



Change Your Questions Change Your Life

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Publisher: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc.

Copyright year: 2004

ISBN: 10:1-57675-241-0

Author's Bio: Marilee Adams, PhD, executive coach, speaker, and corporate consultant, is president of the Inquiry Institute. She's also the author of *The Art of the Question: A Guide to Short-Term Question-Centered Therapy*.

Author's big thought: Every day we all ask ourselves questions - from 'What should I wear?' to 'What should I do with my life?' Marilee Adams shows that the kind of questions you ask can profoundly affect your self esteem, relationships, and career. She introduces 'Question Thinking', an-easy-to-use system for transforming thinking, action, and results. With new perspectives and alternatives, you can take powerful, practical steps to transform your work, your relationships, and your life.

Introduction:

- The ability to intentionally shift our internal questions puts us in charge of our thoughts. This book shows you how to do this.
- *Change Your Questions, Change Your Life* is the story of Ben Knight. He finds himself challenged, seemingly beyond his limits, in his new promotion to a highly responsible management position. Convinced he doesn't have what it takes, he drafts his resignation. That's when his CEO steps in and gives him a second chance by introducing him to Joseph, the inquiring coach. However, Ben's job isn't his only problem. His marriage is in trouble. In this book Ben makes transformations both at work and at home.
- The ability to think productively rather than reactively lies at the heart of QuestionThinking. It is the key to building high emotional intelligence and making wise choices wherever we are. In this way QT methods also help empower successful learning organizations.

- There are seven tools and practices that led Ben to such remarkable results. These tools are woven into the story and are described in a workbook at the end of the book with clear, step-by-step instructions.
- A world of questions is a world of possibility. Questions open our minds, connect us to each other, and shake outmoded paradigms.

Notes:

- The best way to solve a problem is to first come up with better questions.
- Certainly we recognize that questions are a vital part of communication. But the role they play in thinking is not always obvious, and that's where QuestionThinking methods come in.
- QuestionThinking is a system of tools using questions to expand how you approach virtually every situation. These tools give you the power to refine your questions for vastly better results in everything you do. The system can literally put action into your thinking - action that's both focused and effective. It's a great way to create a foundation for making wiser choices.
- Thinking actually occurs as a question and answer process. For example, when you get dressed in the morning you may have asked yourself questions like these: *Where am I going? What's the weather? What's comfortable? or What's clean?* You answered your questions by *doing* something. You are in effect, wearing your answer.
- QuestionThinking is a system of tools for transforming thinking, action, and results through skillful question asking - questions we ask ourselves as well as those we ask others.
- When we get stuck, it's natural to look for answers and solutions. But in so doing we can unwittingly create blocks instead of openings. We first need to change our questions; otherwise we keep recycling the same old, unhelpful answers. Putting the power of questions to work is the first tool. (**Tool 1**)
- New questions can totally shift our perspectives, moving us into fresh ways of looking at and solving problems.
- Questions drive results. They virtually program how we behave and what kinds of outcomes are possible. Consider three companies, each one driven by one of the following questions: *What's the best way to satisfy shareholders? What the best way to satisfy customers? What's the best way to satisfy employees?* Each question focuses on a different aspect of doing business. Each will have a different influence on priorities, everyday behavior, and strategies for achieving goals. Imagine the results of a company responding to all three of these questions. Again, the results you get will be driven by the questions you ask.
- When interacting with other people, you want them to take initiative, to ask their own questions, and come up with answers that maybe you hadn't thought of yourself. Your accomplishments come from the total efforts of the people you're working with, not just from your own solitary work.

- The most effective communication is about 20 percent telling and 80 percent asking. Most of us have turned this around - 80 percent telling and 20 percent asking.

