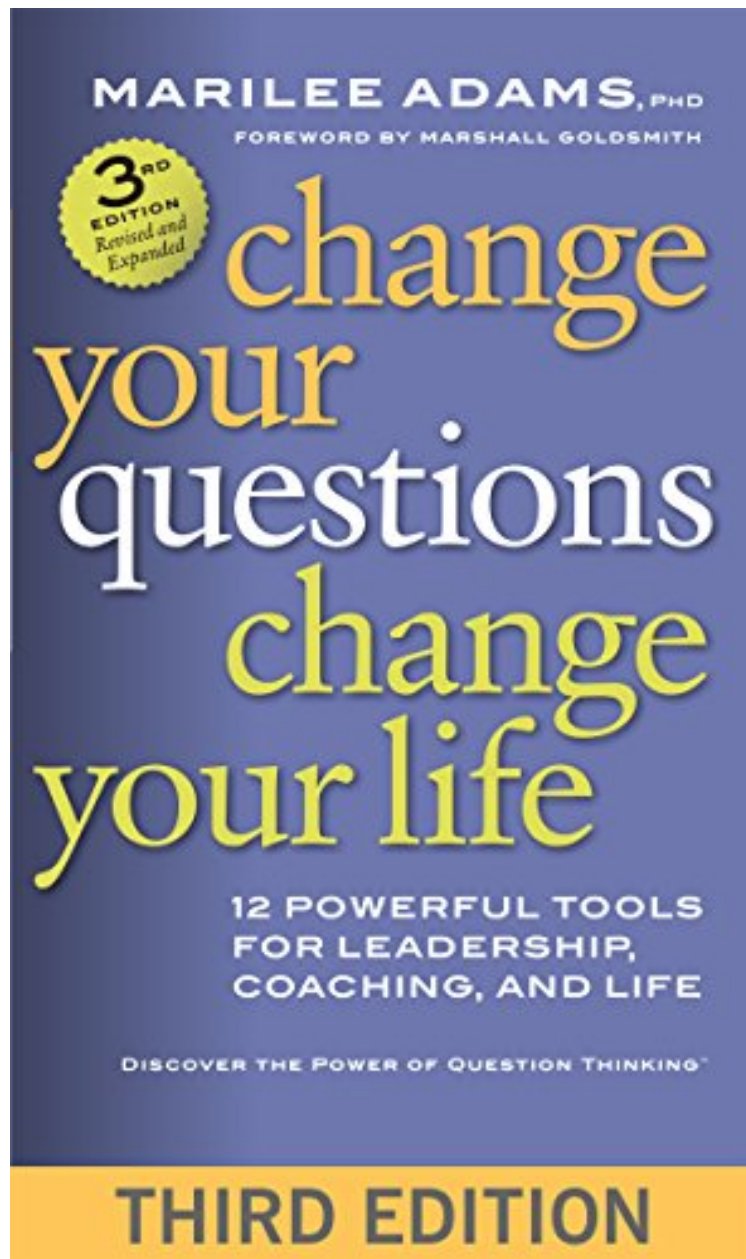


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Change Your Questions, Change Your Life: 12 Powerful Tools for Leadership, Coaching, and Life

Marilee G. Adams

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“As a fellow champion of the power of questioning, I consider Marilee Adams to be one of the pioneers in this field. The storytelling format makes the book a breeze to read, while the workbook at the end shows how practical her work really is.”—Warren Berger, author of *A More Beautiful Question* “Marilee's writings are by far the most profound articulation of the power of the question that I've come across. It's true: we live in worlds our questions create.” —David L. Cooperrider, PhD, Professor, Weatherhead School of Management, Case Western Reserve University “A must-read for every coach! It illuminates a deep truth—that the questions we ask ourselves shape our chances for success and satisfaction everywhere in our lives. *Change Your Questions* is both practical and transformational.” —Linda J. Page, PhD, founder and President, Adler International Learning, and coauthor with David Rock of *Coaching with the Brain in Mind* “Our complex world demands that we ask different questions, but the power of habit throws us into the Judger Pit. Dr. Adams shows us how to get out of the Judger Pit and stay out—and how to improve our relationships, our work, and our lives with the different questions we ask.” —Jennifer Garvey Berger, PhD, coauthor of *Simple Habits for Complex Times* with Keith Johnston “It's hard to describe *Change Your Questions* without using superlatives such as life-changing, remarkable, and mind-opening. There's a reason this book has been an international bestseller . . . It has awakened readers to a new model of thinking, a new understanding of collaboration and communication . . . applicable in all aspects of life . . . It can uplift not only you, the reader, but everyone around you.” —G. Shawn Hunter, author of *Out Think* and cofounder and President, *MindScaling* “This groundbreaking work advances not only the way leaders think about leadership and coaching but how they approach life. It has opened doors for thousands of our Key Executive Leadership Program graduates, exposing them to a world of reflection, questioning, and professional and personal growth . . . transformational in every sense of the word!” —Patrick S. Malone, PhD, Director, Key Executive Leadership Programs, Department of Public Administration and Policy, American University “Question Thinking has led to a radical transformation in how our teams and leaders approach problems. It also made an immediate and sustained change in their behavior. In an organizational culture, the more that people can be taught these processes, the greater positive impact they can have on productivity and the bottom line.” —Carmella Granado, Senior Director, Organizational Effectiveness, *Flextronics* “*Change Your Questions* is an easy, fun story with profound and transformational possibilities . . . elegant, well-designed tools offer practical help for creating lasting and meaningful outcomes in every aspect of health care.” —David W. Moen, MD, Board Chair, *TeamMD* “This insightful approach to business and personal problem-solving is so powerful that it is surely destined to have a major impact in the business world.” —Kathy Leech, Executive Director, Corporate Brand and Advertising, *Comcast* “A wonderful contribution to the world of Action Learning!” —Bea Carson, PhD, cofounder and President, *World Institute for Action Learning* “*Change Your Questions* provides an invaluable road map for helping you truly understand the best way to get to the core of the issues you face. A high-impact read for every human resource and leadership development professional.” —Steve Miranda, Managing Director, ILR School, Cornell University “As a leadership coach and behavioral scientist, I know how essential it is for people to shift mindsets in order to change their behavior and their lives. Dr. Adams provides a simple and brilliant system for opening the mind so breakthroughs can occur.” —Marcia Reynolds, PsyD, author of *The Discomfort Zone* and Past President, International Coach Federation “Question Thinking offers patients, families, and clinicians a new paradigm for patient and relationship-centered care. This simple yet profound framework of questions has the potential to transform health

