

What is the most important question we should ask ourselves?

BE A WORKPLACE OF THE FUTURE NOW

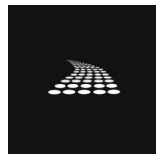
BOOK 6 OF 6

BILL FOX

MOST IMPORTANT QUESTIONS FOR OURSELVES

WHAT ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT QUESTIONS
WE CAN ASK OURSELVES 2022

BILL FOX



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Living in the question is an ever-evolving, creative process in full alignment with the wisdom of the universe. As long as we can stay “in the question,” miracles will happen.

KURT AND PATRICIA WRIGHT, *BREAKING THE
RULES*

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INTRODUCTION

What is the most important question we should ask ourselves?

Introduction

After witnessing so many organizational change initiatives that didn't change anything meaningful or last, I looked for better ways to transform and improve organizations.

But how?

As Tom Thomison, a leading voice on Holacracy, said in my interview with him:

“How do we start? By making it real for ourselves first.”

I began by interviewing leading change practitioners and other experts in a series I called *5 Minutes to Process Improvement Success* to make it real. I asked every leader the same opening question, “What is your best improvement strategy?”

Remarkably, I rarely got an answer about process improvement. People didn't talk about Agile, CMMI, Lean, Six Sigma, or the latest silver-bullet solution.

Instead, they talked about something more profound: trust, reflection, new questions, new leadership, understanding the status quo, and much more. People shared fascinating and surprising new strategies and insights with me.

I published 23 of those interviews in *5 Minutes to Process Improvement Success*. A review by David Marquet, leadership expert and author of *Turn the Ship Around*, is typical of the feedback:

“Most topics have multiple valid perspectives. A diversity of opinion allows me to see sides of an issue I'd missed, allows my organization to be more resilient when one approach isn't working, and allows a more nuanced implementation of initiatives. This is EXACTLY what you get with this book.”

Going Deeper

After 50 interviews, I discontinued the 5 Minutes to Process Improvement series because it wasn't about process improvement. Something else seemed to happen, and I needed time to reflect on it.

Conducting those 50 interviews was so powerful that it triggered my inner transformation. I became a better listener. I was less reactive to my circumstances. I also realized there was enormous power in my intentions—and in the questions, those intentions led me to ask.

These inner changes allowed me to have a new conversation. As I became less judgmental, more open, and a better listener, people seemed to feel freer and safer, and they shared deeper insights with me.

I was experiencing what Michael Neill, transformational coach and author of *The Inside-Out Revolution* and five other books, describes in my interview with him:

“A good meeting is a meeting where everyone is listening, and there is space to hear something new beyond what anyone brought into the room with them.”

I also knew how rare that was in the workplace. And I recognized that I and so many others felt like aliens at work.

We may have seemed happy, committed, and motivated on the surface. But look a little deeper, and there was more unease and dissatisfaction than most of us will admit.

Questions that Open Up New Pathways

Because of the deep and pervasive need for transformation in most workplaces—along with the changes occurring within me and the kinds of insights people were now eager to share—I came up with a new series of interview questions.

I wasn't sure these questions would work, so I experimented: I selected three influential and successful executives and thought leaders to see if they would answer my new questions. They enthusiastically embraced them and shared intriguing insights and wisdom.

What started as an experiment has now evolved into a growing and ongoing conversation with over 80 pioneering business and thought leaders from around the world.

In these conversations, I begin each interview with the same six opening questions -

- How can we create workplaces where every voice is heard and matters, everyone thrives and finds meaning, and change and innovation happen naturally?
- What does it take to get an employee's full attention and best performance?
- What do people really lack and long for at work?
- What is the most important question leaders should ask employees?

- What is the most important question employees should ask leaders?
- What is the most important question we should ask ourselves?

I can't think of anything that's had a more significant impact on my life and work than asking myself new questions. These forward-thinking experts will introduce you to powerful questions that you've likely never heard or considered asking yourself before.

Each leader's full response and the complete interview are available at forwardthinkingworkplaces.com.

This book is updated periodically as we engage with pioneering leaders in an ongoing exploration and conversation. Forward Thinking Workplaces is a global narrative that's uncovering exciting new perspectives that will help you succeed and be a forward-thinking leader and workplace in the 21st century.

It's important to distinguish that the question you're in is also creating a context and giving a trajectory of where we will go. It's going to influence what line of thinking and actions we will take.

DIANNE COLLINS, *THE FUTURE OF THE
WORKPLACE*

WHAT WANTS TO HAPPEN?

Your question takes me back to our work at Transformational Presence, built on just three basic questions. The first one is maybe the most important question, but I feel like the series of the three is what brings it all together. The first question is, what wants to happen? This is not what I want or what you want, or even what we want together. Instead, in the bigger picture, what wants to happen here in service of something much bigger than me or you—in service of something bigger than your company? What wants to happen in the way your company moves in the world? How can your company serve in a bigger way? What wants to happen in terms of my relationship with the company? What is it I have to bring here?

ALAN SEALE, AUTHOR AND DIRECTOR, CENTER
FOR TRANSFORMATIONAL PRESENCE

AM I GETTING THERE IN A WAY THAT I'M COMFORTABLE WITH?

I think there are a couple of questions we should ask ourselves. One, where am I taking my company? What's my strategy? What are my big goals? These are the big aspirational things. The second question is, how am I got to get there? Who are the people who will help me achieve those goals? Finally, and most importantly, am I getting there in a way that I'm comfortable with in terms of my integrity, morality, and ethics? For good or for bad, I've been blessed with the opportunity to work in interesting times. My first big job was working for the U.S. Treasury Department. I managed the Treasury bill, note, and bond auctions when Solomon Brothers cheated in the auctions. I saw firsthand the implications of that scandal. Solomon Brothers ended up going bankrupt. It was all about hubris.

ALAN ZUCKER, FOUNDER, PROJECT MANAGEMENT
ESSENTIALS

ARE WE PROUD OF OUR WORK?

Whether you're a manager or an employee, the main question I'll ask is, are we proud of our work? Is your job making the world a better place? Is it something that is improving people's lives? Is it something that forty years later you can say, "You know, my life was well spent? I made a difference." That's a question we all can ask ourselves. If you're working at a tobacco company, that may not be a job you look back at and say, "Wow, I improved people's lives. I did well there." Maybe we shouldn't have the world's best talent working on that. Companies building new technologies, innovating, and making life better that's where we need to focus the world's talents. Therefore, everybody needs to ask, is this work we can be proud of?

