

Questions That Matter

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The only way to find the right answers is to start by asking the right questions. The right questions are difficult to ask though, because they require us to look deeper and more meaningfully into ourselves. That is why most of us start off with what we want the answer to be and then create a question that leads to that answer. That approach often makes us feel better, but it doesn't make us any better.

For instance, you may feel that your brilliance is underappreciated. You could ask yourself if you are really as smart as you think you are. That is a tough question to face, however, and requires some real honesty and self-reflection. It is much easier to conclude you are smart and instead ask a question like, "Why doesn't the world understand my genius?" You see how easy that is? Keep your conclusion and ask a question that fits what you already believe. That is how we create the lies we tell ourselves.

Communities do much the same thing. When youth are leaving the community, or the economy is in decline, or when crime is on the rise, the natural question that gets asked is, "What are we going to do about it?" Most communities completely miss the most important question: Why? Why are the youth leaving? Why is the economy in decline? Why is crime on the rise? Until you know why, the solutions and the strategies won't fix anything, because they will be exercises on paper rather than an antidote to the root cause of the problem.

Starting with "why" is incredibly important for addressing the real issues and finding real success, but there are other questions that are equally important if you are going to really make your community better. It is important to ask, and engage in a public discussion, about your community's identity. Who is your community? Asking this question over time in a public fashion allows you to gather meta-data on who the community really is through those public expressions. The truth always comes out with the right question.

The follow up question is: What do you realistically want to become? Too many communities come up with grand dreams, but they don't have the resources, assets, or will-power to invest in what it takes to get there. Some communities undertake asset reviews to see if they have what is required to physically fulfill their desired goals. For instance, if you want to be a tourist destination, do you have what tourists would come to see? Also, few communities ask how much they are willing to suffer for their dream. Asking them that question will confirm how committed the community is, and their likelihood of success.

The last question is about action and accountability, and few people really want to ask that one out loud. The reason is that the one who asks the question is the one who is given the responsibility, and if no one asks the question, then it is presumed those "in charge" will own the responsibility. Yet building success in a community is not the responsibility of elected officials and top administrators alone. It takes an entire community working to find success. So, you need to know who will take the lead, who will be involved, and who will need to help.

You should also determine what you are going to do to help. Yes, you. I know, you might not have any power or authority, or be directly involved in the situation, but you can always do something. It may be serving as a champion or cheerleader to counter those who disparage the work being done, or

contributing when you are called upon to perform a task, or could simply involve staying out of the way. Regardless, there is always a way to contribute to the success of your community. If nothing else, be prepared to be asked some tough questions that require real reflection and real answers. Real change happens when we are prepared to face the hard questions, because those are the questions that really matter.

This syndicated content is provided by Doug Griffiths, best-selling author and chief community builder at 13 Ways, a company with a mission to push communities to face their challenges to find their unique path to success. For more information visit www.13ways.ca, or we can start the conversation at info@13ways.ca.