



Questioning Our Questions, by Eric Vogt, Juanita Brown, David Isaacs

"If I had an hour to solve a problem and my life depended on the solution, I would spend the first 55 minutes determining the proper question to ask, for once I know the proper question, I could solve the problem in less than five minutes." -- Albert Einstein

When was the last time you sat through a meeting and said to yourself, "This is a complete waste of time!"? Was it yesterday, or even just a few hours ago? Why did that gathering feel so tedious? Perhaps it's because the leaders posed the wrong questions at the start of the session. Or, worse yet, maybe they didn't ask any engaging questions, and as a result, the meeting consisted of boring reports-outs or other forms of oneway communication that failed to engage people's interest or curiosity.

The usefulness of the knowledge we acquire and the effectiveness of the actions we take depend on the quality of the questions we ask. Questions open the door to dialogue and discovery. They are an invitation to creativity and breakthrough thinking. Questions can lead to movement and action on key issues; by generating creative insights, they can ignite change.

Consider the possibility that everything we know today about our world emerged because people were curious. They formulated a question or series of questions about something that sparked their interest or deeply concerned them, which lead them to learn something new. Many Nobel laureates describe the "Eureka!" moment of their discovery as when the "right" question finally revealed itself—even if it took them considerable time to come up with the final answers. [...]

If asking good questions is so critical, why don't most of us spend more of our time and energy on discovering and framing them? One reason may be that much of Western culture, and North American society in particular, focuses on having the "right answer" rather than discovering the "right question." Our educational system focuses more on memorization and rote answers than on the art of seeking new possibilities. We are rarely asked to discover compelling questions, nor are we taught why we should ask such questions in the first place. [...]

[Actually], it is quite easy to learn the basics of crafting powerful questions. However, once you understand the importance of inquiry, it's hard to turn back. As your questions become broader and deeper than before, so does your experience of life. There is no telling where a powerful question might lead you.

--Eric Vogt, Juanita Brown, David Isaacs, From this [1] article

Links:

[1] <http://www.theworldcafe.com/articles/aopq.pdf>

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