ANDY YEN, CEO OF PROTON TECHNOLOGIES AG

HOW CAN I LEARN MORE ABOUT HOW FEAR IS INFLUENCING ME?

Fear has become a big topic for me in the last few years as I see its influence on everyone. As a result, one of the most important questions to ask ourselves is, how can I learn more about how fear influences me? I'm reminded of the work of Kurt Lewin. He was considered the father of social psychology – behavioral science. He had this concept called force field analysis, which was the simple model or observation that there are forces pushing things forward and opposing forces. As forces push against each other, it creates resistance. Behavioral scientists took from this because we focus on trying harder instead of looking at those opposing forces and reducing them. I believe fear is one of those vast opposing forces.

ANDREW BENNETT, LEADERSHIP COACH AND
PROFESSIONAL MAGICIAN

WHAT IS THE BUSINESS OF THE BUSINESS?

Louis Mobley, the IBM Executive, used to say the most important question a business can ask itself is, “What is the business of the business? What business are we in?” Every single one of us, in a sense, is our own business, so we should be asking ourselves, what is the business of my business? In other words, who am I? Why am I getting out of bed in the morning? What is my purpose here in life? What do I want to accomplish? Where do I want to go? What do I want to see on my tombstone someday? What do I want my legacy to be? What do I want people to say about me when they’re asked? What’s my brand?

AUGUST TURAK, AUTHOR AND CONTRIBUTING
AUTHOR AT FORBES MAGAZINE

WHY ARE WE HERE ON EARTH?

The central inquiry of my life from when I was a teenager to age 60 next week has been the question of purpose. Why are we here on Earth? What purpose are we here to serve individually and collectively? What do we hope future generations will say about us and about the contribution we worked hard to leave behind?

AVIV SHAHAR, FOUNDER, AVIV CONSULTING

WHAT ARE MY INTENTIONS?

I use a framework whenever I'm engaging with something new. There are four foundational questions. When I ask myself of them, I find that I gain a great deal of clarity about why I'm doing what I'm doing. The first question is, what are my intentions? If I have a job, I want to know my intentions. Intentions I would frame as we all have long-term goals in life. Things we like or want to create in our life. Maybe it's a family; perhaps that's a certain kind of impact on our career. We have these values and these long-term goals, so whenever we engage in something, we probably are operating from a hypothesis that this will help me achieve one of my goals.

BOB GOWER, CONSULTANT

AM I DOING EVERYTHING I CAN TO IMPROVE MY SKILLS AND CONTRIBUTE?

This is a question that I constantly ask myself, “Am I doing everything I can as a professional to improve my skills and contribute to the organization’s goals?” I’m putting it on myself to say, am I doing everything? Am I complaining about things or proposing solutions? Complaining is a regular practice for most people. It’s a natural human response to a problem. But at some point, the complaining must stop. It doesn’t solve the problem. It sometimes makes it worse. Maybe this is a better way to handle a situation at work. “Ok, let’s complain about the problem for a little bit and get it off our chest, but then let’s figure out what we can do.” I think it would be good for employees to ask themselves that question.

BOB SCHATZ, AGILE LEADER, AGILE INFUSION

HOW WILL WE BE WITH EACH OTHER?

How can we be with each other? How we will be with each other cuts to the idea of the organizational culture. It's a choice. There is some free will available, but basically, it answers the question of, will we treat each other with dignity and respect? Will abuse of power be tolerated? And conversely, the employee also must answer that question. Will you treat others with dignity and respect? Just how are you going to be in the moment? This speaks to seeing each other and valuing each other for who we are. It's no different in the workplace because it's all about relationships.

CLAUDE CLOUTIER: PRESIDENT, CEO, AND
FOUNDER AT XTREMEEDA

HOW DO I WANT TO SPEND MY TIME?

I'm hopeful that for more of humanity, work will become discretionary—something that we voluntarily do. So I think the most practical sense of that question is, how do I want to spend my time? Questions like, what's meaningful for me and what's my dream are a little bit too pie in the sky for me? I don't know what to do with them.

DAVID MARQUET, PRESIDENT, TURN THE SHIP
AROUND

IS WHAT I'M DOING RIGHT NOW THE
MOST IMPORTANT THING I CAN DO
TO BE SUCCESSFUL?

Is what I'm doing right now the most important thing that I can
do to succeed in my job?

DAVID SHEDD, AUTHOR AND CEO, THE RAYMOND
GROUP

AM I ON PURPOSE?

Personally, if I'm not on purpose and I'm just in it for the paycheck, then I really need to ask myself, or the question will arise, "What am I really doing here?" If I'm not a good fit for the organization, the organization is not a good fit for me, and the chances are we are both not very happy with each other. This is also not a question for yourself but a responsibility for the company you're joining because if you're a bad fit, you're creating friction in their system. Friction not only in your personal experience, but you are also wasting another's resources.

DENNIS WITTRICK, PARTNER, ENCODE.ORG

HOW CAN WE HAVE THIS WORK FOR EVERYONE?

I believe we can look at this question in at least two ways. One would be very simply to ask oneself, “What do I really want – now and going forward?” When I’m doing what I want, it genuinely supports the world and the people around me. And the other way to look at this is with this very important question, how can we have this work for everyone? This question is powerful. In the subtext, in the unspoken, it acknowledges that we can have it work for everyone. And it also evokes what every person wants. A lot of people will repeat this question back to me and say, “How do we make it work for everyone?” No, that’s not the same question. It’s a very carefully worded question. When we ask, how we can have this work for everyone, it’s a place to stand to see what shows up. There is an allowing. There is a calling forth of “intel” from the energy-intelligent quantum field of the mind. It’s not how can we make it work – because that would be back to command and control. There’s no force in, how can we have it work?

DIANNE COLLINS, AUTHOR, DO YOU
QUANTUMTHINK?

DO I KNOW WHERE MY FEELINGS ARE
COMING FROM?

Do I know where my feelings are coming from? Where does my new thinking come from? What state of mind is most conducive to new thinking?

