”

Possibly the most well-respected business advisor of the last 50 years is Peter Drucker. He reckons:

“My greatest strength as a consultant is to be ignorant and ask a few questions.”

Asking naïve or ‘beginner’s mind’ (3-year-old’s) questions puts you on the road to creative breakthrough questions.

Why not put a ‘stranger’ in the room when you start asking the ‘WHY’ questions about your business and your customers and your products? This will help you step back. Please let us know if we can help you with this. You can also download (from the back page) the powerful question checklist that helps you ask breakthrough questions.

Use the Business Bitesize Support Tools And Resources to help you make the most of this edition of **Business Bitesize** – go here: www.businessbitesize.com/obc_accountants to download these

“Isn’t asking all these questions just a big navel-gazing exercise?”

You’re right to challenge the possible time wasted when taking a ‘time-out’ for a questions exercise.

But the reality for most business owners is they are swamped by the sheer volume of stuff that needs doing day-in, day-out. Being this overloaded is not conducive to creative or innovative thinking.

So, it pays to step back and do some creative thinking by asking some well-structured questions. A good starting point being:

“What questions should we be asking ourselves?”

When Jim Hackett retired from Steelcase, he’d grown it into the world’s largest office furniture company. He’d managed a profound restructure and saved it from extinction! Hackett believes:

“There is an over celebration of getting things done...”

...we have to train ourselves to ask questions. We have to discipline ourselves to do it.”

Discipline yourself to a regular ‘time-out’ for question creation.

“Please tell me more”

In Warren Berger’s brilliant book – *A More Beautiful Question* – you’ll discover deep insights into the power of breakthrough questions.

Berger shows how our time at school almost beats out of us the child-like skill of asking great questions. He also shows how powerful and how relatively simple it is to start asking challenging questions. Questions that just might deliver you and your business a valuable and lasting breakthrough.

So, if you’d like a breakthrough result for your business we recommend diving into this valuable book.



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4 helping hands for you...

It’s easy to admire breakthrough businesses like Uber and Airbnb.

But what if you could create your own breakthrough idea for your business?

Warren Berger’s research points to a simple 3-question formula you and I can apply to our businesses, our products and our services.

Why not take a little time out and give this 3-question formula a go?

- 1. Step back from the ‘coalface’ of running your business and go problem finding**
- 2. Create a whole series of ‘WHY’ questions to find a problem worth tackling in your business**
- 3. Next pose some ‘WHAT IF’ questions to generate creative options**
- 4. Having found the problem and created options now it’s time to work out ‘HOW’ - prototype and test your ideas as fast as you can**

ULTIMATE ARGUMENT: “How do I know that the 3-question process will work for me and my business?”

One of the key insights from Warren Berger’s research is that the successful innovators are great at prototyping, testing and trialling.

Why not take a leaf from the book and give the 3-question formula a try?

Yes, the formula is simple but isn’t necessarily easy. Polaroid, Liquid Paper and Airbnb all took months or years to mature into sellable propositions. So please take the long view AND take the first step.

Take some time out and start asking yourself the ‘WHY’ question. Even better why not set about creating a whole series of ‘WHY’ questions and then filter and fine-tune the best ones to use.

STOP: working at your ‘coalface’ and take time out to ask breakthrough questions

START: by asking ‘WHY’ so that you find a problem worth fixing



Your next steps:

Busy being busy gets things done but doesn't get you a breakthrough result in your business.

If Polaroid, Liquid Paper, Gatorade, Airbnb and many more breakthrough business ideas start with questions it clearly pays to ask more questions too.

And so why not get a breakthrough for your business, use the proven 3-question formula so that you and your colleagues ask the simple, valuable and innovative questions.

Start by stepping back from your 'coalface'

Have yourself a 'time-out', away from the day-to-day hustle and bustle of your business. Why not get an outsider involved or a 3-year-old!

And build yourself a list of questions using the 3-question formula laid out in Warren Berger's brilliant book.

'WHY...?'

'WHAT IF...?'

'HOW...?'

More tools and information for you:

Download the question checklist to help you get started using the URL link in the box below.

Get yourself a business breakthrough – start asking 'why', 'what if' and 'how'

Where do the breakthrough ideas come from? How come we haven't yet come up with ours, you know the one idea that delivers a breath-taking result for our business or kick-starts a new business?

Chances are you've been too busy being busy, doing everything that just needs doing to keep your business going. Time to invest a few short hours in a few questions – just like the breakthrough business owners in this report have done.

1. Drag yourself away from the 'coalface' of running your business – step back and go problem finding.

Just like Edwin Land did going on holiday with his 3-year-old daughter. If you prefer just block-off a couple of hours away from work and use the question checklist from the downloadable tools (see below) to help you. Perhaps get an outsider involved too.

2. Write down a whole series of 'WHY' questions to seek out a problem worth tackling in your business.

You can then filter and fine-tune the questions and see which questions help you better to see then understand one or two problems worth further investigation.

3. Then pose some possibility questions to generate options. Ask 'WHAT IF' questions to dream up creative options, possibilities, alternatives. Just like Brian and Joe did as they set up Airbnb. Just like Bette Nesmith Graham did when imagining painting over typing errors to then create Liquid Paper.

4. Make it happen next. Having found the problem and created options now it's time to prototype and test your ideas as fast as you can. Remember innovation is rarely an overnight success. Edwin Land took 5 years to launch his first Polaroid, Airbnb took 2 years before they got their breakthrough investors to commit. But they got started fast.

Use the insights in this Bitesize report to help you make more of the power of breakthrough questions and use the additional resources you'll find in the downloadable tools to help you more.

YOUR SUPPORT TOOLS ARE HERE: Go to the link below and you'll find a selection of practical support tools to help you get a deeper understanding of asking breakthrough questions so that you too can achieve a breath-taking result for your business.

Find the support tools to help you here - www.businessbitesize.com/obc_accountants

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