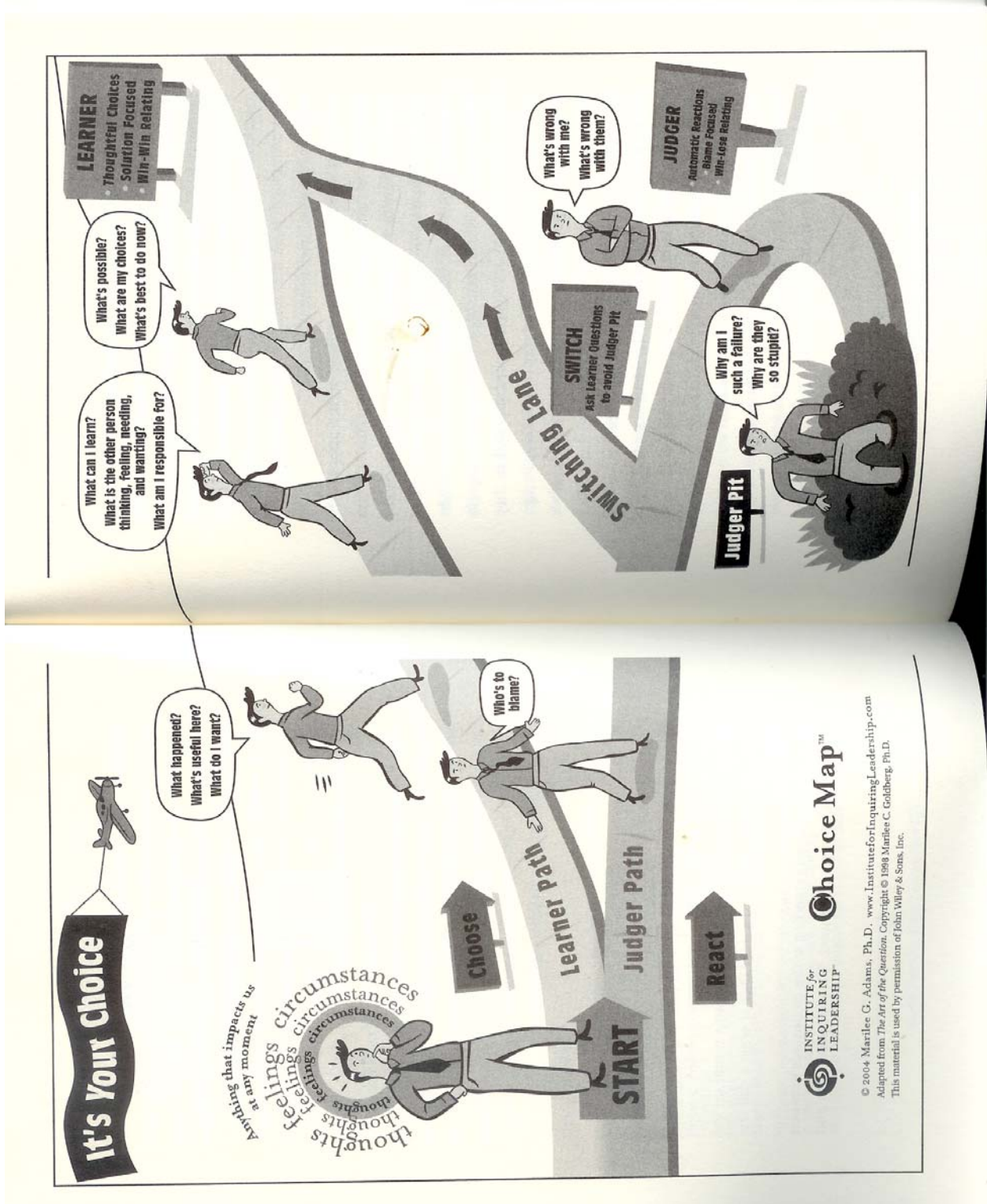
Discovering Learner and Judger Questions (Tool 3)