DICKEN BETTINGER, FOUNDER, THREE PRINCIPLES
MENTORING

AM I REALLY THIS IMPORTANT?

Other people matter. That is what the late Christopher Peterson, one of the founders of positive psychology, used to say. So my question to myself would be, am I really this important? Do I really need to always think about improving? Maybe it's sometimes better to think about somebody else.

EVA SCHIELEIN, OWNER, AESTIMAT

DO WE REALLY WANT TO DO THIS?

The most important question is, do we really want to do this? It might read better as I think we get caught in organizational processes from time to time. And even in personal life, we get caught in routines. Take your kids to school. Take them home from school. Make dinner. Go grocery shopping and so on and so on. Somehow we don't do what we really want to do. From time to time, we should come back to a place where we ask ourselves, "Okay. Now, let me think. What did I want to do? Did I do this? How did I do this? Am I still on track? What do I need to change?" When I teach people how to do innovation with design thinking or agile project management, we have circles or intervals we work in. We begin the interval with planning for the next week or two. Then at the end of that period, we look back and ask, what have you done? Let's look at the result. Let's test the result and decide what we will do over the next one or two weeks and so on.

TOBIAS THEEL, FOUNDER, INNOVERSITY INSTITUTE

AM I PRACTICING THE THING I WANT OTHERS TO BE?

Sometimes we have our values and ideas of how people should act and how they should be. Whenever I get into that place, because sometimes we all get frustrated when someone's not acting the way that we want them to, I stop, and I ask myself, "Am I practicing the thing I want others to be?" The answer is almost always I could always practice more. I can do it better. And if I practice it more and if I do it better, then I won't necessarily need to ask someone to do the thing I want them to do; I will be the living example. I think that's such a massive part of how people learn because if they see that incongruence between what you say and what you do, they won't take anything you say seriously, even if it's helpful.

FELICIA SPAHR, ARTIST, AND TRANSFORMATIONAL
LEADER

WHAT'S MY REAL QUESTION?

I have a favorite question, and I learned to ask it years ago. I started asking it of other people, but then I realized I had to ask myself the same question. In my first job as a sales manager, I had people coming into my office all the time asking me questions. It was exhausting because it seemed like the more questions I answered, the more questions I got. Then it dawned on me that people weren't asking me their real questions. What they were really looking for was either validation, or they were looking for ideas because they hadn't taken the time to think through what they were trying to do. For whatever reason, I realized the more I gave them, the more they asked. I just decided my new question was going to be, "What's your real question?"

GWEN KINSEY, LEADERSHIP COACH

WHO IS LEADING OUR LIVES?

The more we clear out who we actually are not, the clearer it becomes who we actually are. That's when our real-life begins, and that's when you start to live your real potential—what you can do and what you have been called for.

DR. HELENA LASS, FOUNDER, WELLNESSORBIT

WHAT DO I NEED TO CLEAR OUT OF THE WAY TO BE EFFECTIVE?

What do I need to clear out of the way to be effective? If you're a psychologist, what is your goal? Your goal is to be able to respond to your client who's sitting there, talking to you, in a rational and non-emotional way—instead of bringing your baggage into your reaction to what the client is saying. It's the same in business. It would help if you tried to identify your baggage so that you can be present in the moment without dragging your stuff in. That's hard to do. It can be painful, but it's necessary to be fully present and have clarity when dealing with people at work or anywhere else. You're more effective if you don't have your own baggage.

JOHN RYSKOWSKI, TRANSFORMATIONAL CHANGE
LEADER

ARE WE GIVING EVERYBODY THE SPACE TO LEARN WITHOUT FEAR?

People that are serious about their work tend to be pretty hard on themselves. Sometimes, it ends up turning into being hard on others too. And it's not because we're hard-headed. It's because we're serious about it. We care about it a lot. And when we are very passionate about it, I think it sometimes erases our opportunities to give people the benefit of the doubt. Because in most situations in most cultures people want to do well. And if they're not, it's typically not their fault. And so we should ask ourselves, are we giving ourselves and each other and those around us the benefit of the doubt? Are we giving everybody, ourselves included, the space to learn without fear? Are we generous with our time but still self-caring and protective of our own time and then respectful of others' time? We can waste a lot of it if we don't give people the benefit of the doubt because we become accusatory instead of inquisitive. So I think it can be easily resolved by constantly putting ourselves in the frame of mind of giving ourselves the benefit of the doubt.

HILLEL GLAZER CEO, ENTINEX, INC.

WHO ARE WE?

Who are we? What are our values, and how will we bring those values to life in our daily lives, work, family, and spiritual life?

HOWARD BEHAR, FORMER PRESIDENT, STARBUCKS

DO WE WANT THIS?

I think on a collective scale, and in the context of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, it would be, do we want to want this? That's how the historian and author of *Sapiens* and *Homo Deus*, Noah Yuval Harari, coined it. What is the meaning or end goal of these technological and scientific developments? We need to remember that technology, science, and systems are a means to an end. They are not—or should not be—an end in themselves. They should serve to improve the lives of people and a thriving ecosystem on our planet.

HRUND GUNNSTEINSDOTTIR, WRITER AND CO-DIRECTOR, INNSAEI

WHAT IS THE BEST WAY FOR ME TO INCREASE COLLECTIVE AWARENESS?

This is one of the questions I ask myself every day. I am part of that “We” intelligence and what is beneficial for me is helpful for other people. When you act with no ego, you can’t hurt people. You can’t do wrong. It’s impossible.

IRENE RICOTTA, CEO, VISION COACHING

WHY NOT?

One of the most important questions that we can ask ourselves is, why not? As human beings, we are so acclimated to conformance. Even in the US, which is probably the least conforming nation in the world, a place where engineers are known for extreme innovation through winging it, thinking outside the box, and for challenging authority, we don't often ask, why not? Too many companies run their teams by saying, "because I said so." I think the why not? question is probably the most important thing because we need to get people to explain and verbalize why they take the positions they do. So many times, they're just repeating what they think is an unbreakable rule. Instead of saying, "I won't do that" or "We can't do that," let's say, "Why not, why can't we do that?" Let's start the conversation, let's collaborate on the answer, and let's figure out how everybody can win here.

