

BRAIN CAPITAL

UNLEASH YOUR BRAIN

The Chief Question Officer® Advantage

Better Thinking Through Better Questions

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Originator of Question Thinking™

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The Chief Question Officer[®] Advantage

Better thinking through better questions

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ORIGINATOR OF QUESTION THINKING™

MOST ORGANISATIONS HAVE CEOs, CFOs, CLOs, COOs and other such functions. We believe that an informal C-level designation, that of Chief Question Officer, can have an empowering impact throughout an entire organisation. Such individuals, deeply skilled in question-based tools and practices, might come from training and development, HR, or even be Chief Learning Officers. Effective questioning can be the difference that makes the advantageous difference for building a positive, innovative, and productive corporate culture.

Fostering Inquiring Cultures

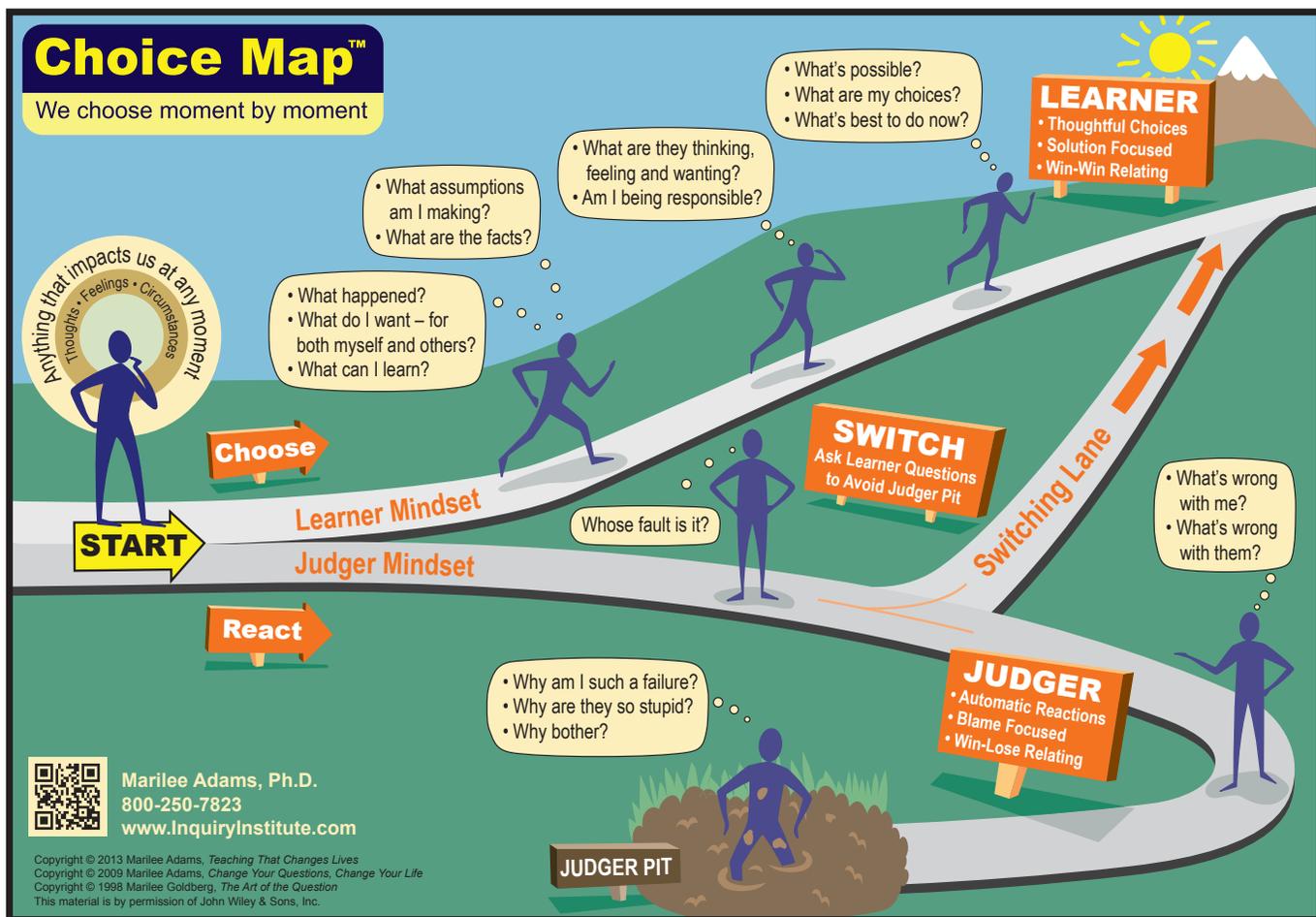
Traditionally, we've thought of people in the C-suite as having all the answers.

