

Learner Mindset: Foundation

Inquiring Mindset™ Tools
for Life and Work

A Resource Book

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Learner Mindset: Foundation

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The Inquiring Mindset™

The Inquiring Mindset is the habit, curiosity,
and courage of asking open-minded questions
of oneself and others.

12 Axioms of the Inquiring Mindset

A person with an active Inquiring Mindset operates from the awareness that:

1. Questions have more power than answers, both in thinking and communicating.
2. Questions are *first*, then answers.
3. Great results *begin* with great questions.
4. Every question *missed* is a potential crisis waiting to happen.
5. Solutions that are not strategic and thoughtful can cause even bigger problems.
6. A genuine question is one to which the answer is not already known.
7. Successful strategic thinking, information gathering, communication, collaboration, creativity, and change depend on the quantity, quality, and intention of questions.
8. Asking questions of oneself and others is the best defense against assumptions and blindspots that compromise relationships and results.
9. Asking others constructive, quality questions brings out their best thinking, partnership, action, and results.
10. Quality listening is essential to the process of effective question asking.
11. Mindset trumps questions.
12. Whatever the situation, an active Inquiring Mindset is your best ally for successful and satisfying relationships and results.

Some Thoughts about Change and Learning

There is . . .

no progress without change
no change without learning
no learning without questions
no questions without curiosity
no curiosity or questions without an active Inquiring Mindset.

* * * * *

Great results *begin* with great questions.

Change and learning generally depend on the quantity, quality,
and intention of the questions we ask ourselves and each other.

Every question missed is a possible crisis waiting to happen.

You have your questions – or your questions have you.

Blame keeps us stuck in the past.
Responsibility paves a path for a better future.

The person who wants a change is responsible for the change.

We're all recovering Judgers.

You have your Judger – or your Judger has you.

Judger begets Judger and Learner begets Learner.

No one can help anyone else from a Judger place.

Judger denied can become Judger squared.

Judger mindset impedes both teaching and learning.
Learner mindset facilitates both.

Accept Judger and practice Learner -- moment by moment by moment.
It's as important for classrooms and teams as it is for individuals.

Switching questions are what make learning, change, and
progress possible. Switching is where the action is!

-- Marilee Adams

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Great results *begin* with great questions!

Section 1

Power and Potential of Questions

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Top Twelve Reasons to Ask Questions

“Despite the omnipresence of questions in our lives, few people are fully aware of the potential and power inherent in them. Perhaps this is because, somewhat like the wind, it is their effect, rather than their presence, which is often most conspicuous.”

Marilee Goldberg Adams: *The Art of the Question*

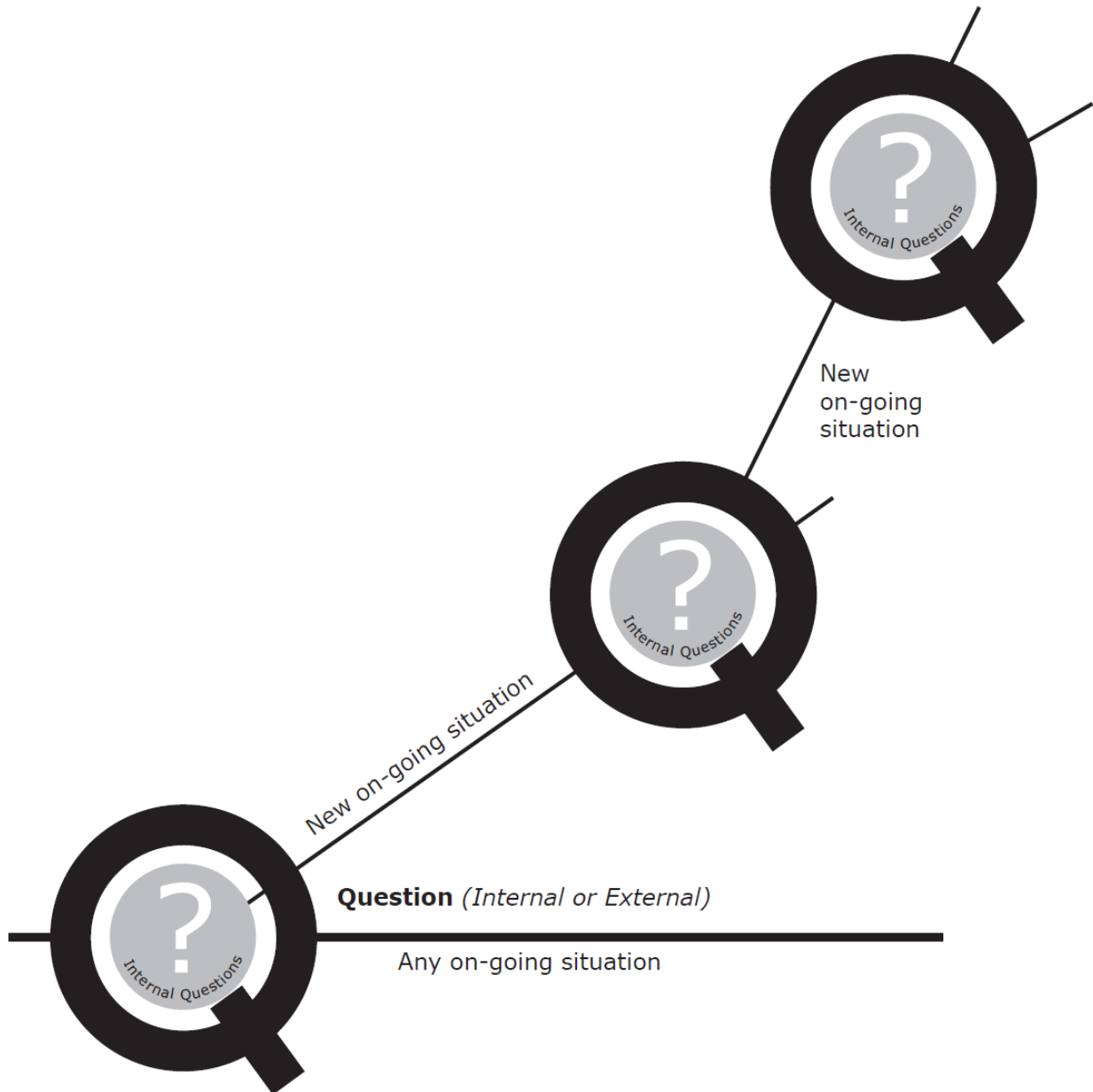
This list is based on three assumptions:

1. A genuine question is one to which the answer is not known.
2. Curiosity is the driver of open-minded questions.
3. The questions are intended in a constructive manner, i.e. not to intimidate, prove being right, nor demonstrate how much one knows.

Among the top reasons we ask questions are to:

- Gather information
- Build and maintain relationships
- Learn, teach, and reflect
- Think clearly, critically, and strategically
- Challenge assumptions
- Listen to understand, verify, and clarify
- Solve problems and make decisions
- Negotiate and resolve conflicts
- Set and accomplish goals
- Take charge and focus attention
- Create and innovate – open new possibilities
- Catalyze productive and accountable conversation and action

The Adams Model of Change™



Question Reluctance

Most of us experience question reluctance in some form and at some times. Question reluctance behaviors usually represent an avoidance and/or discomfort with asking questions (and often with answering them). Consider this: Have you ever been in a situation, either professional or personal, had an important question to ask, and did *not* ask it? Virtually everybody answers, “Yes.” That’s a form of question reluctance.

While Question reluctance is normal, it is not natural. As children, we all asked questions easily and naturally. Expressing our curiosity by asking questions is how we learn about the world. However, most of us have also been discouraged from asking questions at home, at school, and/or at work. We’ve come to believe that asking a question might be considered rude, intrusive, or inconsiderate. Sometimes people refrain from asking important questions because they don’t want to appear “not to know” or to be out of the loop. Furthermore, this reluctance and reticence is more prevalent in some cultures more than others.

For these and other reasons, many of us have developed the assumption that question interactions are inherently conflicted, rather than collaborative. This conclusion is unfortunate because curiosity and questioning are the foundational drivers of learning, development, and change. In other words, not asking relevant, timely curiosity questions can actually impede growth and development, and even productivity and success.

The antidote to question reluctance is to re-engage the natural spirit of inquiry and curiosity we all had as children, combining this with developing the attitudes, skills, tools, and practices of questioning (and also Question Thinking).

The Clamor for Answers

“We live in an answer-oriented, fix-it-quick world. In the clamor for answers—sometimes *any* answer—we often overlook quiet distinctions and fresh perspectives that could reveal whole new worlds of possibility. Moreover, sometimes the conditioned hunt for answers represents an attachment to ‘knowing,’ and a simultaneous avoidance of any anxiety associated with ‘not knowing,’ or even appearing not to know. This is ironic as well as unfortunate, for often the most productive answers are born only after long periods of gestation and living with not knowing *yet*.”

