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# 25 Great Questions to Ask ... Unsuspecting Souls

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*(Using the skill of asking questions  
to extend a conversation)*



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# Introduction

One of the important skills professional coaches learn to master is that of asking open-ended questions that will produce discovery and awareness in the life of the person being coached. (We like to call the ‘person being coached’ the PBC for short.) As I travel around the country conducting coach training courses, it’s not unusual for a student to ask, “How do you know what to ask?” or, “Do you have a book of good questions to ask?” This ebook has been specifically designed to assist you in developing the habit of asking great questions. Of course, this little book isn’t even remotely close to exhaustive in its scope. In fact, by the time you’ve had a chance to read through this short list of some of our favorite questions to ask unsuspecting souls, you will most likely have a list of your own questions already being compiled.

Many of these questions are not necessarily ones that fit into a typical coaching conversation. In fact, *most* of these questions can be used in casual conversations with friends, family members, or individuals you may be mentoring or encouraging in their faith journey. As a general rule, the goal behind most of these questions is helping someone else pause and think about their life.

*“If a question isn’t designed to help an individual pause and think ...it isn’t a good question.”*

As you begin to experiment with these questions, or questions of your own, you’ll know you’re on target with your asking when the people you are engaging in conversation start saying, ‘That’s a good question.’



# What's so great about asking questions?

Questions leave the expertise with the expert.

Doctors ask questions of their patients at every appointment. And the purpose behind the questions is a diagnosis and treatment plan for an ailment or health concern. In that scenario, the DOCTOR is the expert. But in a coaching application ... the expert is the PBC! As a coach, if my client views me as a guru of problem-solving, I've failed them. I don't have the answers to the dilemmas facing my coaching clients. I'm not the 'expert' on their life. THEY are the experts, and by asking open-ended questions, I help them examine options, evaluate outcomes, and take responsibility for movement and change.

Questions can sometimes address 'real' stuff.

Many times, conversations and interactions with other people can be shallow, 'how-the-weather' kinds of dialogue, when what is actually needed is connection on a deeper level. Asking non-threatening questions that will cause another person to pause and reflect is a way of mining some of the deeper issues of life. Even casual or first-time acquaintances can be impacted greatly by our asking a carefully constructed question that will 'extend the conversation.'

Asking questions reflects a desire to 'know' another person

Isn't it true? Everyone —on some level— wants to be known and appreciated. When someone asks a question of us, it can represent a 'path of opportunity' for us to disclose a bit more about who we really are. A great question may open the door of another person's life, and give them the permission to disclose details and elements of their 'story' or journey that might otherwise go unnoticed, or unknown.

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*The goal of a great question: Extend the conversation.*

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# 3 Questions to Ask ‘You’ ...

*(before you start asking ‘them.’)*

## 1. *“Why is this person in my way?”*

That’s a God-question. As people come into your orb of influence, asking God for direction is a great place to start. Out of all the moments you have ever lived, and considering all the people you’ve ever interacted with, why is *this* person in your path at this particular moment in time?

## 2. *“How might I impact this person with my life?”*

That’s a ‘me’ question, for sure. Asking myself how I can impact another soul in a specific encounter helps me focus on a central idea I think is very important: I have an opportunity to leave my fingerprints on the life of another person, a person loved by God, whom He has chosen to intersect with my life at just this time, and in just this place. Asking myself the ‘How can I impact this person?’ is a great question for all of us to ask ourselves.

## 3. *“What do I see, when I see this person?”*

That’s a ‘them-focused’ question. Are they happy, or sad, or challenged or discouraged? When I actually take the time to carefully observe people, I am able to be more effective in my communications and interactions. I’m not judging them. I’m not assuming things. I’m simply observing and taking note of what I observe.

*“We are so afraid of silence that we chase ourselves from one event to the next in order not to have to spend a moment alone with ourselves, in order not to have to look at ourselves in the mirror.” (Dietrich Bonhoeffer)*

# Some Questions of ‘Significance’

Q: ‘Who tells you who you are?’

