



25 Questions to Find Your Next Big Idea

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Every worthwhile effort starts with asking the right questions.

Whether you're brainstorming a blog post, business idea, a new platform, or a talk, the right questions will trigger a moment of discovery.

The following questions are designed to help you jolt yourself out of how you “usually” think about things, to get curious, to question and examine. I use them to help speakers find their “throughline,” which is TED-speak for the connecting theme that ties all the narrative elements of a TED talk together.

As one of the biggest platforms for thought leaders, TED is a fantastic model to use—not just for speaking, but for thinking about ideas and what they mean to you, and to other people.

Whether you aspire to the TED stage or not, use these questions to get your wheels turning, to help you target, question, and awaken new ideas and stories that can form the basis of your business, your work, your talk.

We grouped the questions by type (“curiosity,” “change of heart”) and suggest TED talks that best exemplify these types so you can see these ideas in action.



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—
Chris Anderson, *The Official TED
Guide to Public Speaking*

How to use this guide

- ☑ **Start with one question that speaks to you.** The more deeply you can dive into a question, the more great stuff you'll uncover. You don't get an award for speeding through as many questions as possible. Take your time.
- ☑ **Turn on a timer for 15 minutes (longer if you can!), block out everything and write.** This is the only way to really tune in to those powerful thoughts lurking below the surface of distraction. You'll be surprised at what comes up.
- ☑ **Go back and pick another question.** I promise you, you'll discover ideas you didn't even know you had! And this can give you fodder for all kinds of things—not just your TEDx talk, but perhaps an article, post, or even a book!

CURIOSITY

“The Power of Vulnerability” Brene Brown

“This is What Happens What Happens When You Reply to Spam Email” James Veitch

- 1. What have you always been really curious about, and why?** What have you done to explore that curiosity, and what have you learned? *Example: A man is fascinated by board games and collects as many as he can. By playing, he realizes that the types of games we're drawn to telegraph a lot about how we engage with others, the world, and the importance of rules.*
- 2. What's something you have always questioned or doubted, yet you weren't sure why?** What happened to confirm or challenge it? *Example: Growing up, a girl was taught that it was better to be nice than to be honest. She always struggled to accept this, and her foray into the business world proved honesty is often valued over sugarcoated half-truths.*
- 3. What's one thing you've always thought and no one believed you until now?**
Why does it matter? *Example: One woman was told her whole life that pursuing a master's degree in music would mean teaching, living in her mom's basement, or waiting tables. She used it to leverage a killer job at a hedge fund.*
- 4. What small shift in behavior has changed you in a big way, maybe even changed your life?**
Example: One man's daily walk out of necessity led to a moving meditation practice that changed his health, spirituality, relationships, and connection to himself.
- 5. How has one small thing or event changed the way you see everything?** *Example: After watching a homeless man's offer to tell a joke get turned down by every person on the subway, a woman agreed to listen. Her uproarious laughter made him burst into tears of gratitude, opening her eyes to our need for connection and the ways we dehumanize the people around us.*

CONTRADICTION

“Looks Aren’t Everything—Believe me, I’m a Model” Cameron Russell

“The Danger of a Single Story” Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

- 1. What two ideas are constantly at war in your head? Why? And what have you done about it?**
What can help alleviate this cognitive dissonance so that you can live your life? *Example: I can’t be a good mom and rock my career.*
- 2. What have you always struggled with—and why? What happened when you realized you weren’t the only one dealing with it? Example: A man struggles to work up the nerve to approach women and feels like a failure, until he realizes all guys—even the players—struggle with confidence issues.**
- 3. What do we all say and rarely mean? And what do you think we should do about it? Why is it a problem? Example: “I’m here if you need anything.” We don’t really mean “anything”...and it puts the onus on the person in need to figure out what they need, how to ask for it, and whether you’re capable.**

