
A TEDX TALK · 17 MINUTES

Ask *first.*

One habit, two worlds — a SaaS company, a school of a thousand students, and the same sentence that runs through both.

Everyone remembered *their name*.

Not the question — they remembered the person who asked.

In the classroom, the meeting, the team — somebody asked the same question you swallowed.

You forgot the question. Everyone remembered **them**.

Asking mattered.

WHOSE HABIT IS THIS, ANYWAY?

Most mothers ask: *"How was school today?"*

One mother asked a different one.

*Did you ask a good question
today?*

Her son grew up to win the Nobel Prize in Physics.

Isidor Isaac Rabi — he said it was the questions, not the answers, that built his curiosity.

Running two very different worlds, *one same habit.*

01

Asking is the beginning of receiving.

Polaroid · 1943 · a 3-year-old, her father, a question

02

Receiving an answer is never the problem.

An ocean of answers · waiting for someone who knocks

03

Answers and opportunities are not rationed.

An uncle, an evening · a school of a thousand students

*Plus — a few things I had to learn the **expensive** way.*

Asking is *the beginning* of
receiving.

1943

EDWIN LAND · POLAROID

A 3-year-old watches her father take a photo. She asks the only thing a 3-year-old is allowed to ask:

*"Why can't I see the photo *now*?"*

Her father, Edwin Land, can't put the question down.

The question becomes the answer — and the answer becomes **Polaroid**.

Receiving an answer is *never* the problem.

Every teacher, every manager, every client — they're already standing there. With the answer. With the context. With the objection.

The second you ask, the door opens. The only thing missing — someone willing to **get up**.

"Answers are always there, just waiting for someone to knock on the door."

Answers are *not rationed*.
Opportunities aren't either.

1,000

STUDENTS · ONE CURIOUS QUESTION

Almost every opportunity I've been handed came from a question I almost didn't ask.

THE STORY

A casual family evening. I asked my uncle one small thing:

"How's it going with that school?"

A month of deeper talks later — it was mine. A whole new dimension of my life.

WHY DON'T WE ASK, THEN?

We were taught *a lie*.

- That asking will make us look *weak*.
- That "I don't know" will make us look *small*.
- That not asking makes it look like we already *knew*.

So we walk into the ocean with *a teaspoon*.

WHO IS REALLY THE WEAK ONE?

The asker is *not* the weak one. The guesser is the expensive one.

I · STUDENT

The hand that goes up.

It is not the one who got left behind.
It's the one learning out loud.

II · EMPLOYEE

The question in the room.

Asking "*can you explain that?*" is not expensive. Misreading the room costs years.

III · FOUNDER

Not a vision.

Building without asking customers is just a **hobby with expensive time.**

*Guessing looks busy **the whole time you're failing.***

We were chasing a client big enough to change the era of my company. I thought we understood everything. So I skipped one question.

I didn't lose that deal in the last meeting.

*I lost it the moment
I decided I knew.*

A competitor walked in, asked the question I skipped, heard the one objection I'd never heard — and the deal was theirs.

Not asking doesn't save your face. It sends a fee for an invoice you *haven't seen yet*.

Assumption is the enemy. The question could have been my friend.

HOW TO ASK · TWO HABITS WORTH KEEPING

I · ASK WITH INTELLIGENCE

Not *"I don't get it."*

Ask *"How did you arrive at this?"*

If the first question didn't get the answer, ask again.

Believe you're allowed — before the adult in you says no.

II · ASK FOR HELP

It is not a *wall.*

It is a *bridge.*

The moment you ask, someone is already on the other side, open to come help.

A four-year-old never rehearses before asking. Neither should you.

Asking is not about *getting* an answer. *It's what you are becoming next.*

Important information comes back the moment you ask — and you improve from the version of you one minute ago.

A TABLE QUESTION

"How's it going with that school?"

It handed me an institution of a thousand students.

ANOTHER TABLE, YEARS LATER

"Why not this girl for him?"

She is my wife now — also my home.

A CLOSING · A QUESTION TO TAKE WITH YOU

Don't lower your *hand*.

Ask *first*.

What could change if you started asking first?

Nizamudheen Valliyattu

ASK FIRST · TEDXFOT · STAGE TALK, ~17 MINUTES