-- Marilee Goldberg Adams, Ph.D.
The Art of the Question

* * * * *

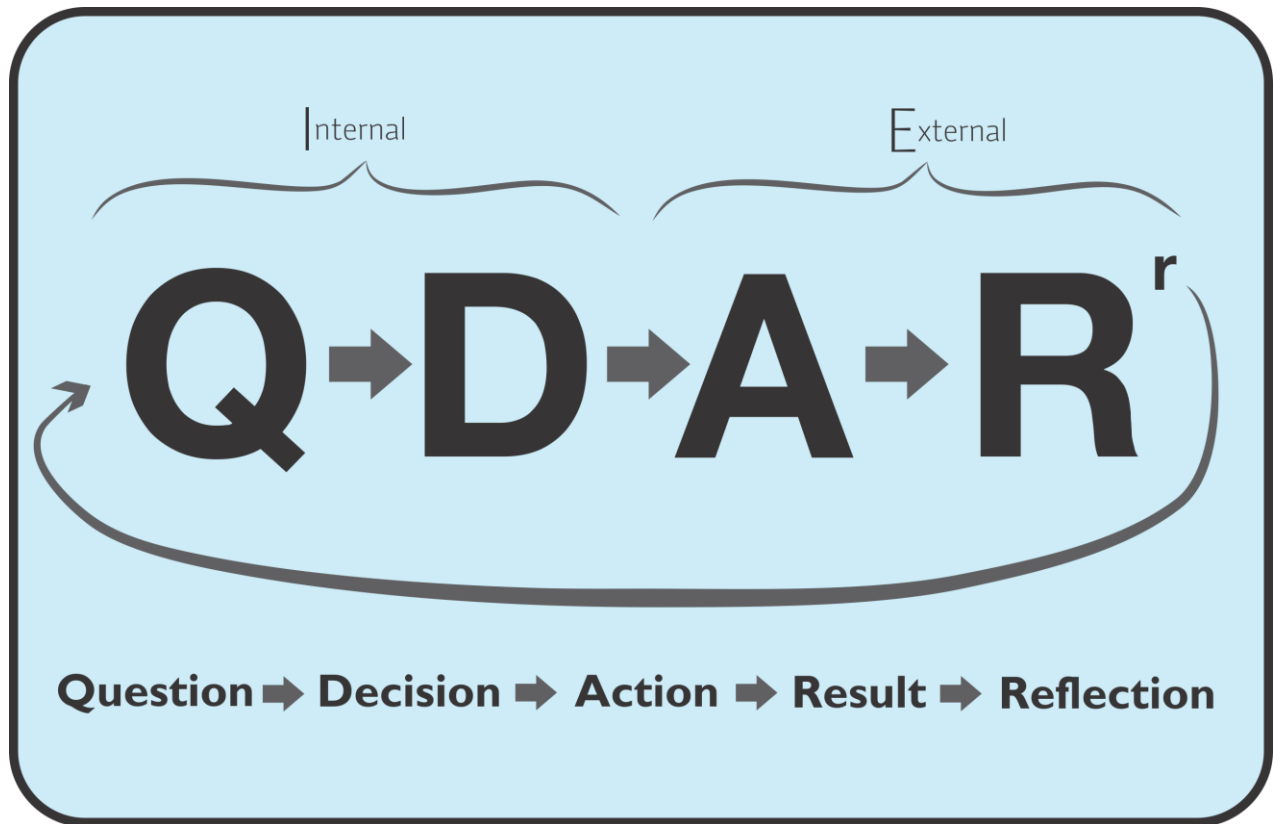
People are often focused *only* on answers, which is understandably what they assume is needed to resolve difficult situations. Of course, ultimately this is true. However, the singular search for answers often means that people start out looking in the wrong place to discover the solutions they seek.

Not realizing that ‘new’ answers could carry similar limitations as any old ones, they also don’t realize that fundamental change often depends *first* on asking better questions. Without this recognition, many people unintentionally operate in a “ready, fire, aim” mode rather than a “ready, aim, fire” one.

To be most truly strategic requires the natural sequence of questions, then answers. Perhaps we could think of this perspective as part of the “science of answers,” or perhaps consider it as focusing on the antecedents as well as the architecture of answers.

Adapted from *The Art of the Question*

Relationship of Questions and Results



Guidelines for Asking Questions Effectively

“A question can be an invitation, a request, or a missile. What impact do you want your questions to have?”

-- Marilee Adams

Expertise with question asking always begins with the mindset of the individual asking the questions. These guidelines presume a mindset that is open-minded, genuinely curious, desirous of learning, and intending a positive outcome for both parties. There are no absolute “rules” in question asking, since the best questions must always factor in context, relationship, and intentions.

- **The general goal is to ask a question effectively.** This means to acquire or convey the information necessary, or initiate some specific action, while maintaining respect and rapport with the other person. Effective questions are usually asked by one’s Learner mindset, not one’s Judger mindset.
- **Observe the Golden Rule in asking questions.** Ask questions of the other person as you would like to be questioned.
- **Make sure you have the other person’s attention.** If that person doesn’t realize he or she is being asked a question, there’s little chance they’ll answer it, or that you’ll get what you’re asking for.
- **As much as possible, know what you want *before* you ask.** For example, is this a question for getting information, to get some action started, or for bringing up a subject to think about?
- **Recognize that questions can convey information and/or feelings.** For example, “Did you know that the team meeting was changed to Tuesday?” or “Have I told you recently how much I enjoy working with you?”
- **Timing is everything.** This pertains to *when* a question is asked, as well as the *potential length* of the interaction. Unless the question interaction is going to be brief, say to the other person, for example, “I have something to ask you. Is this a good time?” or “Do you have a minute?”
- **Also, consider the circumstances and use common sense.** For instance, don’t ask a complicated, difficult, or emotional question when your coachee is already late for a meeting.
- **When is the answer needed?** Let the other person know if this is something for which you need an immediate answer, or if it’s simply something you want them to think about so you can discuss it later.
- **Be careful about how the question is delivered.** To neutralize “defensive listening,” deliver questions in a neutral or accepting tone. Use congruent facial expressions and body language. (Remember: even on the phone you can tell if a person is smiling!)

- **Set the question up properly.** For example, “I have a question about that situation with XYZ Company that we talked about last week.”
- **Consider who *else* might be listening.** Never ask questions that could make the other person feel uncomfortable or look bad in front of someone else.
- **Keep questions simple. Ask only one question at a time, as much as possible.**
- **Be certain the other person understands the question** – or the implications of the question – and clarify if necessary.
- **Give the other person enough time to think and respond (“wait time”).**
- **Listen carefully to the verbal and non-verbal response.** Observe and be sensitive to the other person. Ask yourself questions such as: “Did I get what I was looking for?” “Did this work for him or her?” “Are we still in rapport?” “Is this complete?” and “Is there anything else I need to do here?”
- **Complete** any question-answer interaction; for example, with a simple “Thanks.”

Here are some questions to ask yourself before asking questions of others:

- “What do I want my question to accomplish?”
- What do I need to take into account when asking it?”
- What are my intentions?” “Are they positive?”
- What’s the best way to ask this question?”
- Is this a good time to ask it?”
- Can we both win with this question?
- Is there anything I should tell this person *before* I ask my question?”

Alternative Ways to Ask “Why”

“The eye goes blind, when it wants only to see why.”

---Rumi

Despite the fact that the question “Why?” is a useful and necessary one, many people report that it leaves them feeling like they’re being interrogated -- even if the question is asked in a neutral tone. They may react by feeling and acting defensive as well as reluctant to respond fully or honestly. Below are some alternative ways to ask the same question so that it is *received* as an invitation rather than as a missile. How many others can you come up with?

Alternative ways to ask “Why?”

- How come?
- I’m curious about . . .
- I wonder . . .
- Can you explain to me what you were thinking?
- Can you help me understand . . .?
- What is your understanding about how come this happened?
- What was the reasoning behind that decision?

You can also put the “Why” in a sentence rather than beginning the sentence with it. This buffers the impact of being asked “Why?”

- Can you explain to me *why* you did it that way?
- Would you elaborate on *why* you chose to do it that way?
- Will you help me understand *why* you think this happened?

You can also buffer the impact of “Why?” by using a set-up sentence first.

- This is confusing to me. Why do you think it happened?
- I’m having trouble understanding this situation. Why did it turn out like this?

