Twitter Thread by Thomas Clark Durant



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Questions are a disruptive technology. A thread. 1/

We see the most recent wave of disruptive technologies. E-commerce. Smart phones. Ride-sharing. Blockchain. We are often blind to the disruptive technologies and techniques that have been with us for a long, long time, but are still disruptive and disrupting. /2

Ancient but still disruptive tech: music, migration, out-marriage, ink, questions. /3

Questions change lives. They bring people together, tear them apart. They open doors. And minds. They are the seed of adventure. They acknowledge the chaos inside and around us. They are a transfer of power, trusting that the power will come back in time, improved. /4

What is a question? We use them so frequently, so thoughtlessly. It is easy to overlook their strangeness, and the nature of their power. /5

What is a question? (I am not going to share a dictionary definition here.) /6

A question is a marker of mystery, a pointer to the potentially unknown. It is a hand-off from one voice to another. For one, it is a shift from speaking to listening; for another, from listening to speaking. /7

A question is one of the smallest transfers of power that we can manage, or mismanage. /8

When you ask me a question - sincerely - you surrender some control of the conversation, for the time being. Most of us learn at an early age that this is a necessary thing, a good thing, a beautiful thing. That we are enriched by the viewpoints of others. /9

There are the macro ways we that help us live well together with others. Liberal democracy. Freedom of association. Of exchange. Of conscience. Ethically, religiously, or spiritually sourced norms around tolerating, respecting and even loving others. These are grand things. /10

Those are the big harmonizers, bringing our lives into harmony with one another. At the scale of hundreds, thousands, millions. But the little harmonizers matter too. For the scale of ones and twos. Tens and twenties. /11

So what are *you* like in conversation? /12

Too many "conversations" are dueling monologues. Two or more people spouting off in one another's vicinity, grandstanding in close quarters. /13

Questions weave together viewpoints, transforming what would otherwise be two (or more) monologues into a single dialogue. They create opportunities to be surprised, to influence and be influenced, to come into harmony, to co-evolve. /14

You can be "for" the big harmonizers, but lousy at the little harmonizers. That's been me in years past and it's still me at times, so I'll put that in the first person. I can be "for" the big harmonizers, and lousy at the little harmonizers. /15

It's easier to be "for" good things in the abstract, and harder to be a practitioner of good things in the concrete. Easy to love humanity, but hate humans. Easy to have the right yard sign, but harder to be kind. /16

So let's get concrete. Where and how can you use questions more skillfully? /17

#1. You can use questions to develop a better relationship with yourself. A few questions for that. /18

- What's my pattern with this?
- What's the real challenge for me here?
- What progress can I savor or appreciate?
- What does this (hard situation, dark thought or difficult emotion) have to teach me?
- What would a wise, kind elder recommend I do?
- What's my next step?/19

#2. You can use questions to develop a better relationship with family and friends. A questions for that. /20

- What's on your mind, really?
- What do *you* think?
- Where did you learn that skill?
- What's working in your life right now?
- What keeps you up at night these days?
- How can I help? /21

#3. You can use questions to be more effective in your work. /22

For work, use all of the above, plus:
- What assumptions can we relax?
- What would have to be true for this to be the best choice?
- What voice or alternative should we add to the mix?

- If we had to act now, what would we do?
- How can we test this quickly and cheaply? /23

These questions are not error-proof. If you ask them with the wrong intent or the wrong tone, they may not open things up for you. If you ask them with the right intent and tone, but get distracted and fail to listen, that's on you. /24

In the right hands, they have immense power. /25

A shout-out to my friend, Michael Strong (@flowidealism), whose TED talk on Socratic practice as a disruptive technology inspired many of these reflections. I am going to do another thread on what I've learned about Socratic practice, specifically. /26

A shout-out to Mike Rother (@realmikerother), whose book Toyota Kata has inspired and guided the way I use questions to guide problem-solving in business. /27

If you want to get a daily question from me, sign up at https://t.co/hdHbbc6Dqw /28