



# Are you ready to ask a breakthrough question and get a breath-taking result for your business?

Business owners are often so busy being busy, they fail to ask themselves the breakthrough questions.

Innovation, creativity and inspiration (and the results these things bring) all start when you ask a simple question.

Here's what happens when asking the right question breaks through the clutter of normal working life:

1. A 3-year-old asks her dad an obvious question and he starts a business that ends up with annual sales of £1.1 billion
2. A typist asks a simple question and builds a business she sells for £39 million
3. Joe and Brian ask a few simple questions in 2007 and just 2 years later take 1,000,000 bookings and a £80 million investment. The business is now valued at over £20 billion

### If 3-year-olds can ask an obvious question...

...then can't we all ask great questions?

On a sunny winter's day in 1943 Jennifer Land (3-years-old) asked a question of her dad. Edwin Land had just taken Jennifer's picture with his favourite camera when she piped up:



### *"Why can't I see the picture (you've just taken) now?"*

Like most 3-year-olds, Jennifer didn't want to wait!

Jennifer's question stayed with Edwin and resulted, in 1948, in the first Polaroid camera.

At the height of Polaroid in 1978 customers bought 14 million polaroid cameras and spent £1.1 billion (in today's money that's £3.7 billion) with the company.

All because of Jennifer's naïve yet valuable question.

### Here's a proven solution for you...

To get a breakthrough for your business, use a proven 3-question formula so that you and your colleagues ask the simple, valuable and innovative questions.

### In a nutshell

We're all hungry for better answers. But first, we need to learn how to ask the right questions.

Ask the right questions and you'll get yourself a breath-taking business breakthrough like Edwin did.

### Such a simple question!

In the 1950s Bette Nesmith Graham was a typist in a bank by day and a commercial artist by night.

If you'd been Bette, you might also have asked yourself this modest question:

*"What if I could paint over my mistakes when typing, the way I do when painting my pictures?"*

Bette's question resulted in her taking to work a small bottle filled with a paint and water mixture. Bette's 'miracle mixture' made it easy to cover typing errors.



© Daniel Krasny/Shutterstock

It wasn't long before she was selling her correction fluid to hundreds of secretaries. Later, in 1980, Bette sold her company 'Liquid Paper' for £39 million!

## Innovative breakthrough ideas start with 'WHY'...

Warren Berger, in his book 'A More Beautiful Question', has uncovered a 3-question formula. A formula that goes a long way to explaining how some of the best business ideas and innovations have been created.

Like Jennifer Land (the 3-year-old) you start the 3-step breakthrough question formula with a 'WHY' question.

Polaroid, Liquid Paper and many other inspired and profoundly valuable innovations start when you:

### 1. Ask a 'WHY' question

'WHY' wakes you up so that you become aware of and understand the problem.

***"Innovative questioners, when faced with situations that are less than ideal, inquire as to why, trying to figure out what's lacking."*** – Warren Berger

Joe Gebbia and Brian Chesky were struggling to pay the rent on their San Francisco apartment. At the same time newspapers were reporting on the lack of hotel beds in the city... So what question would you ask given these two facts? How about asking...

***"Why do people coming to our town have so much trouble getting a hotel room?"***

Joe and Brian were problem finding with this question.

And so was born the idea of 'air bed and breakfast'. It's now called Airbnb and is valued at more than £20 billion.

***"...find a problem before others do, and then successfully answer the questions surrounding that problem"***.

– Warren Berger

For more examples of breakthrough 'WHY' questions download the support tools – see back page.

The 'WHY' stage is about seeing and understanding the problem.

### 2. Ask a 'WHAT IF' question

A 'WHAT IF' question starts you thinking about possible solutions.

The 'WHAT IF' stage is about imagining. ***"What if I paint over my mistakes when typing, the way I do when painting?"***

Bette jumped straight into working out possibilities by asking "What if I could..."

### 3. Ask a 'HOW' question

A 'HOW' question signposts, stimulates and prompts you to act on the possibilities and solutions you dream up.

The 'HOW' stage is about doing, testing, prototyping.

Put them together and here's what's possible...

## ...in just 2 years a handful of questions creates Airbnb

Why? What if? How? All contributed to the creation of Airbnb – a business that now generates over £2 billion in sales revenue.