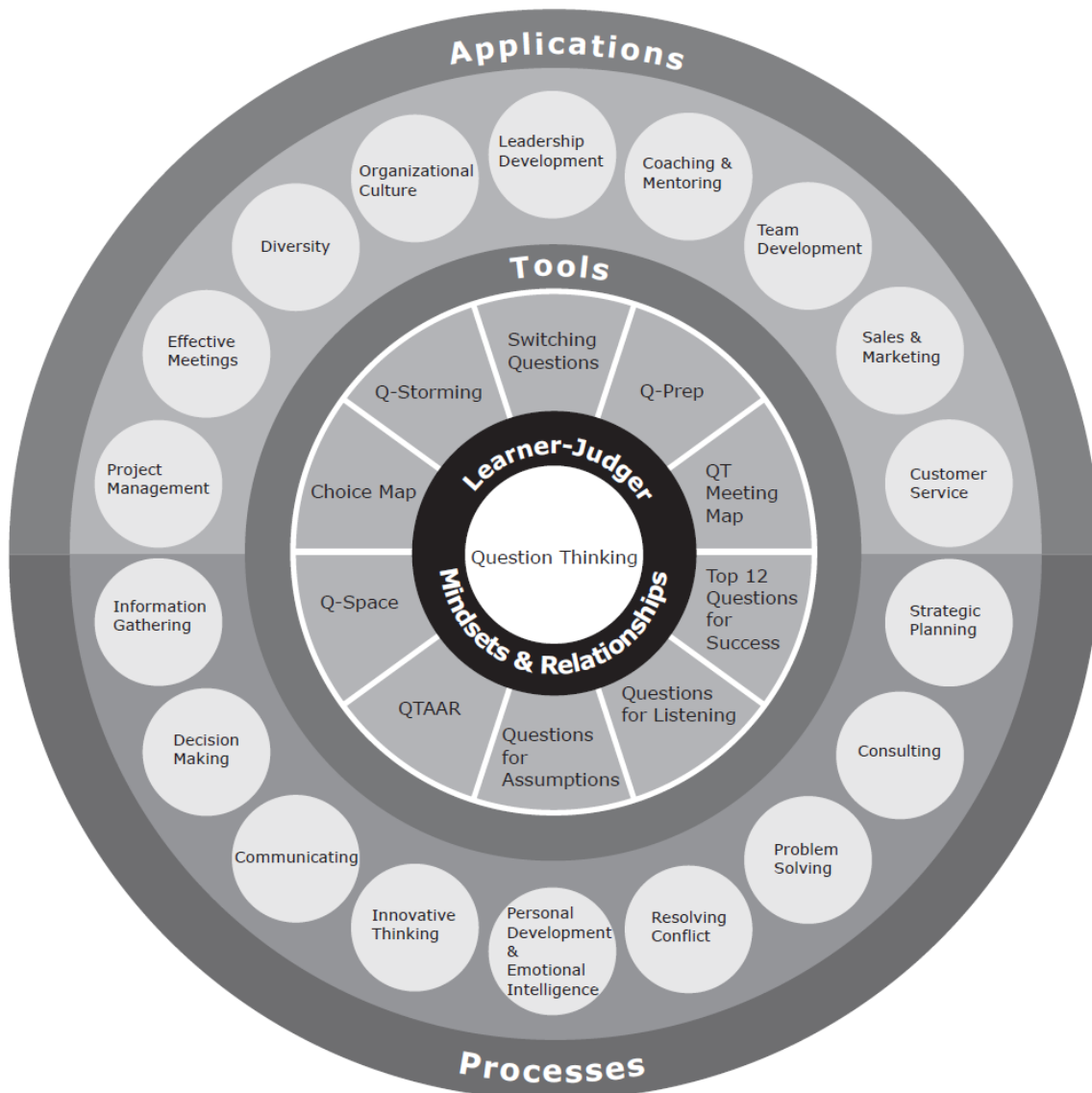
What is Question Thinking™?

Question Thinking (QT) is a theory of thinking based on the premise that the phenomenon called thinking occurs as an internal question and answer process wherein what is typically considered a statement actually represents an answer to a preceding question (or series of questions or “nested” questions). QT theory posits that spoken language represents a form of instantaneous “external answers” to an individual’s internal questions. QT theory also posits that behaviors can be considered as representing answers to preceding questions, even when the questions themselves are “invisible” or not noticed.

Question Thinking offers an approach for slowing down the automaticity of internal questions and answers, perhaps shedding some light on the operations of thinking itself. It represents a way of operationalizing thinking such that the very process can be observed moment by moment, thus offering possibilities for choice and change in real time. The roots of QT include domains that are linguistic, cognitive, psychological, ontological, epistemological, and philosophical. Question Thinking is a theory in its infancy, awaiting exploration, study, research, and further elaboration in both theory and practice.

The Question Thinking System of Skills and Tools is a methodology for transforming thinking, listening, speaking, relating, action, and results through intentional and skillful question asking –questions people ask others and especially those that people ask themselves (sometimes referred to internal questions, self-questions, internal or inner dialogue, and self-talk).

Question Thinking™ Model



The Top Twelve Questions for Success

This exercise provides a logical sequence of questions for assuring that you cover all the bases before making a change or embarking on a new direction.

Within this list are questions that are applicable to a variety of life's challenges. The goal is to integrate these questions into your everyday thinking. Then, when a challenge arises, you'll be able to easily recall some of them. Not every question applies to every situation. That's why you'll want to develop a collection of your favorites and work with them on a regular basis. These questions can open and change your mind. They allow you to unveil new choices, options, and possibilities you might otherwise have missed.

Practice: Think of a situation in which you are stuck, frustrated, or want something to change. You can ask each question on the list below from several perspectives. Ask them of yourself – What do I want? Ask them of other people—What do you want? Or ask them of those with whom you have an ongoing relationship—What do we want? Here's the list:

1. What do I want?
2. What assumptions am I making & what are the facts?
3. What am I responsible for?
4. What am I missing or avoiding?
5. What is the other person thinking, feeling, and wanting?
6. What's there to accept and forgive in myself/others?
7. What questions should I ask myself and/or others?
8. What can I learn?
 - i. from this person or situation?
 - ii. from this mistake or failure?
 - iii. from this success?
9. How else can I think about this?
10. How can I make this a win-win?
11. What's possible?
12. What action steps make the most sense?

Keep this list in a handy place where you can refer to it whenever you feel stuck, want new alternatives, or a change.

Section 2

Worksheets for Learning

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Learning: Type 1 and Type 2

| <p><u>Type 1 (External)</u></p> <p><i>Objective: About Content, Data, Facts</i></p> <p>(Generally refers to what can be looked up, memorized, verified)</p> <p>(more “visible”)</p> | <p><u>Type 2 (Internal)</u></p> <p><i>Subjective: About Context and Self</i></p> <p>(Generally refers to thinking, feeling, mindset, behavior, relationship)</p> <p>(more inferred)</p> |
|---|---|
| <p>Information and knowledge</p> | <p>Capacity, ability, and intention related to: remembering, perceiving & understanding, analyzing & evaluating, applying, creating (Adapted from Bloom’s Taxonomy)</p> |
| <p><u>Example A: About History</u></p> | |
| <p>U. S. Declaration of Independence signed on July 4, 1776</p> | <p>Understands its historical and social relevance and the personal implications for the signers</p> |
| <p>Example B: About Bicycles</p> | |
| <p>Knows what one is and what it’s for</p> | <p>Able to practice, ride, get better, enjoy</p> |
| <p>Example C: About Questions</p> | |
| <p>Can recite what “the 5 W’s” stands for (Who, What, When, Where, & Why questions)</p> | <p>-Understands what kind of question to ask for what reason, to whom, and under what circumstances Has the willingness and skill to do so</p> |
| <p><i>In general, more related to IQ</i></p> | <p><i>In general, more related to EQ</i></p> |

Scenario for Learning, Reflection, and Action

1. Write down a situation in which you want significantly better results at work in roles such as leader, manager, coach or team member. Why is this situation important?
2. What are all the *goals* you can think of in this situation?
3. Pick *one of these goals* that would be a worthwhile change or breakthrough for you in your development. Goal should be specific, within your own control, behavioral, worthwhile, and positive.
4. What *assumptions* are you making in this situation?
Assumptions might be about understanding a communication. They might also be about: yourself (capabilities, intentions, and commitments; the other person (intentions, capabilities, and commitments); resources, limitations, external circumstances (“reality”), and/or possibilities.

5. What are the *facts* about this situation?

6. What *Judger questions* are you asking about *yourself*?

7. What *Judger questions* are you asking about the other person?

8. What are the *costs of Judger* in this situation for you and the other?

9. What *Switching questions* would you need to ask yourself in order to switch from Judger to Learner mindset in this situation?

10. What new *Learner questions* could you now ask about *yourself*?

11. What new *Learner questions* could you now ask about the other person?

12. What new possibilities now become available?

13. What are the key learnings that you can apply in this Learning Scenario?

14. What did you learn in this exercise that you can apply to other areas of your life?

Goals that Work

A well-formed goal sets one up with the best chance of success. It is therefore a “workable” goal and there are specific criteria of what constitutes one. Nevertheless, people often set “fuzzy” or ambiguous goals without realizing that they are probably undermining their own success.

Here are some of the criteria of a well-formed goal. If a goal doesn’t meet all or most of these, it may be more like making a wish than setting an actionable and achievable goal.

1. Specific situation with behavioral components

This is a specific situation in which you want a different and better result. If, for example, you want a better relationship with a colleague, then determine a specific conversation between you that you would like to improve.

2. Right “chunk size”

This is like the question, “How do you eat an elephant?” The answer: one bite at a time.

3. Ownership and within person’s own scope of influence

This must be a situation in which your own behavior influences the outcome. Remember: The person who wants a change is responsible for the change.

4. Worthwhile

Success is important, motivating, and compelling. Success is worth the effort.

5. Positive, not negative

Generally, the goal is something to move *towards*, not away from. It’s harder to achieve a negative or the absence of something.

6. Measurable and observable

You can describe how you would know it was achieved (this may include metrics).

7. Timing

Timeline for completion; may include milestones along the way.

8. Mood of possibility

After setting up all these conditions of a workable goal, you are energized and hopeful about success. And, if you are not as successful as you would like, you have a specific way to figure out what happened and how to correct this for next time you set a goal.