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Asking ‘significance’ questions needs to be done in the context of a close friendship or relationship. Obviously, it’s not the kind of question you ask of a total stranger or a casual acquaintance. But asking questions like the ones below are sure to ‘extend the conversation’ in a way that will help the individual you’re talking with reflect on their life, and the ‘identity’ issue that so many of us are challenged with.



Q: ‘In your mind, what’s the difference between being *perfect* and being *excellent*?’

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Or ... “If you could wave a magic wand and change one thing about your life right now, what would you change?” And, “What would that kind of change do for you?”

Or ... “What are your biggest worries? (And, what is your plan for overcoming them?)”

Or, “What do you think about, when you’re not thinking about work (or study?)”

## What About Icebreakers?

Everyone knows how awkward it can seem, when you’re at an event or conference, perhaps don’t know anyone, or at least you don’t *feel* like you know anyone. What do

you say to someone you've just met, or someone you haven't seen in a long time? Here are some ideas for asking great questions to help 'break the ice.'

*Q: "How's your life going?" or "How are you doing?"*

The 'How you doin'?' question is one that we frequently don't really expect to be answered with any response other than, "Fine." We use questions like these as 'fillers,' or introductions to further conversation. But ... is everyone I question about how they're doing *fine*? Almost certainly, the answer is no. So, here are a couple of ways you can 'extend the conversation,' when someone tells you they're fine:

Q: "What's the best part?"

or

Q: "What's the most interesting part of your life?"

or

Q: "What's the most challenging part?"

Other questions that work well as icebreakers:

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Q: "Where are you from?" followed by, "What's it like there?"

or

Q: "How'd you hear about this conference (or church, or town, or ...) and what do you hope will happen while you're here?"

## Questions of 'Noticing'

One of the greatest tools for developing the fine art of asking great questions to extend the conversation is simply noticing what you see. If you become an observer of people and their behaviors, you can use what you see to help formulate some great questions.





Q: “What does ‘hurry’ do to your life?”

Or

Q: “In your mind, what’s the difference between being ‘busy,’ and being ‘too busy?’

Q: “Which ball you’re juggling is dropping?”

Or

Q: “Which plate you’re spinning seems to be wobbling the most?”

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*“It is my conviction that our heavenly Father says the same thing to us every day: ‘My dear child, you must always remember who you are.’” (John Stott)*

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Q: “How are you known?”

Note: This may seem like a strange question to ask someone, but it’s a great one to help people think about themselves in a different way than they may be used to. I’ve asked this question of many, many people, and the answers are always fascinating. It’s a question, really, of ‘evaluating reputation.’

Q: “What are you asking God about, these days?”

Or

Q: “What are you talking to yourself about, these days?”

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*“What’s God going to say to my questions? I’m braced for the worst. I’ll climb to the lookout tower and scan the horizon. I’ll wait to see what God says, how he’ll answer my complaint.” (Hab. 2:1, The Message)*

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Q: “What restores you?”

Asking people what ‘restores’ them often causes a very thoughtful response. In a day in which the pace of life is frantic and incredibly complex for so many people, asking a ‘restorative’ question really opens up more opportunity for discussion and dialogue.

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*“People in a hurry never have time for recovery. Their minds have little time to meditate and pray so that problems can be put into perspective. In short, people in our age are showing signs of physiological disintegration because we are living at a pace that is too fast for our bodies.” (Dr. Archibald Hart)*

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We’ve all had times in our lives when God seemed to be testing, or trying, or leading in a way that didn’t seem clear to us. Perhaps the thing we greatly desire seems just out of reach, or doesn’t seem to be part of God’s plan for our lives. St. Ignatius of Loyola believed that sin could be defined as “an unwillingness to trust that what God wants is our deepest happiness. Until we are absolutely convinced of that truth, we will do everything we can to keep our hands on the controls of our lives, because we think we know better than God what we need for our own happiness and fulfillment.” That being said, ...

