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Newsletter  
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### **Editorial: Power of the 'Q'**

*By Raj Narayan, ISEC Editor*

"A prudent question is one half of wisdom," said Francis Bacon, the 16th Century English philosopher, scientist, statesman, and the pioneer of the modern day 'scientific method'. Indeed, one cannot but marvel at the power of questioning, especially when used as a weapon for intellectual stimulation.

From the mundane 'how are you' to the profound 'who are you', questions have the power of stimulating our minds and often ends up providing answers not only to the interlocutor who asked them but to our own selves. The art of meditation or Zen speaks highly of introspection, which is nothing but a form of constantly questioning ourselves and eventually reaching the highest goal of self-realization.

Fans of civil servant Sir Humphrey Appleby and his political Jim Hacker (BBC Television serial Yes Minister) may recall the minister commenting on his Permanent Secretary's devious methods of withholding information by suggesting that the secret of getting the right answer depends on finding the right question.

The question assumes criticality during coaching conversations, more so since providing answers is never the brief for an Executive Coach. During a recent coaching intervention, the importance of asking questions to the right person struck me. The client resolved his dilemma, ([Read it on the blog](#)), but only so after first overcoming the fear of questioning.

Why do we fear questions? Is it because we are scared of the likely answers? Or is it that we are programmed from childhood not to ask them? Or, maybe it is the fear of making a fool of oneself.

### **MENTOR'S MUSINGS: A Bear That Wasn't**

*By Krishna Kumar, ISEC Founder-Director*

In a coaching conversation, the most powerful questions that we can ask someone is a simple "Who are you?" People grapple with issues of self-identity all through their lives, coming to the forefront in the early teens, continuing through adulthood and even into old age.

The question is often contextual. To illustrate, at the site of a traffic accident a person walking up to offer medical attention may respond to a question by simply stating "I am a doctor" whereas in a social gathering, his reply would probably be more specific. He might not even mention his profession. I am sharing a story with you that illustrate very captivatingly, the issues of identity.

*Once upon a time, there was a bear that lived in a forest. Being a smart bear, he knew that when the leaves fell and the geese flew west it was time to go into a cave and hibernate. This he did.*

*While he was hibernating, builders came and built a huge factory right over the bear's cave so that when he woke*

*up, he found himself standing in the middle of a factory. The foreman came up to him. 'Hey you,' he said, 'get back to work!'*

*'But I'm a bear,' said the bear.*

*'No, you're not,' replied the foreman. 'You're a silly man who needs a shave and wears a fur coat.'*

*'But I'm a bear,' said the bear.*

*So the foreman took the bear to the manager, who told him to get back to work.*

*'But I'm a bear,' said the bear.*

*'No, you're not,' said the manager. 'You're a silly man who needs a shave and wears a fur coat.'*

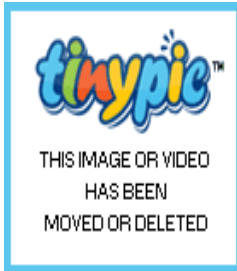
*So the bear carried on protesting and was taken up through each level of the hierarchy, where everyone told him that he was a silly man who needed a shave and wore a fur coat. Eventually, as he continued to protest, he was taken to the zoo and to the circus to argue his case with 'real' bears. They said, 'He can't be a bear because if he were, he would be in this cage with us. He is just a silly man who needs a shave and wears a fur coat.'*

*And so the bear gave up and said to himself, 'Perhaps I am what they keep telling me I am.'*

*So he was put to work on a machine and was miserable.*

*After a long time, the factory closed and all the other workers went elsewhere. The bear was left standing outside in the cold. He looked up. The leaves were blowing off the trees and the wild geese were flying west. Something deep within him told him that it was time to find a nice warm cave and to hibernate.*

*But I can't do that,' he said to himself, 'because I'm not a bear. I'm just a silly man who needs a shave and wears a fur coat.' So he sat outside in the cold, the snow fell and he began slowly to freeze to death.*



*Finally, he saw sense. 'Who cares what it is they tell me I am? If I was a bear, I could go into that cave over there and be happy and warm - and I want to be happy and warm.' So he went into the cave.*

*As he happily settled down to hibernate, the bear realized that he was not a silly man who needed a shave and wore a fur coat - he was a real bear. And he was not a silly bear either!*

All too often, we believe what other people tell us about what we are or what we ought to be. True happiness lies in discovering for ourselves what we really are - and then strive to being it.

I am sure all of you enjoyed the short story. It is also probably the right moment to step back and ask ourselves a few questions. We may ask, what the story means to us in the present context. Can we find any inputs that could

be used to bring about a change in our attitudes or of those within our organization or ecosystem?

*How often have you faced such situations? Do write in with your comments [tkk@intradconsult.com](mailto:tkk@intradconsult.com)*

### **The Coaching Notes: The Power of The Word**

*By Paulo Coelho*

Of all the powerful weapons of destruction that man has invented, the most terrible – and the most cowardly – is the word.