Here are some of the questions two of the founders asked in 2007:

***"How are we going to pay the rent?"***

They had no jobs and no money and were struggling to keep a roof over their heads.

***"Why can't we find a place for these people to crash for a night or two?"***

The city hotels were jam-packed because of a conference in their city of San Francisco.

***"Why not our place?"***

***"...and what if we provide more than just a mattress to sleep on?"***

They expanded the original thoughts to include a modest breakfast as well as the blow-up mattresses they used.

### ***"What if we create our own website?"***

Instead of advertising their place they built a website (they both had design backgrounds).

***"Why not make a business out of this?"***

***"What if we could create this same experience in every major city?"***

The challenge for the business was that according to traditional thinking and the views of investors, no one would want to stay in someone else's bed.

But Joe and Brian had experienced both sides of the problem – finding a bed AND needing money but with a bed to rent. They wouldn't be put off. And so, another 'WHAT IF' question sent them to Denver:

***"What if we take this idea on the road and test it in another city?"***

In 2008, Denver had a Democratic presidential convention, and a shortage of hotel rooms. And with a little clever PR and news coverage the boys proved that it worked in 2 cities!

A year later they achieved more than 1 million bookings and had received more than £80 million from investors.

## Can it really be this simple?

It can. But few people take questions seriously enough.

Few people take time out to simply generate a whole raft of questions about their business, their customer experiences or the future of their products and services.

So why not open your diary now and block off half a day or a couple of hours away from work. And use this 'time-out' to build a list of questions like those the boys at Airbnb did in 2007. You'll then have started...

If a naive 3-year-old can stimulate a multi-billion-pound business who knows what your questions can inspire?

Book your time-out now and apply this 3-question formula to your business, your thinking and your actions!

## TIME TO DISAGREE:

**“Me and my team know our industry and know what we’re doing, so how come we can’t achieve breakthrough results?”**

Berger puts it best:

*“...many people overestimate their knowledge, put too much faith in their gut instinct, and walk around convinced they have more answers than they actually do. If you feel this way, you’re less likely to ask questions.”*

He then helpfully points out how the British director at the innovation firm IDEO helps businesses achieve breakthroughs:

*“I position myself relentlessly as an idiot (or like a 3-year-old) at IDEO, and that’s not a negative it’s a positive because being comfortable not knowing – that’s the first part of being able to question.”*

Possibly the most well-respected business advisor of the last 50 years is Peter Drucker. He reckons:

*“My greatest strength as a consultant is to be ignorant and ask a few questions.”*

Asking naïve or ‘beginner’s mind’ (3-year-old’s) questions puts you on the road to creative breakthrough questions.

Why not put a ‘stranger’ in the room when you start asking the ‘WHY’ questions about your business and your customers and your products? This will help you step back. Please let us know if we can help you with this. You can also download (from the back page) the powerful question checklist that helps you ask breakthrough questions.

### Use the Business Bitesize Support Tools And Resources

to help you make the most of this edition of Business Bitesize – go here: [www.businessbitesize.com/anthony\\_russel](http://www.businessbitesize.com/anthony_russel) to download these

## “Isn’t asking all these questions just a big navel-gazing exercise?”

You’re right to challenge the possible time wasted when taking a ‘time-out’ for a questions exercise.

But the reality for most business owners is they are swamped by the sheer volume of stuff that needs doing day-in, day-out. Being this overloaded is not conducive to creative or innovative thinking.

So, it pays to step back and do some creative thinking by asking some well-structured questions. A good starting point being:

**“What questions should we be asking ourselves?”**

When Jim Hackett retired from Steelcase, he’d grown it into the world’s largest office furniture company. He’d managed a profound restructure and saved it from extinction! Hackett believes:

**“There is an over celebration of getting things done...”**

**...we have to train ourselves to ask questions. We have to discipline ourselves to do it.”**

Discipline yourself to a regular ‘time-out’ for question creation.

## “Please tell me more”

In Warren Berger’s brilliant book – A More Beautiful Question – you’ll discover deep insights into the power of breakthrough questions.

Berger shows how our time at school almost beats out of us the child-like skill of asking great questions. He also shows how powerful and how relatively simple it is to start asking challenging questions. Questions that just might deliver you and your business a valuable and lasting breakthrough.