Curiosity Assessment*

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---|--------------------------------|----------|------------|-------------|-----------|
| | very slightly or not at all | a little | moderately | quite a lot | extremely |
| 1. I actively seek as much information as I can in new situations. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2. I am the type of person who really enjoys the uncertainty of everyday life. | | | | | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 3. I am at my best when doing something that is complex or challenging. | | | | | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 4. Everywhere I go, I am out looking for new things or experiences. | | | | | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 5. I view challenging situations as an opportunity to grow and learn. | | | | | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 6. I like to do things that are a little frightening. | | | | | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 7. I am always looking for experiences that challenge how I think about myself and the world. | | | | | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 8. I prefer jobs that are excitingly unpredictable. | | | | | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 9. I frequently seek out opportunities to challenge myself and grow as a person. | | | | | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 10. I am the kind of person who embraces unfamiliar people, events, and places. | | | | | 1 2 3 4 5 |

* Kashdan, Todd. *Curiosity? Discover the Missing Ingredient to a Fulfilling Life*. William Morrow Publishers, New York. 2009—page 267.

Notes and Reflections

Notes and Reflections

Section 3

The Inquiring Mindset

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Learner/Judger Mindset Model

| Mindsets* | |
|---|--|
| Judger | Learner |
| Reactive and automatic | Responsive and thoughtful |
| Know-it-already | Values not-knowing |
| Inflexible and rigid | Flexible and adaptive |
| Blame | Responsibility |
| Either/or thinking | Both/and thinking |
| Self-righteous | Inquisitive |
| Defends assumptions | Questions assumptions |
| Presumes scarcity | Presumes sufficiency |
| Possibilities seen as limited | Possibilities seen as unlimited |
| Primary mood: protective | Primary mood: curious |
| * We all have both mindsets, and we have the capacity to choose where we operate from in any moment. | |
| Relationships* | |
| Judger | Learner |
| Win-lose relationships | Win-win relationships |
| Dismissive | Discerning |
| Debate | Dialogue |
| Separate from others/self | Connected with self/others |
| Fears differences | Values differences |
| Feedback considered rejection | Feedback considered worthwhile |
| Listens for: | Listens for: |
| Right/wrong | Facts |
| Agree/disagree | Understanding |
| Seeks to attack or is defensive | Seeks to resolve and create |
| * We all relate from both mindsets, and we have the capacity to choose how we relate in any moment. | |
| Questions * | |
| Judger | Learner |
| What's wrong? | What works? |
| Who's to blame? | What am I responsible for? |
| How can I prove I'm right? | What can I learn? What's valuable? |
| Why is that person so clueless and frustrating? | What is the other person thinking, feeling, and wanting? |
| Why bother? | What's possible? |
| * We all ask ourselves questions from both mindsets and have the capacity to choose at any moment which questions will frame our thinking, listening, behaving, and relating. | |

Anatomy of Judger

1. Judger Jumble

Whatever Judger “mischief” is being created in the present

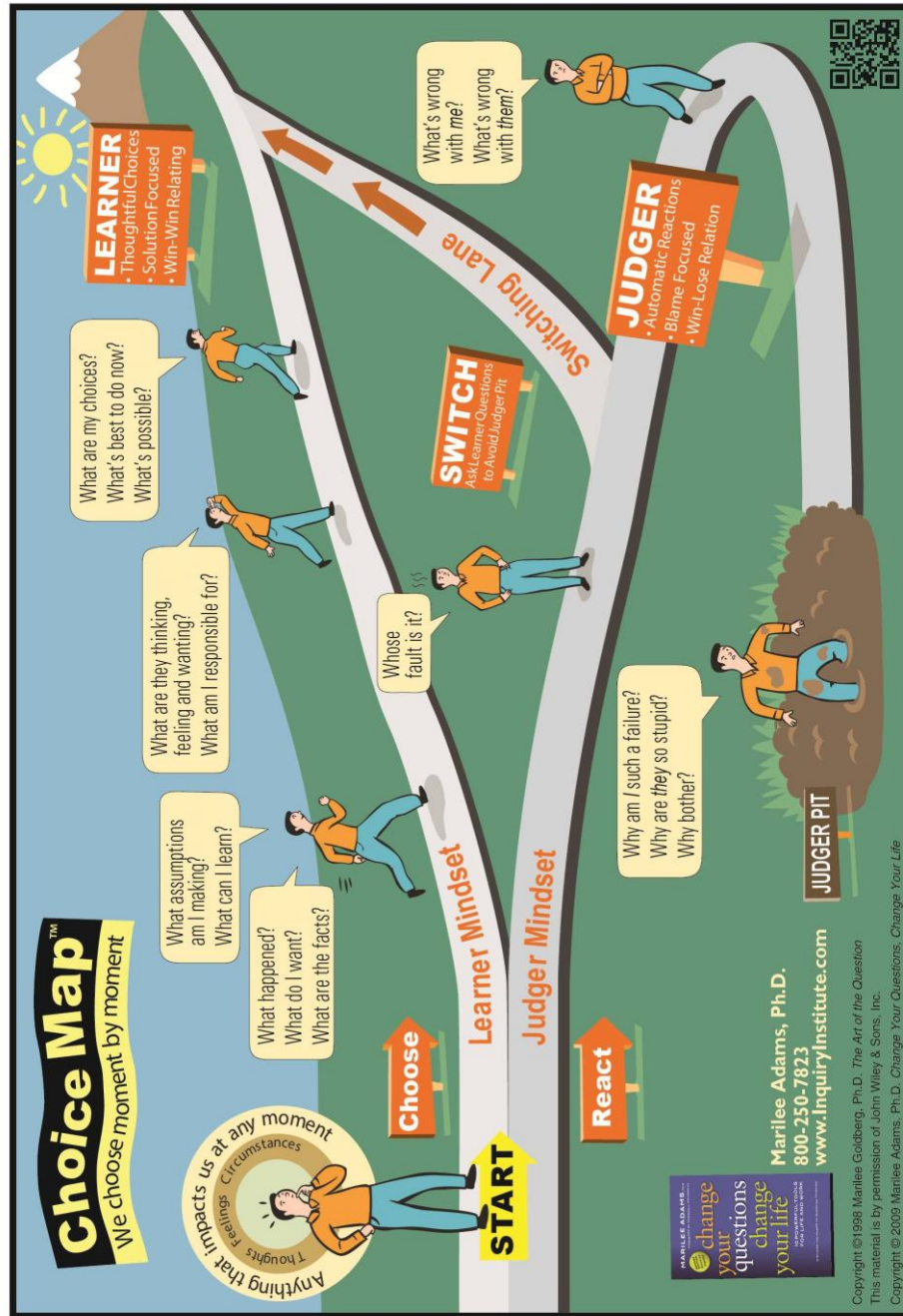
2. Judger Junk Yard

Accumulation of all past Judger thoughts, feelings, beliefs, interactions, and conclusions

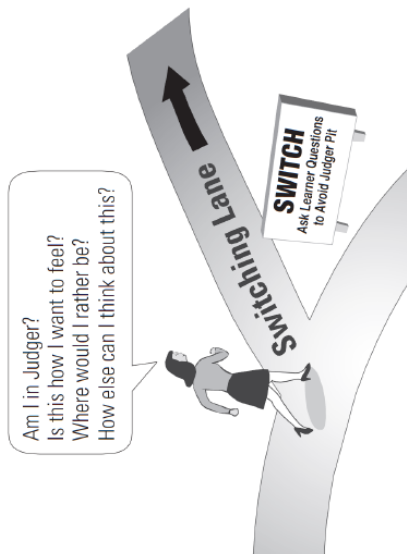
3. Judger Hijack

The part of us that is hard-wired and reactive (and hyper protective)

The Choice Map™



Using the Choice Map™



Copyright © 2009 Marilee Adams, Ph.D. *Change Your Questions, Change Your Life*
This material is by permission of John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
Copyright © 1998 by Marilee Goldberg, Ph.D. Adapted from *The Art of the Question*

The Choice Map™ and You

Imagine it's you who's standing at the crossroads on the left side of the Choice Map. Something has just happened. Now you have to solve a problem or make a decision. Maybe it's related to an important goal in some area in your life. Perhaps it's with your business or career. Maybe it's in a relationship with family, friends, or colleagues. Or perhaps, it's about your health, finances, or plans for the future.

Do this experiment while you think about that situation. First, ask yourself Judger questions (see below) and notice how they affect your mood and confidence. Now, breathe, switch and instead ask yourself Learner questions (see below). What was it like the second time? What about your mood and confidence? What solutions and possibilities can you see now?

You really can change your questions and change your life. When you find yourself in Judger and want to be in Learner instead, ask yourself Switching questions and "reset" to Learner, including: *Am I in Judger? Is this how I want to feel? Where would I rather be? and How else can I think about this?*

Use the Choice Map™ as a powerful tool for getting better results. It's simple and it works!

Judger Questions* include:

- What's wrong with me?
- Whose fault is it?
- Why are they so stupid?
- How can I prove that I'm right?
- Haven't we been there, done that?
- Why bother?

Results of Judger Questions:

- A mood of pessimism, stress, and limitation
- A mindset that's judgmental, reactive, inflexible
- Relating with "attack or defensive" behaviors

³³We ask both kinds of questions and we have the capacity to choose which ones to ask — moment by moment by moment.