- In every instance of our lives we're faced with choosing between two paths illustrated by the Choice Map (Tool 2) on page 5 - the Learner path and the Judger path. The smaller figure shows what questions that guy asks on each path and what happens, depending on the path he takes. There are two little signs; one says "Choose" and the other "React".
- The upper path is the Learner path, where figures are happily jogging along. This is the path you get to by choosing.
- The other path, the Judger path, looks downright bleak, which has to do with reacting rather than choosing. These figures look troubled as they head downward toward a billboard that says Judger. A smaller sign warns: Judger Pit. There is one poor fellow there stuck in the mud.
- The Choice Map is not about classifying people or putting them in boxes. It's a powerful tool for charting more effective paths through our lives.
- At nearly every instant in our lives, we're faced with choices. We're also choosing between Judger and Learner mindsets. With Judger mindset we eventually end up stuck in the mud. With Learner we discover new paths and possibilities.
- Most of the time, we're shifting back and forth between Learner and Judger paths, barely aware we have any control over which one we've chosen. But we do have choice in every moment. Real choice begins when we can observe our own thinking.
- Whichever path we choose begins with questions. The Choice Map literally guides us to ask more productive questions and make wiser choices. You can use the Choice Map to understand, improve, and change virtually any situation.
- At the crossroads, you can see the words Thoughts, Feelings, Circumstances circling around his head. Those words represent anything that impacts us at any moment. Although we can't always choose what happens to us, we can choose what we do with what happens.
- The Choice Map lets you step into the position of a neutral and open-minded observer, then notice your moods, thoughts, and behaviors. It's a wonderful way to check out the questions that precipitated them. If only for a moment, you become a spectator watching a movie of your life. This sets the stage for change. It's very different from being so immersed in the situation that you're powerless to make an objective choice.
- That same observer capacity gives us a chance to reflect and focus on the bigger picture. This is about developing ways to make intentional, conscious choices rather than just being controlled by events around us. These are essential leadership qualities.
- By working with the Choice Map you get pretty good at catching yourself in Judger. It's a great way to strengthen your observer self. First, you just notice that

something's not quite right. Maybe you feel tense, or upset, or just plain blocked. Second, you wake up enough to ask yourself. *Am I in Judger? If yes, then you ask: Is this where I want to be? Nobody can help anyone from a Judger place.*

- A specific type of question helps us switch thinking from Judger to Learner. A *switching question* can be 'How else can I think about this?'
- The Choice Map helps you to see more options in difficult situations and choose more wisely, even under pressure.
- When there is any type of conflict, both people can be in Judger. *The one who wakes up first has the advantage.* That person can choose to go to Learner, be in the driver seat, and turn the situation around for both of them.
- Don't be concerned if you take the Judger path for a while. When your observer self is stronger, you'll find it much easier to switch your questions and get back into learner mode. That's where things open up again.
- We always will go into Judger from time to time. The real question is whether we'll dig our heels in and stay there.
- Your moods and body have signals which tell you that you are in Judger mode. As you learn to recognize these body feelings, moods, and attitudes, you're conditioning yourself to recognize when you land in Judger. You'll be able to zero in on what kinds of questions are getting you stuck. The more you can observe yourself, the more objective you become.
- The kind of questions we ask ourselves can stimulate curiosity, inspire us, open us to new discoveries, and move us in the direction of success- or they can drive us into despair, inactivity and failure.
- Once you're able to observe your own thinking, and recognize the difference between Learner and Judger, you grab hold of the power of choice. Empowering your Observer is **Tool 4**.
- To summarize - the questions we form in our minds shape our decisions and actions and lead to any results we get. They put us on one of two paths, the Learner or the Judger path, and there's a huge difference between them. QuestionThinking tools like the Choice Map and the distinctions between Learner and Judger questions give you the ability to recognize what kind of questions you're asking and where they might take you. If it doesn't look like they are taking you where you want, reshape them so they do. Think Learner and Judger questions. That alone can make a tremendous difference in your life. We're talking about core management skills here - ones that apply in your relationship with yourself and everyone else.

The Choice Map (Tool 2)



Learner - Judger Questions (Tool 3)

Judger	Learner
What's wrong?	What works?
Who's to blame?	What am I responsible for?
How can I prove I'm right?	What are the facts?
How can I protect my turf?	What's the big picture?
How can I be in control?	What are my choices?
How could I lose?	What's useful about this?
How could I get hurt?	What can I learn?
Why is that person so clueless?	What is the other person feeling, needing,
Why bother?	Wanting?
	What's possible?