care.”—Cynda Hylton Rushton, PhD, RN, FAAN, Anne and George L. Bunting Professor of Clinical Ethics, Berman Institute of Bioethics and School of Nursing, and Professor of Nursing and Pediatrics, Johns Hopkins University “Change Your Questions resonates with me because it is not just about knowing the answers but knowing how to ask questions that can transform your life. Dr. Adams's methodology is foundational to everything I do with Appreciative Inquiry and SOAR—it aligns perfectly! Her Choice Map is a valuable resource for anyone who wants to learn the art of inquiry . . . The book contributes much to the fields of leadership and management . . . an easy and fun read with real-life examples and insightful wisdom to positively impact your life and the lives of those you lead.”—Jacqueline M. Stavros, PhD, Professor, Lawrence Technological University; creator of SOAR; and coeditor of The Appreciative Inquiry Handbook with David L. Cooperrider and Diana Kaplin Whitney “This book is an invitation to success for individuals and organizations . . . a surprisingly simple practice to move away from judgments that prevent success and toward learning that propels us to our goals . . . practical guidelines for learning organizations.”—Victoria J. Marsick, PhD, coauthor of Sculpting the Learning Organization and Professor of Adult Education, Teachers College, Columbia University “Change Your Questions is the rare book that I use almost every day. I recently asked Learner questions to quickly transform a delicate organizational situation that for a whole year had seemed intractable . . . The book changes paradigms, organizations, and lives. It's a classic!”—John McAuley, PhD, President and CEO, The Leadership Studio at Muskoka Woods “Marilee's work has been a key resource to the World Cafe; since its inception. 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There is no question that Marilee Adams's Change Your Questions is your go-to resource!”—David Goldsmith, President, Conversant “Dr. Adams's writings and her Question Thinking work have contributed significantly to our Kent State Leadership Development Program, which received a Leadership 500 Excellence Award among educational institutions. Our colleagues report many ‘lightbulb moments’ as a result of Change Your Questions and Dr. Adams's superb teaching skills. Question Thinking has totally changed the types of conversations our leaders have and has also led to measurable results in terms of their career trajectories.”—Robert M. Hall, Director, Training and Organizational Development, Kent State University “Marilee demonstrates why Question Thinking is absolutely essential to organizational success . . . and how easily it can be acquired.”—Beverly Kaye, PhD, coauthor of Hello Stay Interviews, Goodbye Talent Loss “With clarity and accessibility, Dr. Adams models a process whereby we can intentionally change our way of internal inquiry. Imagine being in conscious charge of our own thoughts! A wonderful tool for coaches, leaders, and all helping professionals. ”—Pamela Richarde, MA, Master Certified Coach, Past President, International Coach Federation “This fable is destined to be a classic. Buy this book and read it tonight. Your life will never be the same!”—Stewart Levine, author of The Book of Agreement and Getting to Resolution “I really love this book—and it's one of the most practical I've ever read. The greatest thing is that it's not a ‘one and done’ kind of book. You'll find yourself going back to it again and again. And you'll definitely find yourself sharing it with friends and colleagues. I know I have.”—Tracy Davidson, Anchor and Consumer Reporter, NBC 10 News Philadelphia “This is a must-read for any leader who wants to ask empowering questions—those that inspire, motivate, and produce positive change . . . The book can truly change your personal and professional life.”