Visit our website to download free copies of the Choice Map; you can also send it to colleagues, friends, and family. The Choice Map is from the best-selling book, *Change Your Questions, Change Your Life: 7 Powerful Tools for Life and Work* by Marilee Adams, Ph.D. She is also president of the Inquiry Institute. The website is filled with other free resources as well as Question Thinking™

Learner Questions* include:

- What do I want?
- What works?
- What are the facts and what can I learn?
- What are my choices?
- What action steps make sense?
- What's possible?

Results of Learner Questions:

- A mood of optimism, hope, and possibilities
 - A mindset that's thoughtful, understanding, flexible
- Relating that is connected and collaborative



offerings such as tele-seminars, workshops, executive coaching, coach training, keynotes, and Q-Stormings that can make a positive difference for you—at work and in life.

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Switching Questions

"Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space lies our freedom and our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our happiness."

-- Viktor Frankl

Think of Switching questions as "rescue questions," "turnaround questions" or "course correction questions." They can literally rescue you from Judger experiences or consequences once you've recognized that's where you are. Switching questions give you the opportunity to choose a new course, and sometimes make major breakthroughs—both with yourself and in your relationships with others. Because these questions focus self-awareness and give access to self-management, Switching questions can be considered the "operational heart" of emotional intelligence.

By their very nature, Switching questions are "to-from" questions, meaning they can carry you to a Learner mindset whenever you notice you're in Judger. Whether or not you realize it, you already have Switching questions of your own. The best ones are those that feel most natural and accessible to you. These are the questions you most easily and consistently reach for and use. The more "grooved in" they are, the more effective they will be. The following list of random questions includes some contributed by participants in workshops over the years. Note that this is an evolving list. Make it more powerful and useful by adding your own Switching questions.

- Am I in Judger?
- Is this working?
- What are the facts?
- What assumptions am I making?
- How else can I think about this?
- What's surprising about this?
- Where would I rather be?
- How can I get there?
- Is this what I want to feel?
- Is this what I want to be doing?
- Is this the hill I want to die on?
- What am I missing or avoiding?
- How can I be more objective and honest?
- What is the big picture?
- What am I committed to right now?
- What is the other person thinking, feeling, and wanting?
- Is this the example I want to set for my children?
- What can I do to have a better outcome?
- In the big picture, how important is this?
- What humor can I find in this situation?
- NOW, what is my choice?

ABCD Process

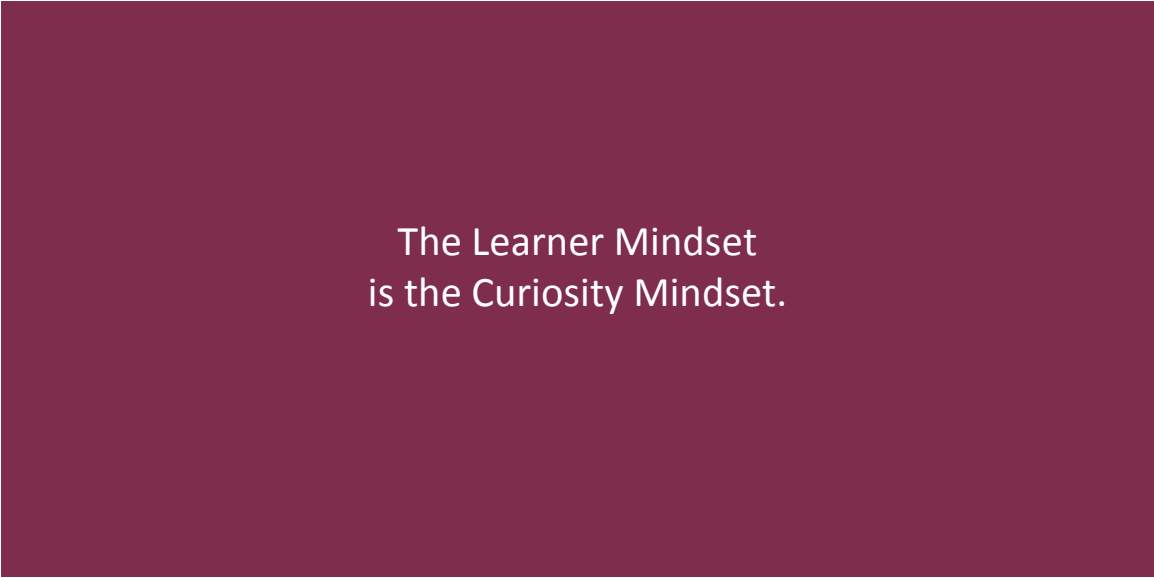
The ABCD Process allows one to create the “space between stimulus and response” that Viktor Frankl describes. It is what “rescues” us from being reactive and gives us the ability to respond instead—this is the true power of choice.

A Aware

B Breathe

C Curious

D Decide



The Learner Mindset
is the Curiosity Mindset.

Question Thinking™ and Emotional Intelligence

The awareness and ability to apply Question Thinking skills is equivalent to the engine that drives high emotional intelligence. Below are examples of how Self-Qs facilitate development of the four fundamental pillars/capabilities of Emotional Intelligence.

Self-Awareness

Knowing what you are feeling in the moment, using this awareness to guide decision making, having a realistic assessment of own abilities, and a well-grounded sense of self-confidence.

- *What are my reactions to this situation right now? What information do those reactions provide to me?*
- *What strengths do I bring to this team effort?*

Self-Management

Handling emotions so they facilitate rather than interfere with the task at hand, delaying gratification to pursue goals, adapting to change and overcoming obstacles; acting to meet internal standards of excellence; developing the traits of trustworthiness, conscientiousness, and initiative.

- *What might be the long-term consequences if I respond angrily right now?*
- *How can I best respond to this unexpected outcome?*

Social Awareness

Sensing and caring about what people are feeling, being able to take their perspective; cultivating rapport and attunement with diverse individuals; reading organizational currents accurately; recognizing and meeting customers' needs.

- *How is my participant reacting, on multiple levels, to this negative evaluation?*
- *Who has the most influence in this situation?*

Social Skill

Handling emotions in relationships well, interacting smoothly, using these skills to communicate clearly, build bonds, persuade and lead, negotiate and settle disputes, for cooperation and teamwork.

- *How can I leverage our common interests to forge an agreement here?*
- *What will inspire others to move forward on this project?*

The Positivity Mindset

Definition

- Positivity seeds human flourishing.
- Positivity transforms us for the better.
- Positivity over time helps us transform who we are; it prompts growth in social and personal resources that increase well-being.
- Positivity helps us build more accurate mental maps that become a durable resource.

Broaden and Build Theory

A meta analysis of 300 studies of positivity (that collectively tested more than 275,000 people) revealed that positivity produces success in life as much as it reflects success in life.

Five Elements of Positivity

1. Be open.
2. Be appreciative.
3. Be curious.
4. Be kind.
5. Be real.

Frederickson, Barbara. *Positivity: Groundbreaking Research Reveals How to Embrace the Hidden Strengths of Positive Emotions, Overcome Negativity, and Thrive*. Crown Publishers. 2009.

Also please see: www.positivityratio.com

Section 4

The Inquiring Team and Communication that Works

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Listening

The fundamentals of being an effective leader, colleague, and team member begin with effective skills in thinking and communicating. An essential element of this, of course, is effective *listening*. Here are some points to consider:

1. Golden Rule of Listening: *Listen to others as you want to be listened to.*
2. Different levels of listening:
We listen on multiple levels all at the same time. One way to think about this point is to consider the question: “At any moment, what are you listening *for*?” People typically listen on at least these three levels, although most of us are not aware of this.
 - *Content* (data)
 - *Intent* and *trustworthiness* of the person speaking
 - *Impact* of the content and person’s intent on oneself and on team/organization
3. “Learner ears” and “Judge ears:” When we listen from Judge mindset, some typical questions include “What’s wrong with that person (or the situation?” and “How are they wrong?” When we listen from Learner mindset, some typical questions include “What’s useful about what they’re saying?”
4. In giving and receiving feedback (including in performance reviews and coaching), what are some of the most effective questions with which one can listen?

The Importance of Trust in the Workplace

Seven Steps to Renew Confidence, Commitment, and Energy*

1. Observe and acknowledge what happened
2. Allow feelings to surface
3. Get and give support
4. Reframe the experience
5. Take responsibility (and apologize)
6. Forgive yourself and others
7. Let go and move on

In addition, it is important to have a conversation about:

- What to learn from this experience.
- What needs to be put in place so that trust can be sustained in the future?

* Reina, Dennis and Reina, Michelle. *Rebuilding Trust in the Workplace: Seven Steps to Renew Confidence, Commitment, and Energy*. Berrett-Koehler Publishers and ASTD Press. San Francisco. 2010.

The Inquiring Leader™

“The Inquiring Leader” is the title of the last chapter of *Change Your Questions, Change Your Life: 10 Powerful Tools for Life and Work* (2nd edition) by Marilee Adams, Ph.D. The book is a business fable, yet the last chapter only briefly describes the term. Therefore, this short description is meant to add some detail and texture to what is meant by the concept of inquiring leadership.