But in today's complex, fast-paced world, what's needed is better thinking and more questions. The smartest, most innovative and productive organisations, and the most talented leaders and managers, are successful not because they have quick answers but

because they ask constructive questions of themselves and others, thereby creating inquiring cultures. These environments are highly thoughtful and strategic, fostering the most innovations and breakthroughs in products, services, and even operations.

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Choice Map



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Organisations with strong inquiring cultures are dynamic, agile, collaborative, and creative, qualities that have a positive influence on every individual, team, project, and goal. Question-driven cultures have the capacity to respond swiftly and effectively to problems inside the organisation while staying ahead of the

curve in planning for external challenges and opportunities.

Asking questions is essential for opening new possibilities for virtually every goal and function, whether it's gathering information, building relationships, thinking objectively, or coordinating supply chain activities. Skilful questioning is also fundamental

for resolving breakdowns, making tough decisions, innovating, and managing change.

Right Answers Through Right Questions

Getting the “right” answers means starting with the “right” questions. But how do we find the right questions?

The first step is learning to distinguish between questions that lead to success and questions that can prevent success or even cause backsliding. Questions for success are generated from our Learner mindsets, not our Judger mindsets.

Learner questions predictably cause new openings for action. Breakthrough answers, after all, depend on provocative new questions. When we ask Learner questions, we are responsive to life's circumstances, leading to better critical, creative, and collaborative thinking, more positive and generative solutions, and relating in win-win ways. Learner questions typically presuppose fresh possibilities, a positive future, and abundant resources. They are never questions to which we already know the answer.

And then there are “Judger” questions. These questions close doors, resulting in detours, missed goals, and

costly errors. They can lead to low morale, staying stuck in “status quo” thinking, conflict, win-lose relating, and a diminished ability to innovate. They focus attention on problems rather than solutions, presupposing an orientation to the past, scarcity, and pessimistic consequences. Judger questions may be focused either internally or externally, aimed at others or at ourselves, often resulting in negative moods and in denying responsibility and searching for blame. The Judger mindset is reactive rather than proactive and leads to “surviving” rather than thriving.

The Choice Map illustrates Learner and Judger questions, the mindsets they characterise, and the predictable destinations and outcomes of each.

Winning Applications

Carmella Granado, a Senior Director of Organizational Effectiveness and Leadership at Flextronics, along with General Manager Matt Zimmer, used these ideas and practices to turn around a site whose performance was lowest among the 14 in their division. Utilising skills and tools that Carmella gained in our Chief Question Officer training programme and from my book *Change Your Questions, Change Your Life*, they instituted weekly group coaching sessions that helped leaders distinguish

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between Learner and Judger mindsets and questions. They also made extensive use of one of the most powerful Learner tools, Q-Storming®, which is an advanced form of brainstorming with questions. Soon line managers were asking more Learner questions and listening less judgmentally, which led to designing and implementing new business procedures that improved quality and customer satisfaction. Within three months, they created an inquiring “Learner culture” and an exemplary turnaround. The site moved into the #1 position in their division and their success was ultimately described in the Wharton Business School newsletter. ■

About the Author

Dr. Marilee Adams, Ph.D. is founder and president of the Inquiry Institute and author of the international bestselling book, *Change Your Questions, Change Your Life: 10 Powerful Tools for Life and Work*. Visit her website to access the Wharton Newsletter and to read a description of the Chief Question Officer Certificate Program: www.InquiryInstitute.com.

