

# Introduction

*Who questions much, shall learn much, and retain much.*

Francis Bacon

*Everything we know has its origin in questions. Questions, we might say, are the principal intellectual instruments available to human beings.*

Neil Postman

Every one of us can ask good questions. Irrespective of education, qualifications, position or experience, good questions are available to anyone willing to ask. We can all ask the types of questions that encourage a fresh perspective, open our eyes to new possibilities, and ultimately get good answers. In a world increasingly defined by distraction, busyness, information overload and technological saturation, questions provide us with an opportunity to pause, think and dedicate focussed attention to a specific topic. Questions allow us to go beyond superficial appearances, spin and hype to develop deeper knowledge on topics and develop informed positions on issues. Indeed, regardless of the circumstances or situations that we face, we do have control over the questions that we ask and the answers that we pursue.

We all ask and answer questions every day. But how often do we deliberately and consciously consider the questions that we ask before we ask them? Generally, the more important the question we intend to ask, the more we should think it through and practice it. However, much like breathing, we usually don't give questions very much thought. That is, until someone asks a question that sparks an insight or unexpected perspective, and we think '*That's a good question*'. Given the title of this book, you are likely reading because, like me, you are interested and motivated to ask good questions.



## Asking Good Questions

So what makes a good question? That itself is a good question and one that led me to write this book, because I wanted to know. I wanted to know because I want to ask good questions. Much like attempting to define anything good – a good person, a good job, a good life – any effort at condensing such a complex topic into a one-sentence definition would ultimately fall short. Instead, this entire book is about answering *what makes a good question*. But whilst I will avoid any simplistic definition, I don't take the easy way out. Instead, you will find a chapter on what I've called foundational requirements of good questions as well as common characteristics. Moreover, you'll also find an entire chapter dedicated to what I've discovered to be good questions across many situations.

This book is based on hours of research which included analysing media interviews, Question-and-Answer sessions, and conversations to better understand how and why we ask questions and the type of questions we ask. Additionally, discussions with professionals (and my own personal experience) across scientific, academic and analytic fields has enabled me to learn much about the importance of questions and how the questions we ask influence our behaviours, decisions and actions.

Ultimately, this book is about encouraging us to understand questions in order to ask good questions. However, if all that we have are questions without answers this is not very helpful. We all want to ask good questions, but I would also suggest that we want to get good answers as well, meaning that there is more to questions than just asking. The value of good questions also lies in the answers and insights we gain by asking them.

By the end of this book you will have a better understanding of questions, how they work and why we ask them. In learning

about the reasons for the popularity of interrogative questions you will be able to more effectively use them as well as recognise ahead of time how the way that you frame the question determines the type of answer that you get. You will see that, ideally, questions get everyone thinking. Importantly, by considering the many ways that people can respond to questions, you will be well-placed to determine whether or not your question has been answered. You will also learn how questions are more than just the words that we use. As promised, we will go through what I describe as foundational requirements as well as additional characteristics of good questions. You will then read about good questions for many situations. Finally, you'll see how developing a questioning culture can help in not just asking good questions but encourage us to get to the *right question*. At the end of the chapters are key points  and suggested actions  to help summarise, consolidate and put into practice what you have learnt.

We shouldn't need someone to say '*that's a good question*' to know that we have asked a good question. People can say '*that's a good question*' for any number of reasons: because it reflects their own thinking, they are simply being polite, or as a technique for giving themselves more time to formulate a response. Instead, we should be in a position to decide for ourselves whether or not we've asked a good question based on knowing why we're asking, knowing what we're asking and, ultimately, asking the question. We can all be more thoughtful and deliberate in the questions we ask.

Ultimately, if we want to gain insights and answers then we need to ask good question.