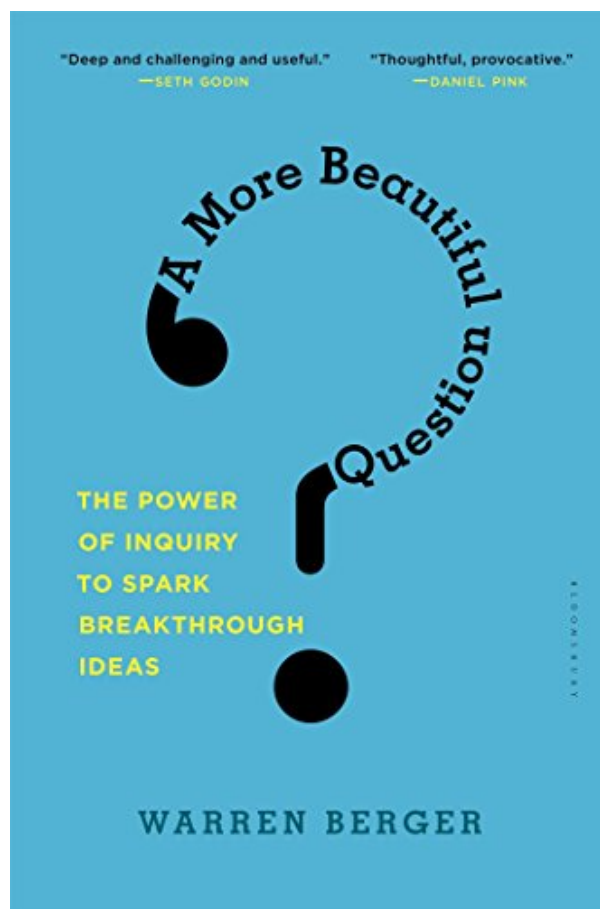


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THE POWER
OF INQUIRY
TO SPARK
BREAKTHROUGH
IDEAS

WARREN BERGER

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From Booklist

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A More Beautiful Question: The Power Of Inquiry To Spark Breakthrough Ideas By Warren Berger

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To get a great answer, you need to ask the perfect question. Warren Berger revives the lost art of questioning.

In this groundbreaking book, journalist and innovation expert Warren Berger shows that one of the most powerful forces for igniting change in business and in our daily lives is a simple, under-appreciated tool--one that has been available to us since childhood. Questioning--deeply, imaginatively, "beautifully"--can help us identify and solve problems, come up with game-changing ideas, and pursue fresh opportunities. So why are we often reluctant to ask "Why?"

Berger's surprising findings reveal that even though children start out asking hundreds of questions a day, questioning "falls off a cliff" as kids enter school. In an education and business culture devised to reward rote answers over challenging inquiry, questioning isn't encouraged--and, in fact, is sometimes barely tolerated.

And yet, as Berger shows, the most creative, successful people tend to be expert questioners. They've mastered the art of inquiry, raising questions no one else is asking--and finding powerful answers. The author takes us inside red-hot businesses like Google, Netflix, IDEO, and Airbnb to show how questioning is baked into their organizational DNA. He also shares inspiring stories of artists, teachers, entrepreneurs, basement tinkerers, and social activists who changed their lives and the world around them--by starting with a "beautiful question."

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A Simple Idea with Profound Implications Nicely Done

By Cameron

After reading Glimmer, Warren Berger's 2009 book looking at designers and design thinking, I became a fan of sorts and pre-ordered A More Beautiful Question anticipating something good as a follow-up. I wasn't disappointed. Like Glimmer -- and perhaps design thinking -- Berger takes both a deep dive and a broad stroke over his subject matter. This is tough to do well, but Berger pulls it off.