—Tara Rodas, Manager of Employee Development, Strategic Learning Services Division, Joint Mission Support Center, United States Postal Inspection Service and Office Inspector General “While curiosity and acute antennae are essential attributes of great leaders, Dr. Adams goes further than this . . . shows how to use questions to illuminate choices . . . and she's a terrific presenter.”—Liz Barron, Senior Director, Executive Education, Smith School of Business, University of Maryland “Marilee is smarter than anyone I know about asking the questions that really matter.”—Lillian Brown, author of Your Public Best About the Author Marilee Adams, PhD, is president and CEO of the Inquiry Institute and the originator of the Question Thinking methodologies. She is an adjunct professor of leadership at American University's School of Public Affairs and presents the Question Thinking system in a wide variety of organizational, educational, health-care and public settings. Marshall Goldsmith is the million-selling author or editor of 31 books, including the New York Times and Wall Street Journal bestsellers, MOJO and What Got You Here Won't Get You There. Excerpt. copy; Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved. CHAPTER 1 Moment of Truth If we would have new knowledge, we must get us a whole new world of new questions. Susanne K. Langer A rosewood paperweight on my desk bears a sterling silver plaque declaring: Great results begin with great questions. It was a gift from a very special person in my life—Joseph S. Edwards—who introduced me to Question Thinking, or QT, as he called the skills he taught

me. QT opened up a part of my mind that otherwise I might never have discovered. Like everyone else, I believed the way to fix a problem was to look for the right answers. Instead, Joseph showed me that the best way to solve a problem is to first come up with better questions. The skills he taught me rescued my career and saved my marriage as well. Both were definitely in trouble at the time. It all started when I was invited to take a position at QTec. The company was in the midst of a major overhaul at the time, and the word on the street was that, barring a miracle, they would fold before the year was out. A friend warned me that accepting a position with QTec would be like signing up to crew on a sinking ship. What convinced me to take the risk? It was my trust in Alexa Harte, the recently appointed CEO at QTec, who'd offered me the position. I'd worked with her for years at KB Corp., my previous employer, where she'd won my respect as a gifted leader. Her confidence about turning QTec around was infectious. Besides, she promised me a great promotion: hefty pay raise, impressive title, and a chance to lead a team in developing an innovative new product. If everything went well the risk would pay off in aces. If not . . . well, I tried not to think about that. At first I was riding high, convinced I had the job wired. Alexa had hired me for my technology and engineering smarts, and I knew I could deliver on that count. The new product really intrigued me, and the technical challenges were right up my alley. At KB where Alexa said she'd seen me work miracles; I'd won accolades as the Answer Man. I'd faced down the toughest technical problems, one right after the other. However, at QTec I was also facing a different kind of challenge; heading up a high-stakes, high-visibility team. I was excited about taking this on, although Alexa had let me know I'd have to put effort into developing my people and leadership skills. My team seemed an enthusiastic and talented bunch, and for a while everything went well. Then life at QTec started unraveling. It was as if suddenly a glaring spotlight was focused on my shortcomings. I didn't dare say it, but secretly I concluded I'd been stuck with a bunch of losers. To make matters worse, there was Charles. Before I came aboard at QTec he'd been passed over for the job I'd been offered. I could understand why he might resent me. And, just as I expected, he was a real troublemaker from the word go, questioning everything I said and did. Things went from bad to worse. If the QTec ship wasn't actually sinking, as my friend had warned me was happening, it was definitely taking on water, and I had no idea how to plug up the leaks. My team meetings