JEFF DALTON, CHIEF EVANGELIST AT AGILECXO,
AUTHOR AND CEO AT BROADSWORD SOLUTIONS

WHO DO I WANT TO BE?

Do you know what I love about what you're doing? Asking questions is the most important thing because we often make statements or give opinions rather than asking questions. I think everybody needs to ask themselves, who do I want to be? It changed everything for me. If you're a leader, you could ask, who do I want to be as a leader? When you answer that question, the questions around what I want to do, what I want to have, where I should go, or whom I should marry make more sense. They can all fit in a clear context once you know whom you want to be. When you answer who you want to be, the doing part takes care of itself.

JILL RATLIFF, LEADERSHIP COACH

WHY?

Why? I'm a big believer in why do we do what we do? Let's understand our purpose, intentions, and motivations and ask why we are doing what we're doing. Here is a simple example. I sit looking at 1381 emails that I feel overwhelmed with that are still in my inbox. I've read them all, but I'm concerned I haven't processed them to put them in a place where I know they've been acted on. Why will I worry about deleting 1381 emails when I can search for what I want anyway? I can just trust myself that I've handled it. If I ask myself, "Why am I doing this task?" I may come up with a better solution! If we don't ask why, in all honesty, we act more like programmed robots than thinking, feeling, and purposeful people.

JIM FINKELSTEIN, CEO, FUTURESENSE

WHAT IS IT WE WANT TO BE PART OF CREATING?

My first choice would be that I think we're all born with the capability of being creators, so we ought to ask ourselves, "What is it we want to be part of creating that doesn't exist that we're passionate about?" I think that's a pretty important question. When I ask people this question, they get excited if they have a picture of it. There's a natural pause and a blank look on their face if they don't. This is a question all of us can ask from wherever we sit in an organization.

JIM HAUDAN, AUTHOR & CEO, ROOT, INC.

WHERE IS THIS ALL LEADING?

The most important question that someone should ask themselves is not what's my to-do list today but where this is all leading? What is the impact of my work on the organization or the company's goals? How will this ultimately impact people, whether customers or hospital patients? Because that road map helps employees understand their role in the big process. The big goal that the organization is trying to reach. If you simply focus on today's to-do list, you see yourself as a cog in the wheel. All right, I wake up. I punch in. I do five things. I go home. But if I do all these things, how does that impact our goals? How does that impact our audience or our customers? Few things can be as fulfilling or as motivating as knowing the true impact of what your work leads to.

JOEL SCHWARTZBERG, PUBLIC SPEAKING COACH,
SPEECHWRITER, AND PRESENTER

IS THIS WORTH THE EFFORT?

Is this worth the effort? I'm asking this question all the time. It better be worth the effort. If it isn't and you are satisfied with mediocrity, you'll never be happy with your work. Likewise, if you strive for excellence in an organization that blocks your ability to realize greatness, you'll never be happy in your work. A matter of excellence is a shared responsibility between the company and the employee. The company must create an environment in which achievers can achieve. Then it's up to the employee to make it happen.

JOHN BELL, CEO (RETIRED), JACOBS SUCHARD

WHAT LIGHTS ME UP FROM WITHIN?

I don't know if we get to be happy in life. I don't know if we get to be successful. But, I fundamentally believe that our jobs as humans are to find what lights us up—particularly if you're not a cisgender male and the world hasn't been designed for you, you have likely been conditioned to think that you are supposed to be in service of others. All the time. 24/7. My advice is that you should be utterly ruthless about doing what lights you up from within. It is only by filling your own cup that you'll have anything to give anybody else.

MINAL BOPAIAH, FOUNDER, BREVITY & WIT

DO YOU HAVE A PROCESS TO SELF-
REFLECT REGULARLY?

I think it's a question of self-reflection. I work with many CEOs worldwide, and one of the things we find is they take very little time for self-reflection. I think the question is, do you have a process to reflect on how effective you've been as a leader, and is that happening regularly?

JOHN TOUSSAINT, CEO, CATALYSIS

WHY DO I THINK THAT WAY?

For me, it goes back to thinking. I think the question is why do I think that way? It goes to mindset and purpose. It's understanding, why do I think that way? What are the underlying causes of that or mindset, or information, or whatever the case may be? Asking these questions opens me up to challenging my thinking a little more. It opens me to greater self-awareness of why I am thinking that way. It goes to not getting stuck. Too often even our thought processes get stuck in a certain gear. We tackle everything in the same way or we don't change our way of thinking about how to approach a problem—or how to solve the situation. So, we get stuck. We become more dogmatic in our approach, which in my opinion is never a good thing.

JON MERTZ, CEO, ACTIVATE LEADERSHIP

CAN I HAVE A VOICE IN THIS ORGANIZATION?

How can I tell the truth? What's on my mind? Is this environment allowing me to do that? Or do I feel like I have to be pent up and not share important things but may be different from what the organization is all about? It's being able to have a voice that is so important. Can I have a say in this organization?

JUDITH GLASER, CEO, CREATINGWE

WHAT DO WE NEED TO KNOW, DO OR BE?

I may be repeating myself, and it's ok. What do we need to know, do or be? What are we seeking? What do we want, etc.? The more you understand what you need to know, the more confident you'll be of what needs to be asked. Therefore, what do I need to ask would be an excellent first question because it opens the mind to think about what questions should be asked.

KAREN MACK, MSOD

WHAT DOES THE WISDOM IN ME MOVE ME TO DO RIGHT NOW?

I have profound respect that if I want to be clear about something—or if I want to get wisdom for something—looking into my analytical processing mind is not the place to look. I know that there is a very fertile, rich living intelligence in the silence behind my thinking. It's essential to create your personal way of connecting to it, respecting it, trusting it, and having a partnership with it.

KEN MANNING, AUTHOR AND PRESIDENT, INSIGHT
PRINCIPLES

AM I LIVING AT WORK IN A WAY THAT
ACCORD WITH THE PRINCIPLES THAT
DEFINE ME AS A PERSON?

Here's a question I would encourage all my employees to ask themselves from time to time: Am I living at work in a way that accords with the principles or system of belief (or religion) that defines me as a person? Do I live what I say I believe? Do I feel like when I run, I feel god's pleasure (however I define "god")? We want our people to live what they believe to be connected to their work with a full heart.

