

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

When thinking about breakthrough questions for your business, ask yourself the following question:

How often are you planning 'time-out' away from your normal place of work to work on breakthrough questions?

CONTENTS:

1. The one 'BREAKTHROUGH' question you must ask to make sure you tap into the power of posing the perfect question for your business:
2. Breakthrough questions that all resulted in breakthrough business ideas...
3. The Breakthrough Question checklist – guides your thinking when working on your next breakthrough
4. Breakthrough questions work even when the going gets really tough...
5. The books and resources to help you put breakthrough questions to work in your business

STOP working at your 'coalface' and take a 'time-out' to ask breakthrough questions

START by asking 'WHY' so that you find a problem worth fixing

1. The one 'BREAKTHROUGH' question you must ask to make sure you tap into the power of posing the perfect question for your business:

How often are you planning 'time-out' away from your normal place of work to work on breakthrough questions?

Where is the value in this question?

In an ever-changing business world avoiding change is like standing on a railway line waiting for the train to come and hit you. Just like Blockbuster did, just like Kodak did and just like many retailers did (Woolworth, HMV, Poundland, Toys R Us, Maplin) – ignoring the future.

The value in this question prompts you to challenge your current commitment to getting the most done every day at the 'coalface' of your work. Yes this is productive for today but does little to ensure your business is relevant to your customers in the future.

The question is challenging you to plan a 'time-out' so that you can start a process of breakthrough questions – using the breakthrough question formula recommended by the 'Right Question Institute' <https://rightquestion.org>

Remember, Airbnb, Polaroid, Liquid Paper and many other business creations came from the same breakthrough questioning process – so why not put this same process to work for you and your business.

Below you'll find exercises and insights to share with your team, so that you too can tap into the power of asking breakthrough questions and seeing what you come up with and where it can lead. Then you'll be pro-actively working on the future success of your business not just getting today's work done and dusted.

IMPORTANT: This question prompts you to set a day and time for working on breakthrough questions that could secure the future of your business or create a new business idea worth prototyping.

It's just so easy to get consumed by the day-to-day trauma, excitement and need to 'get stuff done'. One thing that is easy to put off (constantly) is investing time, effort and energy in the future of your business. This is work – just a different type of work, best done away from the office or workshop and only happens when you plan in a day and time for it to happen.

2. Breakthrough questions that all resulted in breakthrough business ideas...

Sometimes it pays to get a little bit of inspiration.

Here are some examples of worthwhile questions that have resulted in business success:

Breakthrough **'WHY'** questions:

"Why aren't all enterprise software applications built like Amazon and Ebay?" asked by Marc Benioff while on vacation swimming with Dolphins in Hawaii.

Benioff went on to launch Salesforce.com that now does more than £8 billion in annual sales.

"Why aren't players urinating more after the games?" asked by Dwayne Douglas, an American football coach, in 1965.

The question resulted in the creation of Gatorade which now has annual sales of more than £4 billion.

"Why doesn't someone create a device to remove the snow (from my windscreen)?" asked by Mary Anderson of her streetcar driver battling through the New York snow in 1902.

Mary went on to design the windscreen wiper.

"If they can put a man on the moon why can't they make a decent foot?" asked Van Phillips when he was struggling with his clumsy prosthetic foot (after losing his lower leg in a speedboat accident).

Van Phillips went on to create the 'blade' you now see being used in the para-Olympics.

Breakthrough **'WHAT IF'** questions:

"Why can't we graphically encode product data?"

This question led to student, Joseph Woodland, asking:- **"What if Morse Code could be adapted graphically?"**

This led to the 1848 patent for the bar code, now being used universally across the globe.

"Why aren't charitable efforts succeeding in getting water to where it's most needed?"

A question asked by actor Matt Damon and Gary White who teamed up with at Water.org to tackle water shortages for 1 billion people. They went on to ask:

"What if local communities could have the means to create their own sources of water?"

A programme by Water.org makes small loans (mostly to women) and has them developing their own ways and means of accessing water – it's helped more than a million people so far.

Jack Dorsey (co-founder of Twitter) ended up partnering with his friend (an independent trader) who'd just lost a £1900 sale because he couldn't accept a credit card and asked:

"Why is it that only companies are able to accept credit cards and not independent traders?"

This morphed into the question:

"What if all you needed to swipe a credit card was a smart phone or tablet?"

The result a business called 'Square' – read about it in the Guardian here -

<https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2017/mar/28/twitter-jack-dorsey-card-payments-company-square-enters-uk-market>

Breakthrough **‘HOW’** questions:

“How can we get those with money to pay more for the ambulance service?”

This question was asked after Shaffi Mather had asked the question:

“Why can’t India have an emergency ambulance service like the US or the UK?”