The term “inquiring leader” refers to leaders at any level who are self-aware, curious, solution-oriented, and value asking questions as a core leadership skill. This includes leading others (teams and organizations) as well as leading themselves. In general, the model and concept of inquiring leadership is meant to complement, supplement, enrich, and operationalize effective leadership thinking and behavior that lead to desired results. Thus, inquiring leaders demonstrate the thinking, communicating, and collaboration skills associated with authentic, strategic, servant, and visionary leadership—all of which are also associated with requisite leadership skills for the 21st century.

Characteristically, inquiring leaders:

1. understand that the quantity, quality, and intention of people’s questions largely determines their ability to learn, think critically and strategically, build and maintain relationships, gather information, make decisions, solve problems, negotiate, manage conflict, and drive positive change as well as effective results.
2. create an inquiring culture in their organizations and on their teams by encouraging people to ask questions of them, each other, customers, and stakeholders—and by providing structures and processes to do so.
3. recognize that “great results begin with great questions” and also that “every question missed is a potential crisis waiting to happen.”
4. ask questions of themselves and others in ways that are constructive rather than critical, that seek to uncover and challenge assumptions, and that promote new thinking and possibility as well as responsibility and accountability.
5. *listen* carefully and respectfully (especially when not agreeing with what they hear). This listening is focused by solution-seeking questions such as, “*What can I learn?*” “*What’s useful about this?*” and “*What are our goals?*” They do *not* listen with problem-oriented, blaming questions such as, “*Whose fault is it?*”
6. solicit honest feedback, comprehensive facts, and multiple perspectives.

continues on next page

Accordingly, inquiring leaders:

7. are self-reflective, self-correcting, and committed to learning from mistakes and failures. They value continuous learning, growth, and development for themselves and others.
8. are comfortable with “not knowing” and “not being right;” they have humility.
9. have high emotional, social, and moral intelligence, are proactive and responsive rather than reactive, and are skillful with self management.
10. see the “big picture’ and think short-term, long-term, and systemically.

The Inquiring Organization

An organization characterized by a “culture of inquiry” is dynamic, agile, collaborative, and innovative. These qualities affect every individual, team, project, and/or goal associated with it. This kind of organizational culture operates out of a spirit of inquiry and multiple practices requiring skillful question asking. These provide a unified approach to strategic thinking, effective communicating, and productive action at every level (and in every role) of the organization.

Such organizations are open to learning, seek continuous improvement, think “outside the box”, and operate out of a practical win-win mentality. The resulting higher levels of collaboration, problem-solving, and workplace wellness lead to maximizing productivity and positively impacting the bottom line. Furthermore, inquiring organizations optimize the tools of empowerment as well as organizational and individual learning. Individuals in such organizations systematically ask questions such as:

- What are our values and goals?
- Do our actions truly reflect our values, goals, and mission?
- What do employees need to support each other and our customers?
- How can this be a win-win?
- What will be most effective and efficient?
- What can we learn? What have we learned?
- What’s useful?
- What assumptions are we making?
- How *else* can we think about this?
- What are the *long-term*, as well as short-term consequences?
- What are we not seeing, the seeing of which would make a difference?
- Who or what is missing?
- What could we, or should we, be doing differently?

While many organizations ask these questions on occasion, it is the consistent organization-wide *discipline* and *process* of participating in an inquiring organization that lead to productive, enduring change and breakthrough results.

WIN-WIN Requests

One makes a Win-Win Request by setting up the situation so the other person has all the information needed to succeed in fulfilling the request.

Elements of WIN-WIN Request

*** Speaker * Listener * Conditions of Satisfaction * Timeline * Win-Win Intention**

There are a limited number of acceptable responses to a request. An individual may:

*** Accept * Decline * Counteroffer * Delay**

Here are some sample questions to ask yourself so your requests work

- *Can* this person fulfill my request? Is this the right/best person to ask?
- Am I stating this request in a way that the other person can win?
- Have I taken into account their circumstances at this moment?
- Have I taken into account their mood right now?
- Is it really my intention that they succeed?
- Have I *delivered* my request in a way that lets them know I want them to succeed?
- Is it really OK if I get a decline?
- Am I willing to stay in relationship until this is complete?

What to be careful about

It must be OK for the person to decline your request.

1. A decline for now is not a permanent decline. It may not even predict a response in 10 minutes. It is a decline for *now*.
2. A decline means the *request* was declined. It does not mean the requestor was declined; i.e. a decline of a request is not a personal rejection.
3. An effective request implies either a positive or neutral judgment about the person to whom the request is being made. A negative judgment about that person's worth or ability to fulfill the request will result in interfering with a win-win outcome.
4. Consider what assumptions you might be making about the person of whom you're making the request, or about the request itself.

Cycle of Requesting

1. Acknowledge or appreciate person for something *real*.
2. Make a request you know they can accomplish (Why would you ask someone for something they can't do or give?).
3. Acknowledge / thank person for their response, *whatever* it is.

With thanks to Fernando Flores

Q-Prep™

A Q-Prep is a simple and powerful planning tool that considers questions in addition to goals and action items. This requires developing the *discipline* and *practice* of writing down questions as part of your preparation for a meeting or conversation (either in person or virtual). Q-Preps can be done alone or with a group or team, and in any setting—professional, business, or personal.

There are many benefits doing Q-Preps. You will:

- be more confident and comfortable in your meeting
- be more thoroughly prepared
- be more able to listen fully and be more attentive and present to the other person
- be more efficient and effective
- save time (yours and the other person's)—for example, by not needing to call back for missed information
- have the possibility of significantly better results

It is tempting to not write out a Q-Prep, or not do one at all, especially in today's time-pressured world. However, once you develop the practice, the advantages become obvious and compelling.

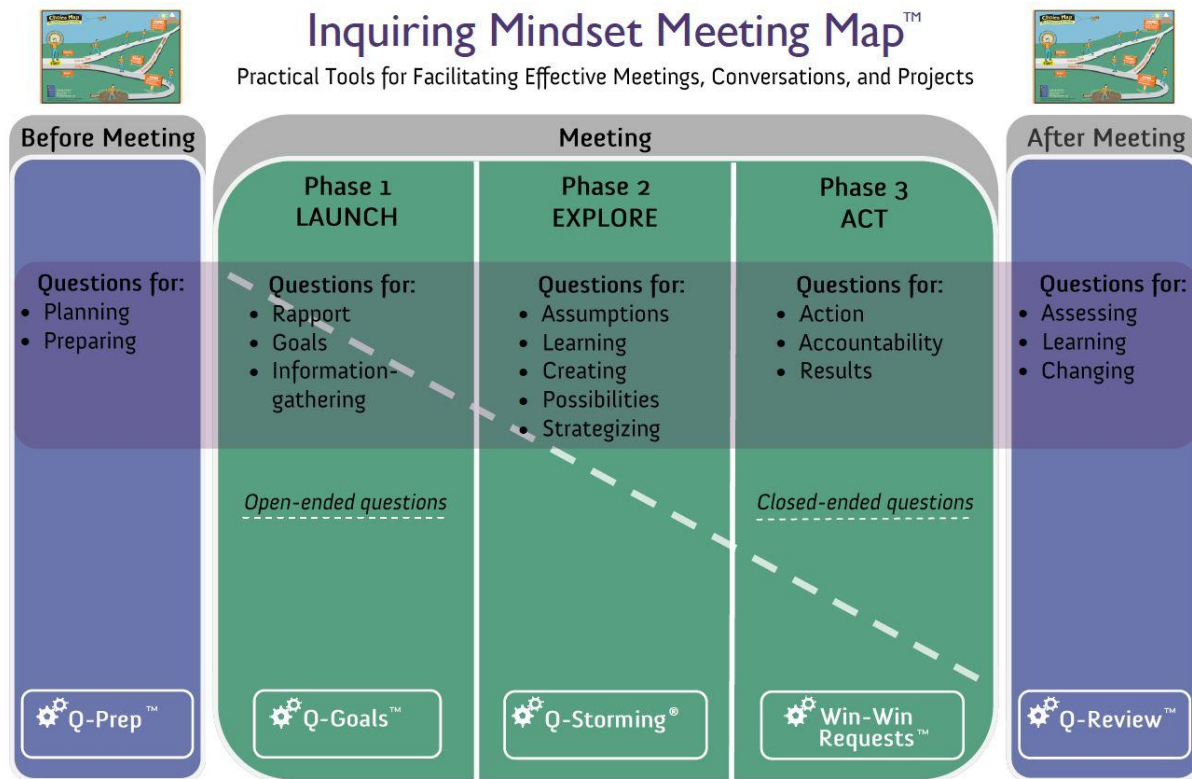
After you have written down your first list of questions, especially in the fourth category, keep going. Often the best, most significant questions occur only at the end of a long list. Go for quantity rather than quality first; then go back and review the questions, noticing if you've missed or avoided any important ones. You could also consider whether any of your questions could be rephrased to be more effective as well as what sequence of these questions might yield the best results.

The first step is to get clear about your goal(s) for the meeting or conversation. What are your goals?

Then, focus on questions in these four categories:

1. Questions you're asking *yourself* about the situation, the other person, your concerns, and your goals.

2. Questions you think the other person may be asking *themselves* about you, their concerns, the situation, and their goals.
3. Questions the other person may ask *you*—and that would be useful for you to be prepared to respond to (whether or not you’ve ever actually asked these questions).
4. Questions you want to, or need to, *ask the other person(s)*. Make this list as long as possible.