KENT JOHNSON, SR. ADVISOR, RELIGIOUS
FREEDOM, AND BUSINESS FOUNDATION

AM I DOING THE RIGHT THING FOR THE REST OF MY LIFE?

The most important question is something around, am I doing the right thing for the rest of my life? This week, I've just written a blog that talks about not giving up on our dreams. Last week, I spoke to a young man who has given up his college education to play music. He has a gig opening for a very big Grammy award-winning band. People are criticizing him for giving up his education. But I'm trying to support him by saying, "You know, you're following your dream, and hardly anybody does that. That's the most important thing you can be doing."

LANCE SECRETAN, FOUNDER AND CEO OF THE
SECRETAN CENTER

HOW AM I DOING?

I think of it in two ways. The first part is the question that we ask ourselves, and the second part of it is making sure that we are asking ourselves questions to begin with. I think there's such a tendency to get caught in the vortex of the busyness of our lives. There are so many demands on our time and attention that massive swathes of time can pass when we haven't even checked in with ourselves. The first thing and the reason I love this question is to stop, get still, and check-in with yourself. It almost doesn't even matter what the question is as long as you're taking time to ask yourself a question. The question that I find to be the most revealing is, how am I doing? What's it like for you right now? How is life right now for me? How can I be my own best friend and advocate?

LINDSAY PEDERSEN, AUTHOR AND BRANDING
EXPERT

WHAT CAN I DO?

I have a strong bias for action for helping teams and groups work on things, making decisions, and then acting. I love to hear more people asking themselves, what's next? Or, what can I do? Another good question to ask is, what other inputs do I need before I can put this into practice? I'm interested in having an action bias of making decisions and then being in action; you can see if this was a good decision. Is this working out? If not, course correct. Don't focus too much on permission but start asking, what can I do? The above all align with what I'd say is this bias to action. We've got to do something—and if it's not right—we can make adjustments in motion. That's easier than going from a standing start.

LYNNE CAZALY, AUTHOR, SPEAKER, AND
FACILITATOR

CAN WE STOP ASKING OURSELVES QUESTIONS AND JUST BE?

I'm going to suggest we stop asking ourselves questions and just be. I always say to my clients when they say, "Doesn't this matter, and doesn't this matter?" They're overburdening their mind with so many questions and never answering them. It just creates a lot of chatter in the human mind. It creates this sense of deficiency or lack. People are saying to themselves, "Well, I have to figure this out, and I don't have enough of that yet. And what about this, and what about that." I always look at small children, and I think they're not asking themselves questions about themselves like, how am I doing today? They're just in life. When they ask questions, they ask questions about the world—not about themselves.

MARA GLEASON, CO-FOUNDER, ONESOLUTION

WHO AM I?

My simple answer is, who am I? I struggled to answer your questions, but then I realized I was caught up in my drama. So then I asked, why isn't it that simple?

MARC HANLAN, AUTHOR, EFFORTLESS CHANGE

HOW DO WE ALLEVIATE SUFFERING IN THE WORKPLACE?

Because I see the level of toxicity of so many work environments, the question is, how do we alleviate suffering in the workplace? That's my big question. I address this question in 90% of everything I write, including the book manuscript that I'm developing now. I had my own encounter with workplace toxicity in the past. I felt it to the point of physically and emotionally impacting me. This suffering literally took a physical form where I was on disability for a few weeks and suffered a stress fracture on my back because of toxic management. I was a casualty before reading up on any studies on a correlation between toxic management structures and employee health and well-being. I see now that research says toxic work environments lead to stress, anxiety, or even death. Psychosomatically, whatever goes on in mind will manifest in disease.

MARCEL SCHWANTES, FOUNDER, LEADERSHIP
FROM THE CORE

AM I FULLY HERE?

People should start asking themselves, am I fully here? Are we putting our values into practice? What do we believe? Are we entirely in the current moment? When we are fully present in the current moment, we can check if we are being fully authentic in everything that we are talking about. Humility and vulnerability are both compelling attributes because there are times when we do not have answers, there are times when we may not know things, and in times of confusion, we can feel fear. At these times, people may feel as if they wish to run away from a situation.

MARIA MORALES ROBINSON, AUTHOR AND CO-
FOUNDER HOLONOMICS EDUCATION

HOW DOES WHAT I DO EFFECT OTHERS NEGATIVELY?

How does what I do affect others negatively, and is there something I can do about that? If you've seen anything in my profile, you'll know that I spent eight years studying philosophy at the University of Oxford. When I started to brainstorm, I became a bit philosophical and had to jolt myself back into something relating to the context of what I thought the questions were. It would be nice to think of the positive ways that we work together.

MARK RICKETTS, CEO, IMPACTRI

AM I LIVING MY PASSION DOING THINGS THAT LIGHT ME UP?

I've been playing with that very question myself because it's the new year, and I'm re-energizing my own business. I think the question is, am I living my passion doing things that light me up? I guess that sounds a little more touchy-feely than I am as a person; however, that's been an impactful question for me. If I am busy with things divergent from my passion, I am not contributing or having the impact I know I can. I am not of service to my clients or community, and I am depleting myself. The question is about finding balance and joy in spending my professional time doing meaningful things.

MARTHA KESLER, MSOD

WHAT CAN I DO TO MAKE EVERYONE SUCCESSFUL?

One question is, what can I do to make everyone successful? It has to do with making sure customers get the value they need to accomplish something. It has to do with our stakeholders, our employees, our providers, and also our stockholders. Our stockholders and we must understand that it's just not about the money and the stock value. It is about the right balance between healthy economic growth and making everyone successful. The second question is, am I truly happy? If I am not truly happy, how good of a leader can I be if I am? How could I be able to achieve what we've talked about so far? None of that will happen if I'm not in balance.

MASA K MAEDA, SENIOR AGILE COACH

WHAT'S NEXT TO BE THE BEST VERSION OF MYSELF?

What's next, to be the best version of myself in this moment? When we do that kind of honest accounting, we say, "Wow, I was really an asshole in those three instances, and I want to go clean that up and make sure I don't do that again. And that other thing that I did was really great; I want to do more of that."