So, if you’d like a breakthrough result for your business we recommend diving into this valuable book.



**Get Your Bitesize Support Tools Now**

## Your feedback is

**important to us.** We’d love to know what you think of this edition of Business Bitesize and how you use it or plan to use it. Also we’d welcome your suggestions for future editions of Business Bitesize. To give us your thoughts please use the simple feedback form here: [www.businessbitesize.com/anthony\\_russel](http://www.businessbitesize.com/anthony_russel)



# 4 helping hands for you...

It’s easy to admire breakthrough businesses like Uber and Airbnb.

But what if you could create your own breakthrough idea for your business?

Warren Berger’s research points to a simple 3-question formula you and I can apply to our businesses, our products and our services.

Why not take a little time out and give this 3-question formula a go?

- 1. Step back from the ‘coalface’ of running your business and go problem finding**
- 2. Create a whole series of ‘WHY’ questions to find a problem worth tackling in your business**
- 3. Next pose some ‘WHAT IF’ questions to generate creative options**
- 4. Having found the problem and created options now it’s time to work out ‘HOW’ - prototype and test your ideas as fast as you can**

## ULTIMATE ARGUMENT: “How do I know that the 3-question process will work for me and my business?”

One of the key insights from Warren Berger’s research is that the successful innovators are great at prototyping, testing and trialling.

Why not take a leaf from the book and give the 3-question formula a try?

Yes, the formula is simple but isn’t necessarily easy. Polaroid, Liquid Paper and Airbnb all took months or years to mature into sellable propositions. So please take the long view AND take the first step.

Take some time out and start asking yourself the ‘WHY’ question. Even better why not set about creating a whole series of ‘WHY’ questions and then filter and fine-tune the best ones to use.

**STOP:** working at your ‘coalface’ and take time out to ask breakthrough questions

**START:** by asking ‘WHY’ so that you find a problem worth fixing



## Your next steps:

Busy being busy gets things done but doesn't get you a breakthrough result in your business.

If Polaroid, Liquid Paper, Gatorade, Airbnb and many more breakthrough business ideas start with questions it clearly pays to ask more questions too.

And so why not get a breakthrough for your business, use the proven 3-question formula so that you and your colleagues ask the simple, valuable and innovative questions.

## Start by stepping back from your 'coalface'

Have yourself a 'time-out', away from the day-to-day hustle and bustle of your business. Why not get an outsider involved or a 3-year-old!

And build yourself a list of questions using the 3-question formula laid out in Warren Berger's brilliant book.

'WHY...?'

'WHAT IF...?'

'HOW...?'

## More tools and information for you:

Download the question checklist to help you get started using the URL link in the box below.

# Get yourself a business breakthrough – start asking 'why', 'what if' and 'how'

Where do the breakthrough ideas come from? How come we haven't yet come up with ours, you know the one idea that delivers a breath-taking result for our business or kick-starts a new business?

Chances are you've been too busy being busy, doing everything that just needs doing to keep your business going. Time to invest a few short hours in a few questions – just like the breakthrough business owners in this report have done.

### 1. Drag yourself away from the 'coalface' of running your business – step back and go problem finding.

Just like Edwin Land did going on holiday with his 3-year-old daughter. If you prefer just block-off a couple of hours away from work and use the question checklist from the downloadable tools (see below) to help you. Perhaps get an outsider involved too.

### 2. Write down a whole series of 'WHY' questions to seek out a problem worth tackling in your business.

You can then filter and fine-tune the questions and see which questions help you better to see then understand one or two problems worth further investigation.

### 3. Then pose some possibility questions to generate options. Ask 'WHAT IF' questions to dream up creative options, possibilities, alternatives. Just like Brian and Joe did as they set up Airbnb. Just like Bette Nesmith Graham did when imagining painting over typing errors to then create Liquid Paper.

### 4. Make it happen next. Having found the problem and created options now it's time to prototype and test your ideas as fast as you can. Remember innovation is rarely an overnight success. Edwin Land took 5 years to launch his first Polaroid, Airbnb took 2 years before they got their breakthrough investors to commit. But they got started fast.