The Inquiring Mindset Meeting Map™

This Meeting Map is a practical guide for facilitating any goal-directed meeting, conversation, or project—in business or in life. It is best used together with the Choice Map. Naturally, a meeting conducted with Learner intentions, questions, and interactions will be more successful and satisfying than one where Judger mindset is influential.

The Meeting Map is comprised of three major sections. In the central section are the three major phases of a conversation or meeting. The before meeting column to the left is for planning and preparation; the after meeting column to the right is for debriefing, reviewing, and lessons learned.

As you can tell from the diagonal white dotted line on the Meeting Map, there is a predominance of open-ended questions in the “launch” phase, a predominance of close-ended questions in the “action” phase and a combination of the two in the middle, or “explore” phase. That line does not extend to the exact corners, indicating that those guidelines are flexible. Below are a few sample Learner questions for individuals to ask themselves for each section and phase.

| Before Meeting | LAUNCH | EXPLORE | ACT | After Meeting |
|--|---|--|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What are my goals for this meeting? What could be the best possible outcomes? What concerns do I have? What assumptions am I making and should check out? What do I think the other person(s) goals and concerns might be? What information do I need? What Judger thoughts might I have? How can I switch and get myself into a Learner frame of mind? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What is important to him/her? What do I need to know about him/her? What do I admire about him/her? How can I keep myself “present” and “in Learner”? Am I listening well? What are our goals? What would success look like? What facts do we need to share? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What assumptions are we making about this topic? What questions are currently being asked (of self and others)? How else could we think about this? What might be missing in our thinking or planning? What new questions could help? What might be some creative solutions? What could get in the way of our goals? What strengths and resources can I and we draw upon? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What, specifically, are our commitments? By when will these be accomplished? How will we know? Who is responsible for what specifically? What win-win requests need to be made to insure success? What structures and/or milestones make sense? What support might be helpful? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What were our goals? What actually happened? What worked? What didn't work? What did we learn? What questions were not asked that led to a problem/ misunderstanding? What questions will we ask next time? What acknowledgements should be made? What will we do differently next time? |

Critique and Correct™ Process

The purpose of the Critique and Correct process is similar to other debrief formats, including the After Action Review (AAR)—to learn from the past to improve the future. Several items have been added in order to strengthen the effectiveness of the process.

A common challenge is for each individual, and the team/group as a whole, to maintain an open-minded, curious, learning attitude rather than a judgmental, blaming one. Another challenge is to commit to doing it at all; it takes dedication and discipline to work through this whole format, and to make the time to do so.

All items except for # 1 could be considered from at least 3 perspectives, depending on the situation, its complexity, and whether it seems like an isolated event or one that might easily occur again. These perspectives include systems, technology, and people.

- What were our goals?
- What assumptions did we make about these goals?
- What were our constraints?
- What are the facts about what actually happened?
- What worked?
- What didn't work?
- What questions were not asked, the asking of which would have made a difference?
- What did we learn?
- What will we do differently next time?
- What specific plan will we put in place to make sure this happens? Who has responsibilities for what and what are the timelines?
- Who should be acknowledged, and for what?

Question Thinking Suggestions for Meetings and Conversations

These are suggestions on how to use Q-Prep, Q-Storming, Switching Stories and the Choice Map. This list was generated from one organization with multiple teams with internal and external client projects. Of course, we presume an individual and collective commitment to Learner thinking, listening, and relating.

Team Meetings

- Follow format of the Question Map and make sure everyone knows this.
- Frame agenda of meetings in questions – what questions do you need this meeting to answer?
- At staff meetings – ask more questions and test assumptions!
- When there is disagreement, engage in constructive conflict and negotiation.
- Trouble shooting meeting – Team Q-Prep before meeting with challenging clients
- Share QT success stories.

Projects

- Start all big projects with Q-Storming
- Do a mid-project Q-Storm
- Q-Storm before annual project
- End of project – do a Critique and Correct Process

Individual Efficiency

- Set personal goals for the day
- Do Q-Prep before important meetings and conversations

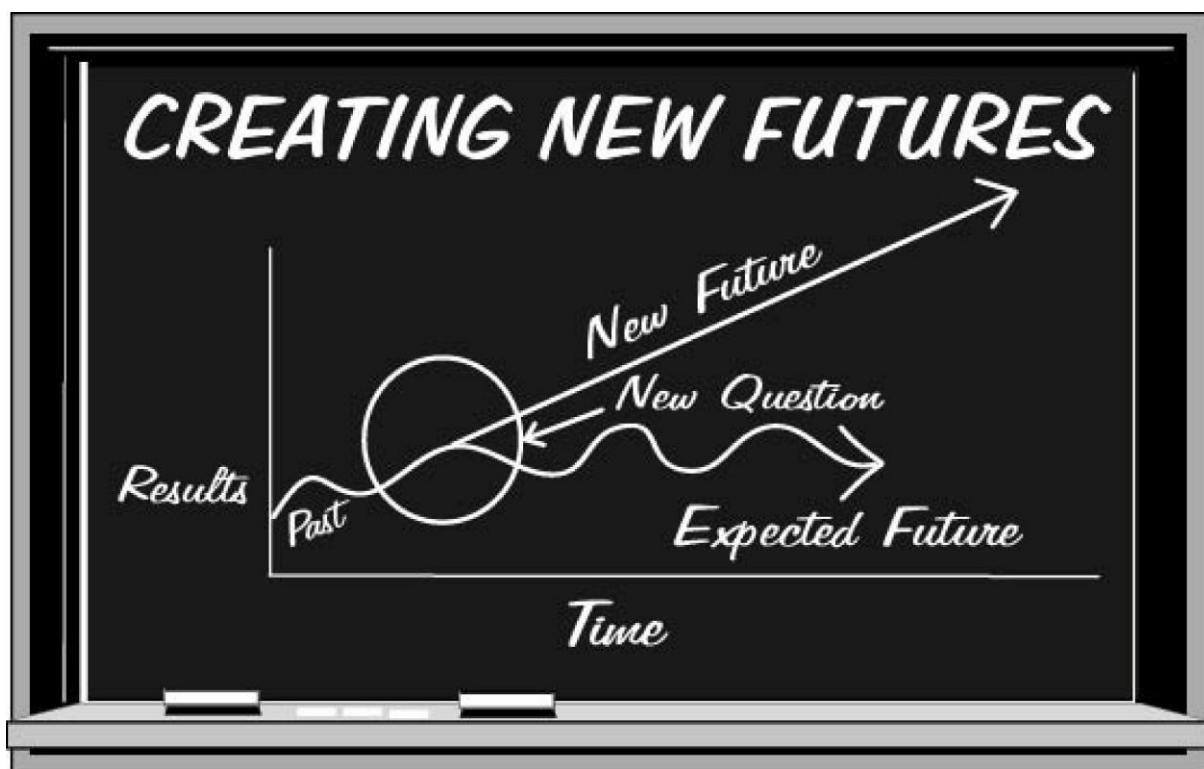
What is Q-Storming®?

Q-Storming® is a collaborative, creative thinking, and problem-solving method that catalyzes the discovery of new questions, directions, and possibilities. It thus makes a difference in catalyzing positive change, and even breakthroughs, in areas such as strategic planning and innovation.

While Q-Storming has similarities with brainstorming, there is an essential difference. The purpose of Q-Storming is to discover new *questions*-- not ideas, answers, or solutions. One uses Q-Storming to generate as many questions as possible, recognizing that it is questions, not answers, that open new thinking and new possibilities. Einstein's question about riding on a sunbeam at the speed of light opened vistas for humankind never before accessible without that paradigm shifting new question.

This breakthrough potential for Q-Storming occurs in the second phase of this three-phase process. The first phase is typical of the thorough exploration that should be employed at the inception of any project, problem-solving, or strategic planning process. With this foundation laid, in Phase 2 the search begins for discovering new questions capable of catalyzing novel, creative thinking and breakthrough possibilities (as in the illustration below). The third phase includes whatever methods are typically employed following any brainstorm or project management process.

New Possibilities™ Model



A World of Questions is a World of Possibilities

Guidelines for Q-Storming®

These guidelines are written from the perspective of the facilitator of a Q-storming event. The method for selecting the situation for focus will vary depending on whether the issue to be addressed is an individual situation or one held by a group, team, or organization. The strategic point is to avoid jumping precipitously to new actions without thoroughly and strategically assessing possible new options and directions. We want “ready, aim, fire” because “ready, fire, aim” is too costly and distracting, and one might never reach the most desirable outcomes.

Phase 1: Setting the Foundation

- Describe problematic situation in which a change, new result, or breakthrough, is desired (by an individual or a team).
- State your concerns
- Consider the range of all goals related to the situation. See page 4 of this handout for guidelines for crafting goals.
- Craft one overarching, compelling, well-formed goal.
- Elicit as many assumptions as possible related to both the situation and the goal.
- Discover basic facts related to both the situation and the goal.
 - Explicating both assumptions and facts is necessary as this information is essential background to assist in the generation of new questions.