MEREDITH HABERFELD, CEO, THINKHUMAN

WHAT'S TRULY GOING ON WITH MYSELF RIGHT NOW?

I'd say, "What's truly going on with myself right now?" Suppose I am in a situation where there's some anxiety, uncomfortableness, discontent, etc., around it. In that case, it's really a time to go inside and ask ourselves what's going on within us. When we don't do this, we often project our fears or uncertainties onto somebody. We can become very reactive. We don't take ownership of how we show up. If and when we can really just be quiet and go inside, we can get true answers and discover our real issues. Then we can change our conversation with whoever else is involved and really make a lot of changes quickly.

MICHAEL ANDERSON, AUTHOR AND LEADERSHIP
COACH

DO I REALLY CARE ABOUT WHAT I'M DOING?

Do I really care about what I'm doing? Do I care about the people I'm working with, and does that translate to being present enough to listen and trust life as it's coming to me? You have your workplace. It's a huge part of your life. You have your family, and you have all these other things. Ultimately you have this personal relationship with reality. To me, it's really looking at that and saying, "Am I deeply connected into a reality I want to be connected into?" As things flow into my reality, am I constantly working against them? Or are they always leading me to new revelations about myself or new growth or that sort of thing? Then being present to watch that and discard the things that don't serve you while grabbing on to the things that do.

MICHAEL BONAMASSA, CEO, PLADCLOUD

AM I HERE?

This isn't how I expected myself to answer this question, but the question that's coming to mind is, am I here? What I mean is, am I awake within my body? Am I actually here? When I'm here, I'm incredibly capable. I'm surprisingly wise. I'm oddly compassionate. I'm quirky, but quirky in a perfect way.

MICHAEL NEILL, COACH, AND CEO, GENIUS
CATALYST

WHAT LIGHTS ME UP FROM WITHIN?

I don't know if we get to be happy in life. I don't know if we get to be successful. But, I fundamentally believe that our jobs as humans are to find what lights us up -- particularly if you're not a cisgender male and the world hasn't been designed for you, you have likely been conditioned to think that you are supposed to be in service of others. All the time. 24/7. My advice is that you should be utterly ruthless about doing what lights you up from within. Only by filling your own cup, you'll have anything to give anybody else.

MINAL BOPAIAH, FOUNDER, BREVITY & WIT, AND
AUTHOR OF EQUITY

WHO AM I?

The most important question we can ask is, who am I? The more we see our true nature, the more we find this space inside where there is no division. The space within has no gender, religion, or opposites. There is union, peace, and compassion. Any problem we face, any challenge we have, is the world of form. When I say form, I mean thoughts, feelings, and this form we call our body. The moment I realize that my true nature is pure consciousness—that what I truly am is formless—everything starts to change. Pure consciousness doesn't get stuck, and it doesn't get into conflict. There are no challenges in the formless. There's no you and me. There are no problems. There's no pain and no struggle.

NATASHA SWERDLOFF, AUTHOR, AND OWNER, THE
PRINCIPLES INSTITUTE

IS MY INTENTION PURE?

This is something I learned from Dr. Inamori. I should be asking myself, is my intention pure? Is my intention noble? As the president or a senior executive with a lot of experience, I may become arrogant due to my title or expertise. Is my intention pure? I always have to keep my intention pure and straightforward. Whatever my intention may be, it has to do something good for others. I think good and do good. So I have to keep asking that question every day.

NEM BAJRA, CEO, CALSOFT SYSTEMS, INC.

IS THIS THE RIGHT PATH?

The most important question we should ask ourselves is, is this the right path? What path am I on? What impact am I trying to make? All these questions fall into the category of, am I driving towards my purpose? What is my purpose, and how can I continually manifest that and make a positive impact?

NICK HUGHES, FOUNDER, FOUNDERS LIVE

HOW CAN I GROW AS AN INDIVIDUAL?

First, how can I grow as an individual? Second, how can I improve my service to others? And third, how can I get off this world gracefully? How can I die beautifully? How can I realize the ultimate truth?

NORMAN BODEK, LEAN LEADER, OWNER PCS
PRESS

WHAT IS OUR ULTIMATE GOAL HERE?

What is our ultimate goal here? This question applies whether it's a six-month or two-year project or whether you're crunching something in a week. As you're getting into details of the effort with all the different people involved in the enterprise, it's important to ask what our ultimate goal is. It's very easy to get sidetracked. And, of course, it's very easy to recognize that maybe we need to change our goal as you start going. I like the Lean Startup model by Eric Ries, where you're constantly taking measurements and adjusting accordingly. If you think about it as a rising line on a chart, instead of going straight up and hoping you're on the right track, you keep taking iterative steps down to review, making the line look like a bunch of sawteeth.

PATRICK ROSS, ENTREPRENEUR, MARKETING AND
COMMUNICATIONS

ARE YOU A COWARD OR DO YOU
HAVE COURAGE?

If I were going to ask another question, I would say two things. First, what are you afraid of? What keeps you up at night? What is the next huge challenge you're wrestling with? What is making you afraid, and how are you dealing with overcoming that?

PAUL AKERS, AUTHOR AND PRESIDENT, FASTCAP

WHO AM I?

The most important question you can ask yourself is, “Who am I?” Who am I, essentially? What are my natural gifts? What do I do well, and what are the things that prevent me from being my natural self? What are things mitigating my ability to be present and be in the zone like an athlete? We’re all different. There’s no oneness. We are all unique beings. We all have a unique set of social and psychological issues that block that. The most important question is to know who you are. The second step is to address what blocks it and how I mitigate the feelings and thoughts that come up?

PAUL DAVID WALKER, AUTHOR, AND CEO, GENIUS
STONE PARTNERS

WHAT ARE MY RESPONSIBILITIES AND HOW DO THEY ALIGN?

Let me explain why I believe this is the most important question we can ask ourselves. When I go into client organizations to coach them concerning some problem they have, and when we dig deep trying to uncover the root cause, I all too frequently find that the root of the problem can be traced to the lack of clear understanding and ownership of responsibilities and competency to carry out those responsibilities. Interestingly, one of the key competencies we all need that people don't think about is observing each day on the job where one's responsibilities come into play. We can be given a list of responsibilities, read them on a piece of paper, and think we know what the words mean, but then completely miss everyday situations that occur on the job where those responsibilities come into play.