Use the insights in this Bitesize report to help you make more of the power of breakthrough questions and use the additional resources you'll find in the downloadable tools to help you more.

**YOUR SUPPORT TOOLS ARE HERE: Go to the link below and you'll find a selection of practical support tools to help you get a deeper understanding of asking breakthrough questions so that you too can achieve a breath-taking result for your business.**

**Find the support tools to help you here - [www.businessbitesize.com/anthony\\_russel](http://www.businessbitesize.com/anthony_russel)**

**business  
bitesize**



business breakthroughs  
in minutes



## Are you ready to ask a breakthrough question and get a breath-taking result for your business?

When thinking about breakthrough questions for your business, ask yourself the following question:

How often are you planning 'time-out' away from your normal place of work to work on breakthrough questions?

### CONTENTS:

1. The one 'BREAKTHROUGH' question you must ask to make sure you tap into the power of posing the perfect question for your business:
2. Breakthrough questions that all resulted in breakthrough business ideas...
3. The Breakthrough Question checklist – guides your thinking when working on your next breakthrough
4. Breakthrough questions work even when the going gets really tough...
5. The books and resources to help you put breakthrough questions to work in your business

**STOP** working at your 'coalface' and take a 'time-out' to ask breakthrough questions

**START** by asking 'WHY' so that you find a problem worth fixing

### 1. The one 'BREAKTHROUGH' question you must ask to make sure you tap into the power of posing the perfect question for your business:

How often are you planning 'time-out' away from your normal place of work to work on breakthrough questions?

Where is the value in this question?

In an ever-changing business world avoiding change is like standing on a railway line waiting for the train to come and hit you. Just like Blockbuster did, just like Kodak did and just like many retailers did (Woolworth, HMV, Poundland, Toys R Us, Maplin) – ignoring the future.

The value in this question prompts you to challenge your current commitment to getting the most done every day at the 'coalface' of your work. Yes this is productive for today but does little to ensure your business is relevant to your customers in the future.

The question is challenging you to plan a 'time-out' so that you can start a process of breakthrough questions – using the breakthrough question formula recommended by the 'Right Question Institute' <https://rightquestion.org>

Remember, Airbnb, Polaroid, Liquid Paper and many other business creations came from the same breakthrough questioning process – so why not put this same process to work for you and your business.

Below you'll find exercises and insights to share with your team, so that you too can tap into the power of asking breakthrough questions and seeing what you come up with and where it can lead. Then you'll be pro-actively working on the future success of your business not just getting today's work done and dusted.

**IMPORTANT:** This question prompts you to set a day and time for working on breakthrough questions that could secure the future of your business or create a new business idea worth prototyping.

It's just so easy to get consumed by the day-to-day trauma, excitement and need to 'get stuff done'. One thing that is easy to put off (constantly) is investing time, effort and energy in the future of your business. This is work – just a different type of work, best done away from the office or workshop and only happens when you plan in a day and time for it to happen.

## 2. Breakthrough questions that all resulted in breakthrough business ideas...

Sometimes it pays to get a little bit of inspiration.

Here are some examples of worthwhile questions that have resulted in business success:

### Breakthrough **'WHY'** questions:

*"Why aren't all enterprise software applications built like Amazon and Ebay?"* asked by Marc Benioff while on vacation swimming with Dolphins in Hawaii.

Benioff went on to launch Salesforce.com that now does more than £8 billion in annual sales.

*"Why aren't players urinating more after the games?"* asked by Dwayne Douglas, an American football coach, in 1965.

The question resulted in the creation of Gatorade which now has annual sales of more than £4 billion.

*"Why doesn't someone create a device to remove the snow (from my windscreen)?"* asked by Mary Anderson of her streetcar driver battling through the New York snow in 1902.

Mary went on to design the windscreen wiper.

*"If they can put a man on the moon why can't they make a decent foot?"* asked Van Phillips when he was struggling with his clumsy prosthetic foot (after losing his lower leg in a speedboat accident).

Van Phillips went on to create the 'blade' you now see being used in the para-Olympics.

### Breakthrough **'WHAT IF'** questions:

*"Why can't we graphically encode product data?"*

This question led to student, Joseph Woodland, asking:- **"What if Morse Code could be adapted graphically?"**

This led to the 1848 patent for the bar code, now being used universally across the globe.