- In the middle of the Choice Map there is a road joining the Judger and Learner Paths. The Switching Lane provides a powerful tool for switching from Judger to Learner.
- When you're standing in Judger, the whole world can look pretty bleak - and the future can only be a recycled version of the past. Even though the world is filled with possibilities, you have only limited access when seeing with Judger eyes or hearing with Judger ears.
- Any time you step onto the Switching Lane and ask switching questions (**Tool 5**) you automatically switch into choice. You unveil a whole new picture of what's possible. QuestionThinking gives you the power to choose. When can observe your own thoughts, especially Judger ones, you gain the ability to choose what to think next. Choice takes practice and sometimes courage, to make the best use of it.
- The author and concentration camp survivor Viktor Frankl spoke of '...the last of the human freedoms- to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way.' That's the essence of QuestionThinking.
- Whenever you sense you might be in Judger, pause, take a deep breath, and ask yourself, Am I in Judger? If your answer is yes, you can step into the switching Lane by asking simple questions like: How else can I think about this? And Where would I like to be? These are Switching questions which quickly move you to the Learner Path.
- These are practical tools that take advantage of how humans work. Questions always direct our attention. New questions can redirect our attention. They change assumptions and what we see possible in any moment. Thought sets intention. Learner questions program us with a positive intention.
- People who spend more time in Judger than Learner may be quite driven and productive. But they can also drive everyone around them nuts, lowering productivity, cooperation, creativity, and people's ability to contribute. Operating from Judger can build resentment and conflict, whether with your family or co-

workers. An organization run by people in Judger tends to have greater levels of stress, conflict, and problems with staff.

- We're all going to fall into Judger from time to time, but the more you use the Choice Map. Switching questions and other tools (to follow), the easier it will be, and the longer you'll be able to stay there. You'll also spend less time in Judger.
- Being in Judger is not the same as using good judgment. It always means Judgmental.
- Judger has two faces. One focuses on being judgmental toward ourselves, whereas the other focuses on being judgmental toward others. The results can look quite different but they come from the same judgmental place.
- If we focus our Judger mindset on ourselves, we'll tend to feel depressed and diminish our self-confidence. If we focus our Judger mindset on others, with questions such as *Why is everyone around me so clueless and frustrating?* We tend to get angry, resentful, and hostile. Either way, Judger usually puts us in conflict.
- If you ask questions about who's to blame, you block yourself and others from finding alternatives and solutions. It's very hard to fix a problem when operating from Judger blame. If you focus your questions on what you're responsible for, you open your mind for productive action. You're free to create alternatives and remedy the situation.
- The Learner-Judger Chart: Mindsets and relationships provide a way to become a much better observer of ourselves. It lists learner and Judger Qualities and Characteristics, and therefore provides clues for discerning where we are at any moment; it's invaluable for helping us shift from Judger to Learner.

Learner/Judger Chart	
Mindsets	
Judger	Learner
Judgmental (of self and/or others)	Accepting (of self and others)
Reactive and automatic	Responsive and thoughtful
Know-it-all/obedient	Values non-knowing
Inflexible and rigid	Flexible and adaptive
Bitter/ice thinking	Both/and thinking
Self-righteous	Inquisitive
Afraid of difference	Values difference
Personal perspective only	Considers perspectives of others
Defends assumptions	Questions assumptions
Possibilities seen as limited	Possibilities seen as unlimited
Primary mood: protective	Primary mood: curious
We all have both mindsets, and we have the power to choose where we operate from in any moment.	
Relationships	
Judger	Learner
Win-lose relationships	Win-win relationships
Feels separate from others	Feels connected with others
Fears differences	Values differences
Debates	Dialogues
Criticizes	Critiques
Listeners for:	Listeners for:
Right/Wrong	Facts
Agree/Disagree	Understanding
Differences	Commonalities
Feedback perceived as rejection	Feedback perceived as worthwhile
Seeks to attack or defend	Seeks to resolve and create
We all relate from both mindsets, and we have the power to choose how we relate in any moment.	