PAUL MCMAHON, PRINCIPAL CONSULTANT, PEM
SYSTEMS

WHAT IS THE HIGHEST AND BEST GOOD YOU CAN AIM FOR?

You should ask yourself what the highest and best good you can aim for is? I like to say that you're checking your email and social media right now because you don't know what to do. You haven't figured out what the highest top 1% or 5% activity is that you could possibly be doing. You're not doing it. You wanted a little brain juice, so you went and got on Twitter. This is how most people actually spend their life.

PERRY MARSHALL, ENTREPRENEUR AND AUTHOR
OF 80/20 SALES & MARKETING

HOW MUCH AM I ALIGNED WITH THE BEST EXPRESSION OF MY BEST SELF?

Who are we? That was the first question I asked myself when I saw your question. Who am I to answer that? However, as human beings or as leaders or as people working in organizations, if I put myself in any role I could have related to the life of organizations, the question would be, what am I here for? This question came to my mind because I was CEO at a leading company providing process engineering technology to the petroleum industry. Not asking myself this question led me to burnout. So, the question behind this question is how much am I aligned with the best expression of my best self? This means I'm doing the right thing. This means I am where I should be because, to some extent, nobody else will do what I do.

PIERRE-BORIS KALITVENTZEFF, FOUNDER AT
ENTHALPIES

ARE WE HAPPY?

The most important question to be asking ourselves is, are we happy? In happiness, I would include happy, satisfied, and fulfilled in what we're doing or spending our energy on.

ROB ALLEN, SOFTWARE ENGINEERING MANAGER

WHO AM I?

The most important question we can ask ourselves is, who am I? Only if we know who we are can we accurately determine the possibilities and probabilities of our life. Who we are consists of the three questions: What am I, how am I, and why am I? On the one hand, these questions either limit or open up possibilities and probabilities. On the other hand, these answers also show us our level of integration. Only if we can answer all three questions for every facet of our lives are we integrated or have integrity.

ROBERT FUCHS, HIGH-PERFORMANCE
PSYCHOMETRICS AND CULTURE CHANGE

WHAT IS MY FEELING ABOUT MONDAY MORNING?

The most important question we should be asking ourselves is, what is my feeling about Monday morning? We spend a large part of our lives at work. I've always believed that Monday morning should be just as good as Friday afternoon. If you're not looking forward to Monday morning, then you're just working for a paycheck. You are not working to make a contribution to the world. You are slowly chipping away at your health, probably physically as well as psychologically. But as long as Monday morning is as happy a time as Friday evening, then you are living a full life because you are enjoying both your work time and your free time.

ROD COLLINS, STRATEGY AND INNOVATION EXPERT

HOW CAN I BE HONEST WITH MYSELF?

To be honest with ourselves. I've been through some experiences in my life and what I came out with from those experiences was the person that was hardest, to be honest with, was myself. I would tend to look on the positive side rather than face the stark reality of the situation. For example, if a business is beginning to fail and you've tried everything to turn it around, at some point, you've got to agree that it's not worked. That honesty with yourself is really hard. Once you can engrain it in your makeup, you become a real strong leader. In my case, I'm very, very comfortable in my own skin. I love each day, one day at a time. That gives me a lot of what people tell me is my charisma because I am what you see.

RUSSELL DALGLEISH, SERIAL ENTREPRENEUR

DO YOU KNOW WHERE THIS FEELING IS COMING FROM?

This question made me chuckle because many of my friends and colleagues know that I often say, “I’m going to have a tattoo put on the inside of my wrist, and the tattoo is going to say, ‘Do you know where this feeling is coming from?’” It’s such a show-stopper question for me. This question helps me remember how the mind actually works when it comes to mind.

SANDRA KROT, AUTHOR AND HUMAN DIMENSION
CONSULTANT

HOW AM I BEING PERCEIVED BY THE PEOPLE AROUND ME?

How do I make sure I'm intentional about how I want to be perceived by the people around me? One of the most important aspects of humanity and relationships is being self-reflective. It's not that I think anyone should care what other people think necessarily, but relationships are really the key to satisfaction and happiness in life. If you're not aware of how you're being perceived by the people who love you or the people you love, then you're limiting your opportunities for connecting more deeply. If you are negative, and that's what you're putting out there, at least know that about yourself. Understand why people perceive you that way.

SARAH ELKINS, COMMUNICATIONS COACH, AND
STORYTELLER

TO WHAT EXTENT DO I FEEL TRULY ALIVE WITH LIFE?

It would be along the lines of to what extent do I feel truly alive with life, with what life is calling me to do? What I see in the leadership work I do is that it is truly catalytic when people start asking questions of themselves on that level. It's catalytic in people's career and development because the difference between somebody being in a place of alignment and being in an area of misalignment is huge. It's huge in terms of the energy they have to bring. It's huge in terms of their creativity, how their self-expression flows, and how open they are to connect with other people.

SARAH ROZENTHULER, AUTHOR AND DIALOGUE
COACH

WHAT AM I OVER OR UNDER LOOKING?

There's one question that I keep asking myself. I tend to ask, what am I over or under looking? You could take it both ways. What am I overlooking? What am I overvaluing? What am I overusing? You could say undervaluing or underusing, but I somehow use that question to keep myself in check. When I don't, it's because I'm too busy to have that reflective state of mind. Then I got myself into trouble, so I learned to make time for it and hold others accountable to hold me accountable.

SESIL PIR, INDUSTRIAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL
PSYCHOLOGIST

AM I DOING WHAT I WANT TO BE DOING?

We can talk ourselves into all sorts of different things. We can rationalize, but we need to be incredibly blunt and direct in asking ourselves inevitable questions. Am I doing what I want to be doing? Usually, I think an immediate answer will pop into your head, and that answer will be yes, or it will be no. I'm going to venture a guess for most people; the answer is no. Then you have to have follow-up questions going. What do I need to do to get myself to a place where I'm doing what I want to be doing? And it may not be straightforward. What do I need to do to continue to move towards answering the question with a yes? That answer could take a year, or it could take 20 years. But if we're asking ourselves the question directly, "Am I doing what I want to be doing?" and if the answer is coming back no, then I have a personal need to move towards being able to answer that question with a yes.