*"Why aren't charitable efforts succeeding in getting water to where it's most needed?"*

A question asked by actor Matt Damon and Gary White who teamed up with at Water.org to tackle water shortages for 1 billion people. They went on to ask:

**"What if local communities could have the means to create their own sources of water?"**

A programme by Water.org makes small loans (mostly to women) and has them developing their own ways and means of accessing water – it's helped more than a million people so far.

Jack Dorsey (co-founder of Twitter) ended up partnering with his friend (an independent trader) who'd just lost a £1900 sale because he couldn't accept a credit card and asked:

*"Why is it that only companies are able to accept credit cards and not independent traders?"*

This morphed into the question:

**"What if all you needed to swipe a credit card was a smart phone or tablet?"**

The result a business called 'Square' – read about it in the Guardian here -

<https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2017/mar/28/twitter-jack-dorsey-card-payments-company-square-enters-uk-market>



### Breakthrough **‘HOW’** questions:

*“**How** can we get those with money to pay more for the ambulance service?”*

This question was asked after Shaffi Mather had asked the question:

*“Why can’t India have an emergency ambulance service like the US or the UK?”*

He’d set up the ambulance service on a pay ‘what you can honour’ basis, but everyone claimed they were low income! So they changed the system and now charge more to go to more expensive hospitals and charge less to go to cheaper hospitals. Mather’s service has become the largest ambulance service in India serving over 2 million people.

*“**How** do you make a hard-boiled egg’s shell disappear?”*

Because Betsy Kaufman made devilled eggs for a living, peeling eggs was work that took time and often resulted in scrapping an egg that wouldn’t peel. She also asked:

*“What if you could hard-boil an egg and not have shells to peel?”*

This question morphed into:

*“What if you could boil an egg in a hard-boiled egg shape, but with the shell already off?”*

You can now buy ‘eggies’ which enable you to do just this – saving time and wasted eggs too!

*“**How** would you integrate speed-dating into the work you do or the problem you’re faced with?”*

*“**How** would IKEA tackle this problem?”*

*“**How** would J.K. Rowling or Jay-Z approach this issue?”*

You can bring creative questions about both ‘HOW’ and ‘WHAT IF’ by asking questions from another’s perspective.

*“**How** would Steve Jobs, Alan Sugar, Richard Branson, Amazon, Waitrose, Rolls Royce handle the issue?”*

### 3. The Breakthrough Question checklist – guides your thinking when working on your next breakthrough

It's very easy to take questions for granted, after all it's something you do every day without thinking.

However, asking a breakthrough question isn't something we do every day and so it pays to follow a proven process for this.

The checklist below has been adapted from the 'Right Question Institute' – it took them ten years to develop and fine-tune this list – why not give it a go and see how well it works for you?

a. <b>Design a question focus</b>	"Technology is going to be more important in our industry"
b. <b>Produce questions</b>	No debating the merit of questions; no answering questions; write down every question; change any statements into questions.
c. <b>Improve your questions</b>	Turn open questions (what, where, when, how, who, why) into closed questions that get a 'no' or 'yes' answer. Turn closed questions into open questions.
d. <b>Prioritise your questions</b>	Work together to work out your favourite, most impactful, questions.
e. <b>Decide on next steps</b>	What actions do you take on the best 3 questions – plan diary time for action.
f. <b>Reflect on what you've learned</b>	After you've worked through the questions' process, discuss what lessons or insights you've gained from the process and the questions created.

And why not check out what the Right Question Institute is doing? This process started out as a methodology to help adults ask better questions of 'people in power'. It has since proved its value in schools too, helping children learn the skills of asking great questions. It can also be easily and effectively applied to our world of business.

<https://rightquestion.org/what-we-do/>

#### **4. Breakthrough questions work even when the going gets really tough...**

Jerry K. Myers, who had been brought in to lead 'Steelcase', quit the job after three years. His departure came as Steelcase reported a \$70 million loss for the year.

Jim Hackett then took over the reins at the end of 1994 where he found he had his hands full!

Hackett took over from Myers and had to ask some challenging questions and make hard decisions to ensure the survival and continuity of what was once the largest office furniture producer in the USA. He even had to cut the job that the best man at his wedding was doing at Steelcase!

