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Book Review: QBQ! The Question Behind the Question

[amtap book:isbn=0399152334]

Personal responsibility isn't a new topic. It is a core topic for every self help and business guru's system. Whether you are an entrepreneur or trying to make changes in your personal life responsibility is a key to success.

In QBQ John Miller takes a unique approach to this old topic. He looks at the questions we ask continuously throughout the day. Some we ask out loud: "When are you finally going to finish your project?" Some we ask ourselves: "Why does my boss always say one thing and do another?"

These questions are at the root of personal responsibility. A powerful question leads to action and improvement. A weak question leads to blame and procrastination. By becoming conscious of our internal and external dialog we become more effective. We become change agents. We become better leaders.

In a nutshell we make better choices moment to moment by asking better questions.

3 Guidelines to good questions

- The question must begin with a "what" or "how"
 - Leads to solutions.
 - Don't ask why: Why is the word of victims. Why me? Why didn't he finish on time? Why doesn't he spend more time on my needs? This does nothing to solve the problem. It only adds to stress and worry.
 - Don't ask when: When implies we have no control over the schedule. This leads to a loss of control and to procrastination.
 - Don't ask Who: Who is the language of blame. You are basically looking for a scapegoat and it leads to finger pointing. John uses the old phrase "a poor sailor blames the wind." This could be changed to fit any situation. For example, "a poor manager blames his workers."
- The question must contain an I
 - I can change only me: The key is to focus on what you can control. Your circle of influence begins with yourself. This is where you have the most influence. You can't change others. You often can't control events. It is only our thoughts and actions that we can really control.
 - Take ownership of the situation. Fix the problem and stop trying to blame others.
 - Have integrity: your actions and words must match. This means that you must do what you are asking of your employees. Also, what you say in the office and in your personal life need to match. If you can't, you either need to enact change or find another place to work. Believe or leave. You must have integrity. What you say in the office and away need to match.
- The question must focus on action
 - People avoid action due to the perceived risk. Remember, there is risk in inaction as well.
 - Action solves the problem and moves things forward.
 - Action leads to learning and growth.
 - Action leads us toward solutions while inaction holds us in the past
 - Action requires courage while inaction is caused by fear.
 - Action builds confidence while inaction destroys it.

What if I'm not in a leadership position?

Leadership begins with personal accountability. He asserts that leaders can be found at all levels. It is something we see in sports all the time. There is often a critical player that helps make everyone else better. It is often a mid level role player, not the star or the team captain.

We see the same things in the business world as well. Look in any group and someone always stands out. This person is usually the go to guy (or gal) in the department. The interesting thing is that seniority is not the main factor. It is the person who tends to find solutions.

In conclusion

I recommend this book to anyone looking to be more effective or who wants to be a better leader. All in all this is a well written book. The ideas are thought provoking and can be easily applied to all areas of your life. While it is a quick read John comprehensively covers the topic.

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