Knives and firearms leave traces of blood. Bombs shake whole buildings and streets. Poisons can always be detected.

But a destructive word can provoke Evil without leaving behind a single clue. Children are subject to years of conditioning by their parents, artists are mercilessly pilloried, women are systematically undermined by remarks made by their husbands, and the faithful are kept apart from religion by those who judge themselves capable of interpreting the voice of God.



Check to see if you yourself are using this weapon. Check to see if someone is using this weapon on you. And put a stop to both

### **Select Reading: The Falser Words Were Never Spoken**

*By Brian Morton, published on August 29, 2011*

In a coffee shop not long ago, I saw a mug with an inscription from Henry David Thoreau: "Go confidently in the direction of your dreams! Live the life you've imagined."

At least it said the words were Thoreau's. But the attribution seemed a bit suspect. Thoreau, after all, was not known for his liberal use of exclamation points. When I got home, I looked up the passage (it's from "Walden"): "I learned this, at least, by my experiment: that if one advances confidently in the direction of his dreams, and endeavors to live the life which he has imagined, he will meet with a success unexpected in common hours."

Now Thoreau isn't quite saying that each of us can actually live the life we've imagined. He's saying that if we try, we'll come closer to it than we might ordinarily think possible. I suppose that the people responsible for the coffee mug would say that they'd merely tweaked the wording of the original a little. But in the tweaking, not only was the syntax lost, but the subtlety as well.

Gandhi's words have been tweaked a little too in recent years. Perhaps you've noticed a bumper sticker that purports to quote him: "Be the change you wish to see in the world." When you first come across it, this does sound like something Gandhi would have said. But when you think about it a little, it starts to sound more like ... a bumper sticker. Displayed brightly on the back of a Prius, it suggests that your responsibilities begin and end with

your own behavior. It's apolitical, and a little smug.

Sure enough, it turns out there is no reliable documentary evidence for the quotation. The closest verifiable remark we have from Gandhi is this: "If we could change ourselves, the tendencies in the world would also change. As a man changes his own nature, so does the attitude of the world change towards him. ... We need not wait to see what others do."

Here, Gandhi is telling us that personal and social transformation go hand in hand, but there is no suggestion in his words that personal transformation is enough. In fact, for Gandhi, the struggle to bring about a better world involved not only stringent self-denial and rigorous adherence to the philosophy of nonviolence; it also involved a steady awareness that one person, alone, can't change anything, an awareness that unjust authority can be overturned only by great numbers of people working together with discipline and persistence.

When you start to become aware of these bogus quotations, you can't stop finding them. Henry James, George Eliot, Picasso - all of them are being kept alive in popular culture through pithy, cheery sayings they never actually said.

My favorite example of the fanciful quotation is a passage that's been floating around the Internet for years. It's frequently attributed to Nelson Mandela, the former South African president, and said to be an excerpt from his 1994 inaugural address.

"Our deepest fear," the passage goes, "is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous? Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small does not serve the world. ... As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others."

Picture it: Mr. Mandela, newly free after 27 years in prison, using his inaugural platform to inform us that we all have the right to be gorgeous, talented and fabulous, and that thinking so will liberate others. It's hard to imagine it without laughing. Of course, it turns out it's not actually an excerpt from this or any other known address of Mr. Mandela's. In fact, the words aren't even his; they belong to a self-help guru, Marianne Williamson.

Thoreau, Gandhi, Mandela - it's easy to see why their words and ideas have been massaged into gauzy slogans. They were inspirational figures, dreamers of beautiful dreams. But what goes missing in the slogans is that they were also sober, steely men. Each of them knew that thoroughgoing change, whether personal or social, involves humility and sacrifice, and that the effort to change oneself or the world always exacts a price.

But ours is an era in which it's believed that we can reinvent ourselves whenever we choose. So we recast the wisdom of the great thinkers in the shape of our illusions. Shorn of their complexities, their politics, their grasp of the sheer arduousness of change, they stand before us now. They are shiny from their makeovers, they are fabulous and gorgeous, and they want us to know that we can have it all.

*Brian Morton, the director of the graduate program in fiction at Sarah Lawrence College, is the author of the novels "Starting Out in the Evening" and "Breakable You."*

## **Happenings @ ISEC:**

The ISEC office has shifted to a new location in Whitefield, Bangalore. The new premises are an independent cottage with

close to 8000 sq. feet of landscaped area, where we plan to shortly conduct leadership retreats.

ISEC Founder-Director, Krishna Kumar, is an invited member of the Association of Certified Executive Coaches (ACEC). Membership to the ACEC is presently restricted to a core group of 100 members worldwide.

**With warm regards,  
Krishna Kumar  
Executive Coach & Founder-Director, ISEC**