Phase 2: Generating Questions

- Describe guidelines for Phase 2
- All questions are encouraged and welcome. Short questions work best.
- Go for quantity first (stimulate right brain).
- *No answering of questions*; the goal is to brainstorm *questions*, not answers.
- *No explanations or expounding on questions*—you want to keep up the momentum.
- Continue until the quantity and quality of questions begin to wane or repeat.
- Describe guidelines for the questions themselves
- First person singular or plural (I/We). These are internal, self questions (“thinking questions” not “speaking questions”).
- Curiosity questions, not judgmental questions.
- Genuine questions (ones to which one doesn’t already know the answer).
- Typically more open-ended than close-ended questions regarding: conditions, constraints, assumptions, expectations, aspirations, etc. related to the situation and the goal.
- Include questions focused on the person as he/she (or a team) relates to (and behaves in) the situation—not only on circumstances or external factors (within person’s own scope of behavior and influence).
- Everyone Q-Storms. Length of time depends on significance of the issue and goal. It is typical to generate 30-80 questions in about half an hour.
 - Typically the first questions are the ones that are “top of mind.” The most creative questions generally arrive towards the end when peoples’ thinking is being stretched.
- NOTE: You will need two scribes to capture questions. Though the questions “arrive” slowly at first, momentum is quickly gained and typically one scribe cannot write fast enough to capture all the questions.

Phase 3: Analysis into Action and Results

- The first step is to get the questions into a format so they can be worked with. A typical approach is to type the list of questions into a file. Add new questions if they “show up” while typing—this literally continues the Q-Storming.
- You might also add other questions later, including those by others after the file of questions has been emailed out. This list can be sent to people who were in the original Q-Storming session, as well as those who were not. Anyone can add new questions and send them in.

Working with the questions

- With this list in hand, the next step is to combine, cluster, categorize, sequence, and prioritize the questions.
- Sometimes it’s useful to make a Mind Map of the categories and questions (affinity diagramming might also be utilized).
- Then the individual (or team) can assess the questions for importance, urgency, etc. include noting if any categories are missing. Also note whether any important questions within a particular category are missing and add them in.
- In each category, rank order by whatever criteria is most relevant to the situation, goal, and context under consideration.
- Remember: the Q-Storming method is a *discipline*. To get the most benefit from the accumulated questions, each should be taken seriously, or at least considered. Question your questions!
- Notice if there are any questions you don’t want to deal with or that seem too obvious to bother considering. Both categories may provide the most valuable openings for change!
- Take questions now assessed as most useful and turn into a statement that represents a desirable idea or solution such as one might work with in a brainstorming session.

Proceed as one would with any new goal or desirable outcome.

- One can now brainstorm for new ideas or directions.
- Whatever idea or direction that emerges from the brainstorming can now be submitted to any project management process or system that has been found to be most useful for this individual or team to accomplish their intended result.

Here are some other points to keep in mind:

- You can’t get the best answers by starting with the wrong questions.
- Most any problem can be solved with enough right *questions*.
- When a problem seems unsolvable, new solutions and possibilities are often obscured by unasked questions. A question not asked is a door not opened.
- Remember: Every question missed is a possible crisis waiting to happen!

“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 if I knew the proper question, I could solve the problem in less than 5 minutes.”

-- Albert Einstein

A Team Discovers Missed Questions *

The inquiring mindset that is reinforced individually and collectively by participating in action learning could also lead a team to search for questions they may have been missing altogether. They might even discover that every question missed is a crisis waiting to happen. Discovering such questions could lead them to approach resolving their business challenge more strategically and comprehensively. In the following example, this search for missing questions helped a team reconceive a problem in a way that led to new directions in thinking and strategy. It also helped them avert potential further problems that could have occurred by responding to the old one too quickly.

This executive team of a large city hospital, which is also part of a larger hospital system, met to address a serious and mounting problem. Other hospitals within their system were transferring a particular category of patient to them without adequate or timely communication or coordination. This was causing problems with finding beds, providing quality patient care, and increasing stress levels for staff. The team decided the answer was to create a new role for a coordinator and then launched into a discussion about obtaining funding for such a position.

At this point, a respected team member commented that she didn't think they had thought through the situation thoroughly enough yet. She suggested they come up with a list of potential questions to explore before jumping precipitously to a solution. Among the questions they had not considered were these:

- What is the formal and informal patient transfer process for this particular category of patient as compared to that of "regular medical patients?"
- Have we adequately communicated the guidelines for this process to staff, both in our hospital and the others in our system?
- What perspectives and suggestions could we get from the nurses who deal with this problem on a daily basis?
- What are best practices in other hospital systems for dealing with similar situations?
- What assumptions are we making and what systemic issues might we discover that would allow us to take patient care to a whole new level?

The team realized that they lacked adequate information for resolving their problem. They also recognized that creating and funding a new role without this information could mask the real problem and potentially lead to even more. In addition, they recognized that a personnel solution cannot "fix" what might be a systems issue. Therefore, they decided to approach the problem by filling in gaps in their understanding of it so they could be more strategic and successful in alleviating this stress for staff and even reach new levels of quality patient care.

* From: Adams, Marilee. "The Practical Primacy of Questions in Action Learning" in *Action Learning and Its Applications: Present and Future*. Boshyk, Yury and Dilworth, Lex (Eds.) Palgrave Macmillan Publishers, 2010.

The Five Questions™

1. Am I in Learner mindset or Judger mindset right now?
2. Am I listening with Learner ears or Judger ears?
3. What am I assuming (about myself, the other person, and the situation)?
4. What are my goals and intentions?
5. Who do I choose to be in this moment?

Section 5

Resources

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Reading Suggestions

Abrashoff, Captain Michael. *It's Our Ship: The No-Nonsense Guide to Leadership* Business Plus. 2008

Abrashoff, Captain Michael. *It's Your Ship: Management Techniques from the Best Damn Ship in the Navy* Business Plus. 2002

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Let Us Inquire Together *

“In a world increasingly overwhelmed with information, we can ask Learner-centered, solution-seeking questions about what to do with all we know. As Learners we can join in creating an age of inquiry, rather than merely living in an age of information. Among our first questions would be: *What will it take to step together out of the win-lose paradigm and into a win-win one? How can we accept and manage our individual and collective Judger tendencies? How can we be both loving and practical in creating a win-win world? and How can we remember to keep asking questions such as these?*

“Learner answers would be rooted in sensing the webs of connections that have always existed among individuals, families, society, and our physical world. I believe we share an intuitive knowing that any viable—even desirable—future, must pay homage to this knowledge and build upon it. As Learners we can join as participants in a living dialogue about a win-win future. This inquiry positions us outside the limitations of the Judger’s paradigm, and creates a spaciousness where these question-centered methodologies can make the empowering difference. Taking advantage of the question-driven nature of choice and responsibility, we can dedicate ourselves to speak, listen, and act together in enlivening the spirit and expression of genuine community.”

Marilee Goldberg Adams, Ph.D.
The Art of the Question

* These are the last two paragraphs from *The Art of the Question: A Guide to Short-Term Question-Centered Therapy* (John Wiley & Sons, 1998), which is a cognitive-behavioral psychology textbook. The theoretical framework it presents forms the basis for *Change Your Questions, Change Your Life*.

Traditionally, the end of a book is where authors write about what they care about the most, their deepest hopes for the impact of what they have just written. This was certainly the case for me.

Marilee Adams, Ph.D.



Marilee Adams, Ph.D. is an organizational consultant and facilitator, author, executive coach, and professional speaker. She is president of the Inquiry Institute, a consulting, coaching, and educational organization. She is also an adjunct professor in the School of Public Affairs at American University in the Key Executive Leadership Program.

Dr. Adams' published works include books, book chapters, and articles. These include *Change Your Questions, Change Your Life: 10 Powerful Tools for Life and Work* (Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2009) and *The Art of the Question: A Guide to Short-Term Question-*

Centered Therapy (John Wiley & Sons, 1998). *Being a Teacher Who Changes Lives* will be published by Berrett-Koehler in 2013.

Her book chapters include "The Practical Primacy of Questions in Action Learning" in *Action Learning and Its Applications, Present and Future* (2010) and she co-authored, with Dr. Marge Schiller and Dr. David Cooperrider, "With Our Questions We Make the World" in *Advances in Appreciative Inquiry—Constructive Discourse and Human Organization*. She also co-authored with Dr. Cynda Rushton, an article in *Advanced Critical Care Nursing* entitled "Asking Ourselves and Others the Right Questions: A Vehicle for Understanding, Resolving, and Preventing Conflicts between Clinicians, Patients, and Families."

Dr. Adams works and speaks in the public sector, healthcare, corporations, and professional associations. These include: NASA Goddard, the National Defense University (NDU), U.S. Departments of Treasury, Interior, and Education, National Geospatial Agency, the Brookings Institution, and the Council for Excellence in Government; Toronto General Hospital, Hamilton Health Sciences, and Christiana Care Hospital; Ameriprise, Lockheed Martin, Johnson & Johnson, Merck & Co., and Wachovia Bank; Brother International, National Training Laboratory, Georgetown University McDonough School of Business, Harvard University, Princeton University, Columbia University Teachers College Workplace Learning Institute, the International Coach Federation, the Organizational Development Network, the Society for Human Resource Management, the American Society of Training and Development, Learning Forward, and the Global Forum for Action Learning.

Prior to 1998, Dr. Adams was a psychotherapist in private practice working with individuals and groups as well as couples and families. During that time, she founded and directed several public seminar companies.

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