SIMON HEATH, EXECUTIVE COMMUNICATIONS
COACH

AM I BEING AUTHENTIC?

The one question that I'm conscious of asking myself regularly is, am I really being authentic? I do see things happening that I disagree with, and in these situations, Maria and I have decided not to get involved in specific projects and activities. When you are entirely in your power, you can walk away from requests masquerading as opportunities are anything but. We have decisions to make every week, and we have to say, are we going to do this or this? We can't do everything. We have to decide what the most authentic thing for us is and the most long-term and sustainable path?

SIMON AND MARIA MORAES ROBINSON, AUTHOR &
CO-FOUNDER HOLONOMICS EDUCATION

AM I IN THE RIGHT PLACE?

I'm asking myself as much as possible, am I in the right place? Am I doing the right thing? Is this going to help me move forward? I'm questioning my presence and entire being in the moment.

SIRAJ SIRAJUDDIN, AGILITY AND LEADERSHIP
TRANSFORMATION CONSULTANT

ARE YOU TRUE TO YOURSELF?

If you're not true to yourself and live a life you want across all aspects of your life, then what people get is a lesser version of you. As a result, the most important question to ask yourself is, am I true to myself? What I mean by that is, do I speak my truth? Do I ask for the truth? Do I encourage others to be a better person by communicating with them and the questions that I ask? If not, what everyone else gets is a lesser version of you. They will never have your full potential... and who knows what that would mean? If you see it (or hear it), you deal with it there and then – don't wait. Part of Compassionate Assertiveness, my communication model, is based on a bit of mantra called, "See it, say it." I've got businesses that have been working with me for three or four years now, and it's transformed their business just by working with that saying. That means if you see it (or hear it), you deal with it there and then – don't wait. If you do wait and address it later, it often sounds like 'blame and shame' by that time.

STEPH HOLLOWAY, FOUNDER, ELEMENTAL
POTENTIAL

AM I GOING TOWARDS OR AGAINST OUR FOUNDING PATTERNS?

We want to be members of this social body of individuals that somehow share the same destiny—or at least a piece of that destiny. The important question or questions might be framed with respect to what we've been reasoning about up until now. If these ideas of creating a unity of purpose and a community of trust get anchored in the organization, then at any point in your day, whatever you do or decide, maybe the guiding principle should be am I going towards or against those two founding patterns?

STEVE TENDON, MANAGING PARTNER, TAMEFLOW

AM I SHOWING UP AS MY BEST AND HIGHEST SELF?

Am I showing up as my best and highest self? If not, there are many great follow-up questions, like what's stopping me, and how can I change or release that? What's triggering me in this moment? And also: What would make my heart sing? I have a background in Conscious Capitalism; I was on the executive team for the Orange County chapter for several years. And so another one of the most important questions we can ask comes from what Conscious Capitalism calls the Stakeholder Orientation: Is this decision a Win for all of our stakeholders, which includes our employees, our customers, our suppliers, our vendors, our shareholders, our community and the planet as a whole? If not, how can we tweak or adjust this decision to make it a Win for everyone? What else is possible?

SUE ELLIOTT, FOUNDER & CHIEF OF PERSONAL
TRANSFORMATION, EASIER WAY

HOW WILL I APPLY MYSELF TO THE VERY LIMITS OF MY ABILITY?

My immediate answer to this question is, how will I apply myself to the very limits of my ability? And then two sub-questions that come after that are number one, What prevents me from making the changes I know will make me more effective? And then number two, is there any reason to believe the opposite of my current belief? I loved this question because it really gets to what I think is the heart of the matter. It is really about how we release limitations and surrender to certain things to live our lives for ourselves instead of living somebody else's life. This question really puts the onus on me as an individual. I can't point a finger external of myself.

SUSAN TAYLOR, LEADERSHIP COACH AND CEO,
GENERON, INTERNATIONAL

WHO ARE WE SERVING?

Who are we serving? The reality is we—and I'm talking us as the big picture change agents—if we're only doing it for ourselves, then I don't think that we are serving the world as a whole correctly. I believe change agents need to be helpful. There is substantial data that suggests people who are helpful are at the very least proto- servant leaders regarding the change we are attempting to facilitate. They can draw enough power to them so they can help influence change. The problem with that statement is that power tends to accumulate and corrupt. When power accumulates, we can get to a point where we start serving ourselves instead of others. Therefore, the whole concept of servant leadership breaks down, and it is not as helpful to those around us.

TOM CAGLEY, PRESIDENT, TOM CAGLEY AND
ASSOCIATES

HOW DO WE GROW UP AND WAKE UP?

I think true to the theme of my initial responses, it's to make conscious choices. I believe the following questions are essential: What questions can we ask ourselves? Is this a conscious choice I'm making to lend time, energy, and talent towards something other than self? Be conscious about your work. Be intentional about your work. Be introspective about how your work has meaning for you and the organization. Wake up more. Be more engaged in that process. Both as a self-development process and just a clear choice-making process about what you do with your life, time, energy, and talent. I think that's the question, how do we grow up and wake up? Which is just a general theme overall.

TOM THOMISON, PARTNER, ENCODE.ORG

HOW CAN WE DELIVER OURSELVES BETTER INTO THE WORLD?

I think we're all leaders because wherever we are, whatever we do, there's always somebody who looks to us for answers. And so, why are we here? What is it that we want to control? What is it we can master or want to master? What is our purpose? These questions are a good starting point for a conversation to think about.

VALERIA MALTONI, CONVERSATION AGENT

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Bill Fox, Founder, Forward Thinking Workplaces

Forward Thinking Workplaces is a global narrative that's uncovering exciting new perspectives that will help you succeed and be a forward-thinking leader and workplace in the 21st century.

I help CEOs and leadership teams start and have new strategic conversations that engage and leverage the collective voice, energy, and wisdom of everyone—to attract, retain and grow exceptional people and results.

I'm also the author of *The Future of the Workplace* (Apress, August 2019) and *5 Minutes to Process Improvement Success*.

I invite you to contact me at bill@billfox.co to share which questions you find most helpful and intriguing or share your questions with me.

To your forward-thinking life & success!

Bill Fox

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