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- There is a large cost to spending time in the Judger Pit. It slows down work and communicating with other people becomes increasingly more challenging.
- You free yourself from Judger by accepting it as part of you. By exercising this type of acceptance we truly gain the freedom to choose.
- You can use another tool to help make decisions - the A-B-C-C Choice Process. Questioning assumptions is **tool 6**.
 - A- Aware- *Am I in Judger?*
 - B- Breathe - *Do I need to step back, pause, and look at this situation more objectively?*
 - C - Curiosity - *Do I have all the facts? What's happening here?*
 - C - Choose - *What's my choice?*
- Using the Choice process begins with acceptance, and then builds on it.
- The ultimate goal of QuestionThinking is to recognize the Judger in ourselves, switch to Learner, and operate from there. Use the Choice Map, Switching questions, and the Learner and Judger distinctions daily. They show you how to observe yourself and the world around you, how to make wiser and more conscious choices. This isn't just a once-in-a-lifetime insight though. It's a practice, something you do daily. You'll soon have the ability to calmly and systematically recognize when you're in Judger - whether you're aiming it at yourself or someone else. It's about accepting Judger and practicing learner. The benefits you gain from these keys will keep reinforcing themselves. Soon everything you've learned will flow pretty easily; you won't even have to think about it. You will really be seeing with new eyes and hearing with new ears.
- It is often by confronting our greatest obstacles that we find our greatest strengths. Joseph Campbell had a phrase for it: *Where you stumble, there your treasure is*. Finding the treasure will depend on your mindset and the questions you're asking, whether they are Learner or Judger ones.
- In team meetings create a Learner environment as it is the key for building an effective team. By creating such an environment you encourage people - you included - to listen more patiently and carefully, seeking to understand rather than looking for what's right or wrong. You set the group up to get curious and ask Learner questions themselves, even when there are tough challenges.
- Accept Judger; practice Learner. Think of it this way: You're never going to be pure Learner. But you can learn to make choices about where you put your attention. Whenever you give your attention to Judger you've got little energy for anything else. The end result is both personally satisfying and more productive.
- When we're able to listen with Learner ears, the impact on others is amazing. When people feel accepted, and not judged, they become much more forthcoming, cooperative, and creative. Although the Choice Map is drawn to depict a single person, you can also apply the same principles to teams - or even whole organizations.
- What could be more natural or obvious than to simply ask? How else can you hope to get a complete picture of what's going on? And how else can you get other people

contributing so enthusiastically? Curiosity, genuine childlike curiosity, is one of our greatest assets...it's the fast track to Learner. Curiosity is the fuel for so much change and growth.

A question not asked is like a door not opened.

These were the questions developed from Ben's (our hero's) brainstorming:

- Start by describing the problematic situation and your goals for change.
- What do I want to change about the team?
- What would I like to see happening that is not happening now?
- What can I do to help us listen better to each other?
- What can I do to be more creative?
- How can I help build a truly collaborative group?
- What can I do to help pull us together, like a well-oiled athletic team?
- How can we keep communication channels open between us?
- How do we state our goals better so everybody can be more aligned and inspired?
- How do I define responsibilities for each team member?
- How do I make sure I follow through on all my promises?
- How can I assure each team member it's really okay to take risks and ask for help?
- How can we all make a contribution?

Great Results begin with Great Questions
The Top Ten Questions for Change (Tool 7)

1. What do I want?
2. What are my choices?
3. What assumptions am I making?
4. What am I responsible for?
5. How else can I think about this?
6. What is the other person thinking, feeling, needing, and wanting?
7. What am I missing or avoiding?
8. What can I learn -
 - a. from this person or situation?
 - b. from this mistake or failure?
 - c. from this success?
9. What questions should I ask myself or others?
10. What action steps make the most sense?
11. How can I turn this into a win-win?
12. What is possible?

Recommendation:

Change Your Questions Change Your Life a pivotal book for transformational change - read it and share it - it's that good!



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My associates and I specialize in and have a passion for working with successful accounting firms. Our concentration is on what are commonly called the "soft skills." Through our experience we have

demonstrated that what is true for Fortune 500 companies is also true in creating a competitive advantage for accounting firms.

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