He’d set up the ambulance service on a pay ‘what you can honour’ basis, but everyone claimed they were low income! So they changed the system and now charge more to go to more expensive hospitals and charge less to go to cheaper hospitals. Mather’s service has become the largest ambulance service in India serving over 2 million people.

“How do you make a hard-boiled egg’s shell disappear?”

Because Betsy Kaufman made devilled eggs for a living, peeling eggs was work that took time and often resulted in scrapping an egg that wouldn’t peel. She also asked:

“What if you could hard-boil an egg and not have shells to peel?”

This question morphed into:

“What if you could boil an egg in a hard-boiled egg shape, but with the shell already off?”

You can now buy ‘eggies’ which enable you to do just this – saving time and wasted eggs too!

“How would you integrate speed-dating into the work you do or the problem you’re faced with?”

“How would IKEA tackle this problem?”

“How would J.K. Rowling or Jay-Z approach this issue?”

You can bring creative questions about both ‘HOW’ and ‘WHAT IF’ by asking questions from another’s perspective.

“How would Steve Jobs, Alan Sugar, Richard Branson, Amazon, Waitrose, Rolls Royce handle the issue?”

3. The Breakthrough Question checklist – guides your thinking when working on your next breakthrough

It's very easy to take questions for granted, after all it's something you do every day without thinking.

However, asking a breakthrough question isn't something we do every day and so it pays to follow a proven process for this.

The checklist below has been adapted from the 'Right Question Institute' – it took them ten years to develop and fine-tune this list – why not give it a go and see how well it works for you?

a. Design a question focus	"Technology is going to be more important in our industry"
b. Produce questions	No debating the merit of questions; no answering questions; write down every question; change any statements into questions.
c. Improve your questions	Turn open questions (what, where, when, how, who, why) into closed questions that get a 'no' or 'yes' answer. Turn closed questions into open questions.
d. Prioritise your questions	Work together to work out your favourite, most impactful, questions.
e. Decide on next steps	What actions do you take on the best 3 questions – plan diary time for action.
f. Reflect on what you've learned	After you've worked through the questions' process, discuss what lessons or insights you've gained from the process and the questions created.

And why not check out what the Right Question Institute is doing? This process started out as a methodology to help adults ask better questions of 'people in power'. It has since proved its value in schools too, helping children learn the skills of asking great questions. It can also be easily and effectively applied to our world of business.

<https://rightquestion.org/what-we-do/>

4. Breakthrough questions work even when the going gets really tough...

Jerry K. Myers, who had been brought in to lead 'Steelcase', quit the job after three years. His departure came as Steelcase reported a \$70 million loss for the year.

Jim Hackett then took over the reins at the end of 1994 where he found he had his hands full!

Hackett took over from Myers and had to ask some challenging questions and make hard decisions to ensure the survival and continuity of what was once the largest office furniture producer in the USA. He even had to cut the job that the best man at his wedding was doing at Steelcase!

You can read the short but enlightening story of Hackett's work as CEO at Steelcase here –

https://www.mlive.com/business/west-michigan/index.ssf/2014/01/steelcase_ceo_jim_hacketts_rem.html

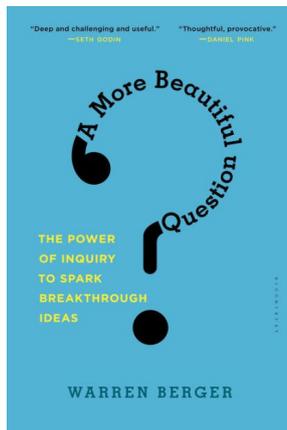
There's one quote worth emphasising in this article:

"He asked a lot of questions. The best way to learn is to listen, not just talk. Jim (Hackett) knows how to listen very intently."

Steelcase made a profit of \$56.7 million on sales of \$2.75 billion in 2012.

5. The book and resources to help you and your team better apply breakthrough questions to your business

Check out the book by Warren Berger called 'A More Beautiful Question – The Power of Enquiry to Spark Breakthrough Ideas' that accompanies this Business Breakthrough and the supporting tools and resources.



Daniel Pink, New York Times bestselling author of 'DRIVE' and 'TO SELL IS HUMAN' writes about Berger's book:

"We know that the art of asking questions is at the heart of discovery in science, philosophy and medicine - so why don't we extend that power to all areas of our lives? The thoughtful, provocative questions Warren Berger raises in this book are indeed the kind of 'beautiful questions' that can help us identify the right problems and generate creative solutions"

You can find a copy of the book here –
<http://bit.ly/beautifulquestionwb>

Check out this 3 minute overview and challenge your thinking about how come we don't ask enough great questions - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dey1Rm5gUxw>



And if you prefer to watch the author unlock his insights into breakthrough questions check out this 60 minute video crammed with valuable insights
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Scu-4xhYIVc>