

# The Power Questions

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# 1 | Good Questions Trump Easy Answers

We're sitting comfortably in a sun-filled office on the fortieth floor of a Chicago skyscraper. We ask the CEO, "What most impresses you when you meet someone who is trying to win your business? What builds trust and credibility with you early on in a relationship?"

This executive runs a \$12-billion company. We are interviewing him about his most trusted business relationships. These are the service providers and suppliers his company goes back to again and again, the individuals who are part of his inner circle of trusted advisors.

"I can always tell," he says, "how experienced and insightful a prospective consultant, banker, or lawyer is by the quality of their *questions* and how intently they listen. That's how simple it is."

In a direct but sweeping statement about what builds a relationship, he tells us what hundreds of others we've advised and

interviewed also affirm: *Good questions are often far more powerful than answers.*

Good questions challenge your thinking. They reframe and re-define the problem. They throw cold water on our most dearly held assumptions, and force us out of our traditional thinking. They motivate us to learn and discover more. They remind us of what is most important in our lives.

In ancient history, transformational figures such as Socrates and Jesus used questions to great effect. Their questions were teaching tools and also a means to change indelibly the people around them. We'll meet both in later chapters and learn their techniques.

But you'll also meet corporate leaders, a minister, a billionaire, an attorney, a medical center CEO, and dozens more. They are all fascinating people (some you may know), for whom a power question becomes a pivotal turning point.

In the twentieth century, towering intellectuals such as Albert Einstein and Peter Drucker loved to ask provocative questions.

One morning a young Einstein watched the sun glittering off a field of flowers. He asked himself, "Could I travel on that beam of light? Could I reach or exceed the speed of light?" Later, he told a friend, "I have no special talents. I am only passionately curious."

Drucker is considered to be one of the most profound thinkers in the field of management. He was famous for his intense questioning sessions with clients.

Rather than offering advice, Drucker would pose simple but penetrating questions such as, "What business are you really in?" And, "What do your customers value most?"

When a journalist once referred to him as a consultant, Drucker objected. He said he was actually an "insultant"—a nod to the tough, direct questions he liked to ask his clients.

Great artists have always understood the role of questions. It is no accident that the most famous dramatic passage in all of literature is built around a single question. "To be, or not to be, that is

the question,” says Shakespeare’s Prince Hamlet as he contemplates life and death.

We use the phrase *power questions* as the title of this book. That’s because the questions we select have the power to give new life to your conversations in unexpected and delightful ways. They are powerful tools to get directly to the heart of the matter. They are the keys to opening locked doors.

Each of the next 34 short chapters recounts a conversation or situation that was transformed through one or more power questions. We’ve used real-life examples in order to illustrate how and when to use the questions. In the final section of this book, called “Not Just for Sunday,” we list another 293 power questions. Using these additional questions will help you succeed in a variety of professional and personal situations.

Learning to use the power of questions can dramatically increase your professional and personal effectiveness. This book will help you build and deepen relationships. Sell more of your products, services, and ideas. Motivate others to give more effort than they ever thought possible. And become more effective at influencing clients, colleagues, and friends.

Are you ready to use the transformational power of great questions? Read on.