became a farce; no discussions, no solutions, and no sense of teamwork. And nobody had to remind me that if we couldn't get our product to market before the competition, we would prove the naysayers right. Life wasn't much better at home. Tension was growing with Grace, my wonderful wife of less than eight months. She constantly asked me about what was going on at work. Finally, one day I just told her she was asking too many questions and she should keep her nose out of my business. She was hurt, I was miserable, and I hadn't the vaguest idea what to do about it. I didn't want Grace to know how much difficulty I was having. I'd always taken great pride in solving problems that baffled everyone else. This time, with any luck, the right answers would turn up before Grace, Alexa, and the people on my team found out that the job was way over my head. Meanwhile I kept more and more to myself and did my best to just get through each day. I was mystified and overwhelmed. It seemed like everything in my life was falling apart. Then came the awful turning point. Grace and I had an argument in the morning, and only hours later there was a major crisis at work. Nobody said it, but I could see it in their eyes: we were cooked. This was my moment of truth. I needed to be alone and face facts. I called Grace and left a message that I'd be putting in an all-nighter to finish an important report. Then I spent the whole long night in my office, staring at the walls, still searching desperately for the right answers and reliving the most disastrous weeks of my life. I told myself I had to face the truth: I had failed. Just after six that morning I went out for coffee and then started drafting my resignation. I finished three hours later, called Alexa, and made arrangements to see her immediately. The walk to Alexa's suite was less than a hundred yards. That morning it felt like a hundred miles. When I got to the big double doors of her office I stopped and took a deep breath to regain my composure. I stood there for some long moments, working up the nerve to knock. Just as I was raising my arm, I heard a voice behind me. "Ben Knight, you're here. Good, good!" It was Alexa. There was no mistaking that voice, always cheerful, exuding a sense of optimism even when things were going badly. An attractive, athletic-looking woman in her late 40s, she radiated confidence. I'd told Grace that I'd never met anyone quite like Alexa. She approached her responsibilities at QTec with boundless enthusiasm. It wasn't that she didn't take her job seriously. She took it very seriously! And she did it with such pleasure and self-assurance that she made it look easy. At that moment, her mere presence made me acutely aware of my deficiencies. I felt numb, barely mumbling a subdued good morning as she touched my shoulder and ushered me into her office. The room was expansive, the size of a large living room in the best executive home. I crossed deep green carpeting, soft underfoot, and walked over to the large bay window where the meeting area was set up. There, two overstuffed sofas faced each other across a large walnut coffee table. "Sit!" Alexa said, gesturing in a welcoming way to one of the couches. "Betty said your lights were on when she left her office at seven-thirty last night, and you were here when she came in early this morning." She sat down across from me on the other couch. "I presume that's for me?" Alexa asked, pointing to the green folder containing my resignation that I'd placed on the coffee table. I nodded, waiting for her to pick it up. Instead, she leaned back, looking as if she had all the time in the world. "Tell me what's going on with you," she said. I pointed to the green folder. "It's my resignation. I'm sorry, Alexa." The next sound I heard stopped me cold. It was not a gasp, not a word of reproach, but laughter! It was not cruel laughter, either. What