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Q: “What are you wishing for, these days?”

Q: “Are you moving ‘toward’ something, or ‘away from something? (And how do you tell the difference?)”

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*“Ask me not where I live, or what I like to eat. Ask me what I am living for, and what I think is keeping me from living fully for that.” (Thomas Merton)*

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Questions of ‘meaning’ and purpose can be some of the most thought-provoking. In fact, much of the coaching I’ve done in the past several years has focused on helping individuals understand, define, and live-out the *purpose* for which they believe God has designed them.

Q: “Where are the growing edges of your faith (or your life?)”



Q: “What about your faith journey? Where were the mountain tops, and what about the valleys?”

Q: “For whom (or what) do you live your life? (Followed by, “What have you done in the last seven days that would make that truth really obvious?”

What I call ‘touching’ moments are all around us every day. Touching moments are moments or opportunities for intentionally leaving our ‘fingerprints’ on the life of someone else. We all know we leave our actual fingerprints on glasses, car doors, tooth brushes and hundreds of other items we touch every day. We don’t give much thought to where we’ve left our fingerprints, after all. They can’t be seen. They don’t leave a visible ‘mark.’ But those fingerprints are there, just the same. How would life be different, if I lived my life with such intentionality that I left my life-fingerprint on every person I met?



Q: “Where did you leave your fingerprints ... yesterday? Where will you leave them, today?”

Q: “What do you ***know*** about God ... today?”

or

Q: “What puzzles you about God, today?”

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*“Our desire to know more, read more, and study more can be another expression of our culture and its acquisitive nature. Knowing God — not knowing more — is the goal.” (Richard Rohr)*

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# Questions of Transition or Change

Q: “When you drive, do you look for red lights or green lights?”

(This is a great question for people who feel like they are stuck. Are they stuck because the ‘light’ they are waiting to change is red, a clear ‘STOP’ sign they may avoiding? Or are they stuck because the light in front of their life is yellow, and they may be too cautious in moving forward? Or are they stuck because the light is green, but they are sitting still, waiting for a color of light they like better?)

Q: “What will it take for you to see lasting change in your life?” (Perhaps a modified version of the question Jesus asked, in John 5: ‘Do you want to get well?’)

Q: “What do you *need*?”

(This might seem, on the surface, like a simple question to answer. But sometimes, folks who feel ‘stuck’ or in some kind of transition may struggle to define what they actually *need*. Listening carefully, and having the courage to ‘extend the conversation’ by following the ‘What do you need?’ question with, ‘And what else? And what else? And what else?’ questions can produce amazing discoveries in the PBC.

Q: “If God granted you two more hours in every day than He did everyone else, how would you use those hours?”

or

Q: “If God decided to give you two fewer hours in every day, what would you cut out that you’re currently including in your everyday activities?”

## Extra Credit Bonus Questions

- *“Where are you most gifted in your Kingdom work?”*
- *“If you were to name some people who are ‘watching’ your life ... who would they be, and what are they seeing?”*
- *“If your heart is where you’re treasure is, where is your treasure?”*
- *“What’s the downside of believing everything you think?”*
- *“Describe your assessment of your current situation?”*
- *“What’s the payoff for doing (whatever?) And, what’s your objective in doing what you’re doing?”*
- *“How do you evaluate what you’re doing or choosing as being the best, rather than merely the good or the better? What criteria do you use for your evaluation of the current situation?”*

## Conclusion

Obviously, this little eBook doesn’t come close to covering all the great questions that can be formulated to ‘extend the conversation.’ These are just some of my favorites. As

you develop questions of your own, I encourage you to make note of what made your question impactful in the life of another. Asking a question that promotes discovery in the life of another person is one of the most rewarding activities anyone can engage in, especially if you are determined to be impactful in the lives of others you encounter along your journey.