There is something delightful about looking at something that seems so obvious and simple, but is far from simplistic, in detail. Berger goes through the vast swaths of research and evidence on question formation and innovation and blends it seamlessly with anecdotes, observations and questions...lots and lots of questions. To 'live the title' of the book, the text is organized around questions and, at least with the Kindle, the questions are hyperlinked to explanations at the back about their origin and relevance. This feature was wonderful and frustrating -- but largely due to technology. I read using a Nexus tablet, but my preferred reader is the original Kindle. On that latter device, the linking becomes a frustration in that it is sometimes hard to get back to your place. But that's a small point.

Berger's style of writing is engaging, balancing conciseness with informality, and using enough revisiting of ideas in different places in the text to thread ideas throughout the narrative, but not too much to feel repetitive. I loved this just as I loved Glimmer.

What a reader will take from this is that questions are important, that the best (and most consistent) innovators, leaders and scientists are typically great at asking questions and not just providing answers. Indeed, Berger makes the case that the question and answer are inextricably linked showing dozens of examples of how the habits of questioning lead to exciting outcomes. He also offers a challenge to anyone involved in education -- which, he'd argue is nearly everyone in this age of change and ongoing learning -- to examine how questions are encouraged and discouraged to shun curiosity. This has enormous implications and, as we see, gets replicated in our businesses and other organizations.

If this book does anything for you I hope it gets you to ask better questions and enjoy not always having answers. Taken to heart, the message of paying attention to the questions -- living the questions if you will -- is one that may have profound consequences on your life, work, and learning.

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful.

An Inspiring Look At Inquiry Leading To Innovation

By Alan L. Chase

I recently attended an excellent seminar for senior executives called "Authentic Leadership." The facilitator of my small group had some encouraging things to say about the way that I frame questions. He then added: "I think that you would enjoy reading 'A More Beautiful Question.'" At his urging, I ordered the book and found that he was correct in his prognostication. I found this book to be intriguing and inspiring.

Using some excellent cases to illustrate principles, author Warren Berger discusses "The Power of Inquiry To Spark Breakthrough Ideas." He quotes liberally from such icons of innovation as Joichi Ito of the MIT Media Lab, David Kelly of IDEO, and Clayton Christensen of Harvard Business School. My office is contained within a hub of innovation, the Cambridge Innovation Center, on the campus of MIT, so I am always intrigued to learn new lessons about innovation and the things that may spark it.

One of the threads that weaves itself throughout this book is the fact that children are natural questioners. It

is only as we grow older that we tend to squelch our innate propensity to ask questions in order to better understand ourselves and the world around us. In this book, Mr. Berger offers many examples of individuals and companies that he re-learned the art of asking great questions.

I was intrigued to learn that Edwin Land, the father of instant photography, was prompted to develop this technology when his young daughter innocently asked him why they had to wait to see a photograph that he had taken when they were on vacation as a family.

He makes specific suggestions, based on research done at the Right Question Institute, regarding how to frame appropriate questions at each stage of a process of exploration, discovery and innovation. One insight that stood out for me was the use of terminology that is useful in a group setting that disarms defensive posture on the part of those participating in the conversation. The form of the question that often provokes healthy discussion is to ask: "How might we?" He also describes the technique that has worked for many companies of replacing "brainstorming" with "question storming."

His final challenge which he poses in the final chapter of the book, is to ask how each individual might frame "a more beautiful question" that frames and sparks inquiry and endeavors to provide meaning and purpose for the rest of one's life. Inspiring!

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful.

Excellent Book About the Question Process

By Kim Davis

Don't think it really occurred to me that there was a process to questions. That there is a progression from why to what if to how. That things don't work so well if you go straight to the how.

I have had it in my head that I am not supposed to ask why questions. That this supposedly gets you stuck in the past, on who is to blame, on explanations. But when you ask, "why am I doing this?" you are really looking for intention. So I have put back "why" into my toolbox after reading this book.

Another useful thing was the discussion about how business sees asking questions as a waste of time and a distraction from acting. I have not been a fan of the old "just do it" thing and this reinforced why I am uncomfortable with it. A quote from some other book - "action without strategy is stupid!"

So overall a very powerful and practical book. No academic ivory tower "let's just sit here and theorise and make our selves sound smart by asking lots of questions" type of stuff.

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