

**Enquire to Inspire**  
*20 Questions to Mentor Your  
Innovation Team to Success*



*"It's what you **ask** your team, not what you **tell** them  
that drives amazing outcomes."*

**Bill Murray**

# **Enquire to Inspire**

## ***20 Questions to Mentor Your Innovation Team to Success***

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## ***Dedication***

This book is dedicated to the passionate Sponsors and Teams that unravel ambiguity; often toiling in obscurity at businesses of all kinds around the world.

Your determination, experiments, and insights inform a better future for us all.



***Thank you for purchasing this book!***

Proceeds from this book will help build a trust fund for my disabled son to ensure that he is able to live in safety and receive professional care after my wife and I are no longer physically able to care for him.



# **Enquire to Inspire**

## ***20 Questions to Mentor Your Innovation Team to Success***

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*"Your words have the power to lift someone up and help them achieve what they thought was impossible."*

**Unknown**

## **Chapter 1: Why this book?**

This is a love story. Like a cheesy made-for-TV romantic movie, the characters are people that have been betrayed, broken, and are not sure that they can ever love again. They've been kicked around, lied to, and told it was their fault. They poured their heart and soul into the relationship and walked away with nothing but sorrow. They are the ranks of the project worker at companies around the world. Maybe you've starred in one of these movies?

Then something wonderful happened in the second act. They got a chance to work on a new kind of team working in a different way. Instead of following a pre-determined plan passed down from high above, they were challenged with a problem or an outcome and asked to piece together a path to a solution. An influential leader worked with the team, not as a manager, but as a mentor. She asked a lot of questions, and when she did, the world of possibilities opened up, instead of closing down. And when

the team was stuck, she went to work on their behalf to get them what they needed to maintain progress. In the third act, when the team came to a dead end and showed their evidence for shutting down the project, she communicated it up and down the hierarchy as a win, and saw that the team was recognized for their achievement.

For an encore, the team and their mentor took on bigger problems with higher profiles. They found that the same behaviors that made the last project so satisfying worked just as well when the stakes were higher. And when they successfully uncovered a valuable new insight, they felt similarly gratified as when they convinced management to cancel the last project.

Years ago, I had an opportunity to coach a small team in a corporate incubator setting. An astute tactical component of the incubator was a director-level sponsor for each team. The sponsor's role was to mentor the team, help maintain their scope, and provide necessary resources to keep them moving fast. Our incubator sponsors quickly took delight in the fact that they didn't need to *manage* the people on these teams, they simply needed to support them as they took risks to better understand the problems they were formed to solve. I was pleased to see the relationships between the sponsors and their teams bloom under these conditions, as they were refreshingly different than the more formal, hierarchical manager-employee interactions I was used to.

In this environment I learned how the right working relationships can make the difference between success and failure for project teams. And as I folded design, agile, and startup mindsets and methodologies into this fertile setting, I watched people change in compellingly positive ways as they delivered valuable business results. Work became fun because they were doing demonstrably important, impactful work that mattered and was appreciated in a rapid-feedback cycle. They saw the effect of their work



quickly and regularly, and they had a sponsor who made sure that the team's work products were broadly shared and publicly credited. The experience has inspired every day of my life since that time. My passion is to re-create these conditions wherever I can.

This book is about people with untapped potential becoming more than they ever thought they could be. It's dedicated to project team workers trying to find the love in their work and to managers who are trying to complete their metamorphosis; from being the person with all the answers to the person with all the right questions. It's those managers in transformation to leaders that this book will support as they work to build an environment where their teams can find that elusive love in their work. That said, whether you are on the team, the leader of the team, or you are coaching the team and the leader through their transformation, this book will help you become more effective by helping you to become more intentional about your work.

In the following chapters, we'll examine the impact of a sponsor on a project team, through the lens of twenty primary and a bunch of secondary questions. We'll explore the impact that such an interrogative relationship has on the work product of the team. We'll chart the transformation of the sponsor from manager to modern leader. Finally, I'll posit that the best reward for a project team, and the company for which they work, is to maintain the team's integrity and give them a new challenge. Along the way, we'll talk about the questions that you *shouldn't* ask, too.

At the end of each chapter, a 'Sponsor Focus' section will help you to consider the chapter's most important points in one place. There, you can identify one or two things you may want to try immediately. Some free advice: don't try to boil the ocean as you work to change how you support the teams you serve; identify the low-hanging fruit and start there. Add more complex ideas as you become comfortable with the simpler ones. This isn't a weekend

class at the local improv theatre, this is a very intentional change in how you will approach your work. When conducted purposefully, it will transform you, both professionally and personally. Your relationships with others will change, likely for the better, and your life will become fuller for the effort.