



Start Reinventing! **What Gets Asked Gets Answered**

“Take the attitude of a student, never be too big to ask questions, never know too much to learn something new.”

-Og Mandino

Boat Rockers

Apple just announced the latest (and most expensive) iPhone in history! It has more abilities than its predecessors and will reinvent the personal smart phone market... again.

Do you know the story of why the iPhone was invented? The original iPhone was introduced in 2007 as one product that combined an iPod with a phone and purchasing device. Steve Jobs introduced the most unusual product in years.

The new device basically combined a music listening machine with a cell phone that had computer features. But what got Apple thinking of this concept?

According to Steve Jobs, he was competing with Microsoft, Blackberry and a host of other companies. Jobs hated the way cell phones functioned. He questioned their assembly, design, materials, purpose and the results consumers were getting from them. What if you could combine your music device so you don't have to carry two on you at all times? What if you added the capabilities of a computer to your phone and music/video listening device? What if you had a screen that wouldn't scratch easily? What if you didn't have to use a tiny keyboard to type information?

Jobs and his team weren't afraid to ask questions. They wanted to know why people had to do things the same way as everyone else on their phones. Nothing was considered sacred. They dared to question everything and start from scratch. The product reinvented communication forever.

Someone asked me last month at a convention what the first step should be in reinventing their organization. Without hesitation I insisted, “Ruthlessly question everything you

do... question your habits, question your procedures, question your routines, question “the rules,” question your products, question your work schedule, question how you hire, question... everything!”

The greatest innovations in the world have come from people who dared to question everything. I remember a PBS series, “The Day the Universe Changed,” by James Burke. He demonstrated how people asked questions about realities and common practices long ago that became the springboards for innovations and inventions... new ways of viewing (and changing) reality. One of my favorites was how a German farmer noticed how burning plants left minerals which led him to invent fertilizer. It saved 18th Century Europe from starvation. Burke called these people “boat rockers.”

Your view of the world will determine how you think about everything. Question the view, and you will run into opposition. Keep questioning it and if you make sense, you will become either a hero or the villain if you can’t show a better view.

Begin the Process

Question everything you do, from your daily routine to the business you are in. Find what works and what you are doing because you have “always done it that way.”

1. **Question everything:** Ask why we are doing this. Ask your staff and employees if they are encountering resistance or better ways of serving customers or producing products.

I asked a group of fire chiefs the top reason they were called for emergencies. To my surprise it wasn’t fires. Firefighting wasn’t in the top five reasons they went out on calls. The most frequent calls were for personal health reasons... Emergency Medical Services, heart attacks, auto accidents, senior adults in trouble in assisted living facilities, etc. But when they spoke to county officials to appeal for more funding, they always talked about fire prevention. We decided that if they made appeals based on the actual needs in the community, the budget committees would value their services more.

2. **Uncover waste and out of date policies:** What are we doing that has expired? What are we doing that is a waste of time, talent, money and efforts? Where could our resources be used better?

If you wanted to keep food cold in the 1800s, you buried it in the ground or in a cold basement room called the “root cellar.” Jacob Perkins came up with the idea of a machine that used ice to keep food cold and not spoil so fast. It took up less space and you didn’t need to dig a hole in the ground. It was originally called, the “ice box,” precursor to the refrigerator.

The first traffic signal was invented when Garret Morgan observed two cars crashing. He designed a way to let drivers know who had the right of way. Today

engineers are designing traffic circles into more communities for the same reasons. They cut down on costs and help prevent accidents.

3. **Observe something that works somewhere else:** If that works here, where else would it work? Why can't we do that over here that is effective over there?

An airplane gets lift on the wings because air moving over a curved surface moves faster than a straight surface. Sure, we know that now, because many inventors have done the thinking for us. But this principle goes back to sail boats over 3,000 years ago. The same principle is working that literally "pulls" a boat into the wind using curved sails. It just took some people asking, "Why not use that principle to make a heavier than air machine fly?"

4. **Eliminate everything that holds you back:** What do we need to release to allow us to move forward? What is holding us back?

Radio was sending clear sound over the air without using a cord since Marconi invented it in 1900. The first radio station was licensed and on the air in 1920. Radio signals had been broadcasting for 60 years, but until the 1980s no one had come up with a way to do the same with the telephone, which predated radio. Then the Federal Communications Commission was pressed to allow other frequencies to be used. Someone asked why we couldn't use a telephone without being tied to a cord.

5. **Find out from your people what works best (and what doesn't):** What do our service representatives and customers like? What penalizes them? How can they do it better and easier?

In a church I served, we wanted to reinvent the way we taught classes. Rather than going to conferences, talking to other churches and reading about other experiences, I simply asked my teachers what they liked and didn't like about our methods. To my surprise, I started receiving similar answers from everyone. It's hard to make changes in a church that has existed for decades. This was easy, since I had all of the teachers and most regular attendees on my side from the beginning.

Ask your team where the connections don't meet in their processes. They will be glad to tell you. You can start by getting the sales account executives in the same room with the service representatives. You will be surprised at the disconnect between what is promised, and what is served. In most organizations service received is often not what was promised.

6. **Instill it in your culture:** What can we do that makes this easy for everyone to remember? What would we like to be known for?

Auto pioneer Henry Ford is often thought of being the inventor of the gasoline powered automobile. He wasn't, though. Ford perfected a method for mass

producing his popular Model T. It was called the “assembly line” and he installed the first one in 1913 to meet the growing demand of consumers wanting to buy the car. It didn’t even change design of almost a decade, so the same job was done at the same station for over ten years. This way he could speedily produce automobiles and sell many more. Today many assembly lines use machines to do the same thing that he created to speed up production.

In every organization there are questions that should be asked. Something always needs improvement and I guarantee that if you aren’t asking the right questions, your competitor is right now. In every procedure there are questions that are left unasked (and unanswered). The more questions you ask, the better answers you receive. Why do you do the things you do and the way you do them? Is there a better way? What is holding your organization back? What could you do to meet needs and satisfy people better? What is no one else doing that we could “pioneer?”

Dare to challenge the status quo. Start asking questions. Rock your boat!

Next month: Listen to Complaints!

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