The Question Matrix

	Why	How	Who	What	When	Where
Has / Have / Happened to	Backgrounders		Fact finders			
Is / Are						
Did / Do						
Might	Experimenters		Hypothesizers			
Could / Can / If						
Would / Will	Catalyzers					
Should / Must						

Using the Question Matrix

The best questions come from curiosity. But this relationship is cyclical: we ask questions when we are curious but we also become curious by asking questions. That is *we can behave our way into curiosity* instead of waiting to feel it. The question matrix is a tool to generate questions to help you become more curious.

The Goal
The goal is to find a generate a variety of questions and then select the one that is the most energizing: the one that makes you the most curious!

Judea Pearl wrote, "You cannot answer a question that you cannot ask, and you cannot ask a question that you have no words for" (*The Book of Why*). The Question Matrix gives you the words to build your questions. You can see that you create questions by combining the interrogative words from the top row of the matrix with the additional words from the far left column. These words form a question stem that you then complete with your own words. There is one exception: with the "experimenter" questions, you can combine the column with the row or just use the column. For example, you can try building a question with "why + might" ("Why might we explore new partnerships?") or you could just create a question with "might" ("Might we find a new set of clients to partner with?").

Avoid the Catalyzer Loop

First, we need to be aware that some of the questions we ask can create a trap. We often trap ourselves with questions that disable curiosity by creating a sense of an imperative – the answers obligate us to a course of action. These are typically questions like: <u>What should</u> we do to satisfy our customers? <u>How would</u> our customers like us to proceed? Asking these "catalyzers" implies that an answer already exists. As a result, once we start asking we feel obligated to comply with the answer and exploration ceases. This can create an loop where we feel pressure to just find the right answer by asking versions of the same question (see figure below).

	Why	How	Who	What	When	Where
Has / Have / Happened to	Backgrounders		Fact finders			
Is / Are						
Did / Do						
Might	Experimenters		Hypothesizers			
Could / Can / If						
Would / Will	Catalyzers					
Should / Must						

Embrace New Questions

To avoid prematurely catalyzing action, we can use the matrix to spur us to ask New questions (the shape sort of looks like a backward "N"), moving from "fact finder" questions, to "backgrounder" questions, to "hypothesizer" questions, and then to "experimenter" questions. The questions are formed by combining the left column with the top row to create a question stem that you can then complete with information you know about the particular situation you want to be curious about.

	Why	How	Who	What	When	Where
Has / Have / Happened to	Backgrounders		Fact finders			
Is / Are		1		2		
Did / Do						
Might	Experimente		Hypothesizers			
Could / Can / If		4		3		
Would / Will	Catalyzers					
Should / Must		5				

The sequence follows how we naturally learn. We start with "backgrounders" they provide context. Then, "fact finders" help us gather more data. The next jump is to use "hypothesizers" to think about different ways to apply the data. This leads to "experimenters" which provide an opportunity to create new data. So this sequence moves from objective to subjective, from facts to useful fictions that help us discover new facts. Finally, "catalyzers" can then be used to help push the conversation forward.

Example

Let's walk through an example. Imagine you want to be more curious about what your clients might want from you in the

future. Here's a potential sequence of questions that might emerge from using the Question Matrix:

1. Backgrounders: Why did we have these successes or failures? How did we respond to these experiences?
2. Fact Finders: What have we done well in the past? When did we do the best? When did we fall short?
3. Hypothesizers: Where (in our process of working together) might we make changes to do even better? Who else could we include in a conversation to learn more about what you'll need in the future? What if we tried something completely different together – what might that look like?
4. Experimenters: How might we work differently together in the future? Why could we try something new? If* we collaborated in a new way, what more could we achieve? *Remember, with experimenters you can build questions by just using the top row words.
5. Catalyzers: How should we go forward? What will each of us commit to do to make this work?

A Few Additional Notes
- Using the Question Matrix can be especially useful to start a meeting, especially meetings that are meant to begin an innovation process, to explore a new strategy, or to develop a new client relationship.
- Don't stop with creating just 1 new question. In the example above (step #2) there are three "fact finder" questions , one starts with "What" and two start with "When." That might be enough but you can explore as many combinations as you can to find the one that energizes new exploration.
- It can be helpful to move back and forth between hypothesizers and experimenters. For example, you might actually create a question like "Why could we try something new?" and then that prompts the question "What if we tried something completely different together – what might that look like?" The order can be helpful but break it if needed.
- If you want, you can create questions by ignore the top row (Why, How, Who, etc.) and just make questions from the left column: Are we making the right choices? If we change our strategy, will we lose our customers? Should we try a new product mix?
- Follow your curiosity. If one quadrant generates a lot of energy, stay there.
- If working in a group, have each member generate at least one question per quadrant. Use post-its to work fast. Give each member 3 votes to vote for the most energizing

question.