You can read the short but enlightening story of Hackett's work as CEO at Steelcase here –

[https://www.mlive.com/business/west-michigan/index.ssf/2014/01/steelcase\\_ceo\\_jim\\_hacketts\\_rem.html](https://www.mlive.com/business/west-michigan/index.ssf/2014/01/steelcase_ceo_jim_hacketts_rem.html)

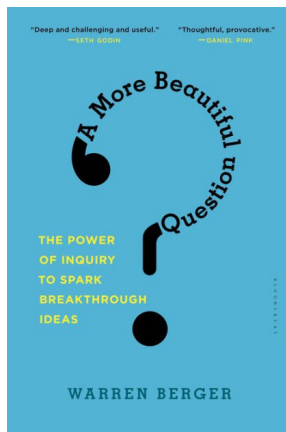
There's one quote worth emphasising in this article:

*"He asked a lot of questions. The best way to learn is to listen, not just talk. Jim (Hackett) knows how to listen very intently."*

Steelcase made a profit of \$56.7 million on sales of \$2.75 billion in 2012.

### 5. The book and resources to help you and your team better apply breakthrough questions to your business

Check out the book by Warren Berger called 'A More Beautiful Question – The Power of Enquiry to Spark Breakthrough Ideas' that accompanies this Business Breakthrough and the supporting tools and resources.

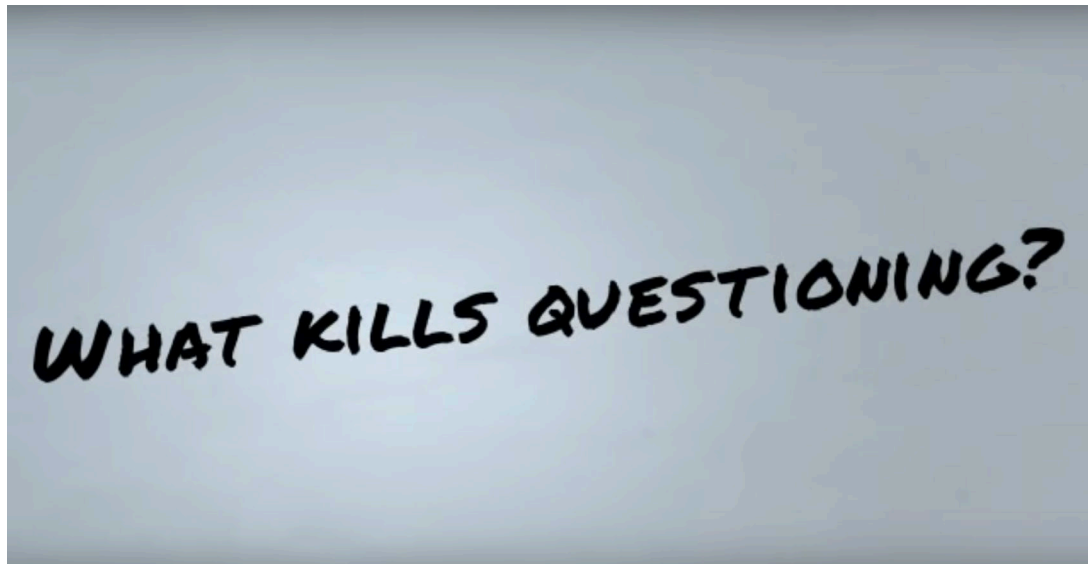


*Daniel Pink, New York Times bestselling author of 'DRIVE' and 'TO SELL IS HUMAN' writes about Berger's book:*

"We know that the art of asking questions is at the heart of discovery in science, philosophy and medicine - so why don't we extend that power to all areas of our lives? The thoughtful, provocative questions Warren Berger raises in this book are indeed the kind of 'beautiful questions' that can help us identify the right problems and generate creative solutions"

*You can find a copy of the book here –*  
<http://bit.ly/beautifulquestionwb>

Check out this 3 minute overview and challenge your thinking about how come we don't ask enough great questions - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dey1Rm5gUxw>



And if you prefer to watch the author unlock his insights into breakthrough questions check out this 60 minute video crammed with valuable insights  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Scu-4xhYIVc>