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| **Use Catalytic Questioning to Solve Significant Problems****Hal Gregersen** ([@HalGregersen](http://leadingwithquestions.us3.list-manage.com/track/click?u=4320a50bc672b2862b6f985c0&id=9c658a586d&e=f8f9a9fe45)) is the Abu Dhabi Commercial Bank Chaired Professor of Innovation and Leadership at[INSEAD](http://leadingwithquestions.us3.list-manage.com/track/click?u=4320a50bc672b2862b6f985c0&id=abc2b088e9&e=f8f9a9fe45). He is coauthor of the book [The Innovator’s DNA](http://leadingwithquestions.us3.list-manage1.com/track/click?u=4320a50bc672b2862b6f985c0&id=aa47608bf0&e=f8f9a9fe45), founder of the [4-24 Project](http://leadingwithquestions.us3.list-manage.com/track/click?u=4320a50bc672b2862b6f985c0&id=e20bc1e610&e=f8f9a9fe45), and a frequent [**Speaker**](http://leadingwithquestions.us3.list-manage.com/track/click?u=4320a50bc672b2862b6f985c0&id=45270fb5f0&e=f8f9a9fe45) on leading innovation and change.For almost twenty years, I have refined a systematic approach to uncovering the right questions—those that start to unlock entirely different solutions and perspectives—with hundreds of teams around the world. **Catalytic Questioning** incorporates five simple, unconventional steps to help change our questions — and creatively solve significant problems both in our personal and professional lives:**Step 1:**Find a white board or flip chart where your team can do its question-centric work (standing up seems to jump start better questions than sitting down). Step back, take a deep breath, and check your assumptions at the door. Question-centric leaders like Pierre Omidyar, founder and chairman of eBay, consistently work at “wiping the mental slate clean,” with fresh eyes through fresh questions.**Step 2:**Pick a problem that your team cares about intellectually and emotionally. Engaging head and heart matter. Double check to make sure that the problem (opportunity) is one that you honestly don’t have an answer to. It makes the quest much more intriguing.**Step 3:** “Question everything!” Engage in pure question talk, with one team member writing down each question verbatim. This gives everyone the chance (especially introverts) to see each question, reflect a bit, and then create better ones. Don’t give preambles to the questions and don’t devote any time or energy to answering them. Just ask. As many questions as you can. Go for 50, even 75. But don’t give up when your mind goes blank around question 35. Savor the momentary dead space and continue the search for better, more provocative questions, which will come with patience and persistence. It usually takes 10 to 20 minutes to exhaust a group’s questioning capacity. Push for exhaustion.**Step 4:**Step back and decide which questions seem most “catalytic,” or hold the most potential for disrupting the status quo. Focus on three or four questions that truly matter that your team honestly can’t answer but is ready and willing to investigate..**Step 5:**Find answers. Questions might be clever, but they rarely produce positive impacts. If you prefer observing the world to get answers, go out and make some systematic observations. If you love to network for new ideas, go talk to people who don’t think or act like you (those from a different industry or country-of-origin are prime candidates) to get diverse responses to the questions. If you get new ideas by experimenting, work with a series of rapid prototypes—fast, cheap, virtual experiments to get instant feedback about which potential solutions matter most. Regroup and use the best traditional brainstorming techniques to leverage all your new input into creating better solutions. If needed, engage the Catalytic Questioning process again to help deliver even deeper insight, and ultimately better solutions.**Becoming a Question Catalyst**At a recent World Economic Forum workshop, this five-step Catalytic Questioning process took 24 minutes. Most participants agreed that asking nothing but questions was a surprisingly powerful tool for revealing innovative solutions.  |