



How do you gain resilience and drive innovation? It's a matter of question.

When you ask leaders what they need most [to weather turbulent times](#), these are the kind of one-word responses you reliably hear: Resilience. Adaptability. Innovation.

What follows is less reliable -- the "how" of acquiring such things. Yet, the truth is we all possess a powerful tool for revealing how. It's called [inquiry](#).

It isn't as though we are unaware of inquiry's potential. For example, we sense instinctively that questions can be a launching point to seeing opportunity and revealing threats. We accept inquiry as the rocket fuel for creative thought, too.

Two things, however, are less understood. What is it that releases inquiry's power, and what kind of inquiry leads to [true breakthrough](#)?

How to release the promise and power of inquiry

The undisputed fact is that inquiry is at its most potent when it is practiced as a habit. This is not how we typically wield this weapon. Most often, we think of questions as the tool we pull out of the toolbox in the moment, usually a moment in which we face a problem. We see inquiry as a means to an end. Questions, we resolve, are purely about getting to an answer. Once they have done that job, we put them away until the next problem comes along.

But truly powerful inquiry is a mindset. Admittedly, it's a mindset some leaders fear. "If all we ever do is ask questions," the thinking goes, "how will we ever get to firm decisions we can act on?" Yet an inquiry mindset is no more intended to keep everything perpetually open than any one answer is meant to lock things down for good.

We need both, answers and questions, to function. But what we really need is the dynamic of exploration offered by inquiry, nowhere more than in a world determined to change as in the current environment. Inquiry ongoing and shared is how you release its promise. But, what kind of inquiry?

What kind of questions to ask

If you look across the broad expanse of creativity and innovation, what you see are certain patterns of inquiry that most often lead to creative breakthroughs. Rather than the specific questions, it's the patterns in the types of inquiry that proves powerful.

Missing the distinction is where we often go wrong. We want to know the exact question, when what we really need to think about is the type.

In my award-winning book ["The Language of Man. Learning to Speak Creativity,"](#) I shared eight common and powerful types. Most find these four to be the easiest to put into play.

1. Unprofessional questions

These are the kind of questions that no matter what kind of environment you work in, you're taught expressly or implicitly to avoid asking. They are the kind of questions some fear will reveal flaws or result in change. Yet such questions are more accurately seen as an exploration of the assumed. The bigger threat is leaving such questions untouched, especially when you know everyone is thinking them anyway.

2. Missing questions

Missing questions are those that should follow our initial inquiry, but usually don't. Failing to ask them often leaves the good stuff on the table. Missing questions are all around us. In politics: "I hear your critique of the other party's plan -- what's your specific solution beyond getting yourself elected?" Education: "I get that strong standardized test scores help you as an administrator -- how exactly do they help the students?"

Once you look, you'll see them everywhere. What are you leaving out?

3. Self-Interview questions

Unprofessional questions allow us to look outward in new ways. Knowing what to do with what we see implies a certain inward clarity. To be able to realize an opportunity or contend with a threat, sometimes you have to begin by interviewing yourself. As much as we ask questions of the world, we must ask them of ourselves, too. Think of self-interview questions as helping you gain a 360-degree view. It's terribly hard to innovate without one.

4. Change-the-W questions

When we do ask questions, we tend to follow narrow paths and patterns, many of which begin with a "W," as in what, why, when, where and their close cousin, how. Such questions are important, but they become more powerful when you change the "W." Instead of "What is the best path to profit?" try, "Why is this the best path?" or even "When?"

The goal here is less an answer and more tapping the cognitive dissonance that shakes you free of the obvious. That is after all, the might in any question, and the power in a mindset of inquiry: to gain a new view.

The most important question is: What are you waiting for?

The bottom line for gaining support

Aside from owing you a significant reciprocity debt, few individuals are apt to move from hearing your idea for the first time to embracing and supporting it. People

process the implications of the proposed approach, and they preoccupy with all of the risks, headaches, and inconveniences posed by doing something different.

Respect an individual's need to move closer to an agreement in stages. Your challenge is to apply the tools outlined above in the right combination for the situation. Once you establish a reputation for sowing success and creating value for individuals, teams, and the organization, you'll find the road to "yes" grows a bit easier to travel.

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