had I missed? I didn't understand. How could Alexa still sound sympathetic in the face of all I'd screwed up? "Ben," she said, "you're not going to quit on me." She slid the folder in my direction. "Take this back. I know more about your situation than you realize. I want you to give me at least a few months. But for that period of time, you've got to commit to making changes." "Are you sure about this?" I asked, dumbfounded. "Let me answer you this way," she continued. "Many years ago, I was in a situation similar to yours. I had to face facts. If I wanted to be successful I'd need to make some fundamental changes. I was pretty desperate. A man by the name of Joseph sat me down and asked some straightforward questions, simple ones on the surface. But those questions opened doors I never even knew existed. He asked, 'Are you willing to take responsibility for your mistakes—and for the attitudes and actions that led to them?' Then he said, 'Are you willing—however begrudgingly—to forgive yourself, and even laugh at yourself?' And finally, 'Will you look for value in your experiences, especially the most difficult ones?' Bottom line: 'Are you willing to learn from what happened and make changes accordingly?'" She went on to tell me how Joseph's work with her, and the methods he had developed over the years, had changed not only her life but her husband Stan's as well. "Stan has more than tripled his net worth in the past few years. He attributes the success he and his company enjoy today to what Joseph taught him. Joseph will probably tell you all about it. He loves to tell stories, especially ones about how people's lives were changed by changing their questions." I must have looked perplexed because she added, "Don't worry about what I mean by questions that change people's lives. You'll learn about that soon enough." She paused. Then, in carefully measured words, she said, "I want you to work with my friend Joseph, starting immediately. I'm sure he'll want to meet with you over a period of time. Figure out the schedule with him. This is top priority now." "What is he, a therapist?" The idea of seeing a shrink made me nervous. Alexa smiled. "No, he's an executive coach. I call him an inquiring coach." Inquiring coach! If I knew anything at all, it was that I needed answers, not more questions. How could more questions possibly benefit me or pull me out the hole I was in? As I was getting ready to leave, Alexa jotted something down on a piece of paper and sealed it in an envelope. "Inside this envelope is a prediction I've made," she said mysteriously, handing it to me. "Put it in that green folder of yours and don't open it until you've completed your work with Joseph and I tell you it's the time to open it." Then she gave me Joseph's business card. I turned it over. There was a big question mark on the other side. It really irritated me. The idea that I'd be spending valuable time with a man whose logo was a question mark went against everything I believed. Back in my own office, I collapsed in the chair behind my desk. My eyes fell on a small gilded frame on the wall. It held a saying, just two words long: Question everything! It was a quote attributed to Albert Einstein. Many rooms at Q Tec contained a framed placard exactly like this one. As much as I respected and appreciated Alexa's leadership, this message had always been a point of contention for me. Everybody knows that leaders should have answers, not questions. My eyes were fixed on Joseph's card with the question mark on the back. What had I gotten myself into? Only time would tell. At least I could put off my decision to resign. My attention shifted to Grace. How was I ever going to smooth things over with her? At that moment there was only one thing to be grateful for—Alexa hadn't asked about Grace and me. I think that would have been the last straw. I knew Alexa was fond of my wife—she'd even come to our wedding. She wouldn't have been happy to find out we were having trouble. I sat there for a long time just staring at Joseph's card. The fact that Alexa had refused to accept my resignation offered a little hope. I was encouraged that she would refer me to her own mentor—even though the jury was still out on whether her trust in me was justified. Still, I had nothing to lose by keeping an appointment with this inquiring coach guy. Besides, even though I was skeptical, I was also curious. If this Joseph guy had helped Alexa and Stan so much, maybe he had answers that would help me, too. "Question everything!" Albert Einstein