CHANGE OF HEART

“My Stroke of Insight” Jill Bolte Taylor

- 1. What is one thing you always believed to be true, and when did that belief change?** How did it affect you? *Example: Growing up, you believed there would be a definitive moment where you became an adult. Slowly, in your twenties, you realized adulthood was completely fluid—and required a different definition.*
- 2. What old bit of wisdom did you laugh off—until now?** *Example: “If you love something let it go,” may have seemed contradictory and trite, until you realized your controlling tendencies were killing your marriage.*
- 3. What is one thing you used to hate, but now love?** And why have your feelings changed? *Example: A kid got food poisoning from a hot dog and refused to eat meat for the next five years. Starving at a pool party that only served hot dogs, he caved and was immediately obsessed—and only ate hot dogs for two weeks straight. Sometimes our unfounded associations blind us to great experiences.*
- 4. What event or incident changed the way you see yourself?** *Example: A woman I know prided herself on being the perfect girlfriend, until she had to call off her wedding.*
- 5. What event or incident changed the way you see other people?** *Example: Becoming the caretaker to your parents made you realize no one is truly independent.*
- 6. What event or incident changed the way you see certain kinds of people?** *Example: A man believed the stereotype that Germans were cold and distant. His three years living in Munich shattered this perception.*

CONSCIOUSNESS RAISING

“Your Body Language Shapes Who You Are” Amy Cuddy

“The Power of Why” Simon Sinek

- 1. What belief or idea do you think doesn't get nearly as much attention as it should? Why?**
Example: Teachers don't get paid enough in the US because parents have been conditioned to see them as their enemy—not their ally. Parents do this because the backlash against parenting is so extreme, they internalize their child's stumblings as failures.
- 2. What problem do we have but aren't aware of? Example: How fragile the US power grid is and what would happen if it went down.**
- 3. What is one thing we all do that makes us worse; i.e., less happy, healthy, focused, appealing, etc, that we don't even realize? Example: Falling down the social media rabbit hole.**
Science shows it makes us less happy, and yet we persist.
- 4. What worries are distracting us from a far bigger problem? Example: Our fear of upsetting our children by talking about death is setting them up to fail when tragedy inevitably strikes.**
- 5. What small thing do we underestimate that has a bigger impact on our lives than we realize? Example: A chiropractor shows us the massive impact of great—or poor—posture on every aspect of your health.**

CONTROVERSY

“Do Schools Kill Creativity?” Ken Robinson

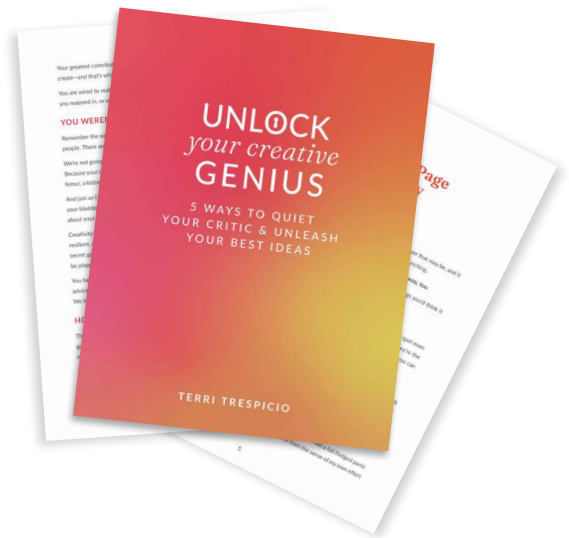
“The Happy Secret to Better Work” Shawn Acher

1. **What misunderstanding would you like to correct?** It could be in the world, about other people, anything! *Example: Love has to be forever to be worth it (my second TEDx talk).*
2. **What’s one bit of advice have you always loathed?** Why is it totally unhelpful? *Example: “Just be yourself.” Great, but what if I don’t know who I am? And why do people always say this when we’re way outside our comfort zones?*
3. **What do we think is a big problem, but isn’t really as big as we think?** *Example: In the US, you’re more likely to be killed by lightning than you are by an Islamic terrorist.*
4. **What problem do we all have, but tend to attribute to the wrong cause?** *Example: We believe people are apathetic about government because they’re self-absorbed, but it’s actually because they’re overwhelmed with where to start.*
5. **What’s one thing people always say that you can’t stand, and why?** *Example: One woman I know who suffered the traumatic loss of two loved ones cannot stand when people say “forgiveness is really for the forgiver.” Aren’t you curious about why? Exactly.*
6. **What small thing do we overestimate, that doesn’t have nearly the impact we think it does?** *Example: A doctor believes, based on his research, that breakfast is not the most important meal of the day.*

Want to Continue Exploring?

When you give yourself a chance to really dive into these questions and explore your thoughts, stories, and opinions, you'll emerge with ideas you didn't even realize you had! Then you can begin the process of making those ideas compelling and relatable through stories and examples—and start sharing them with the world.

Want to explore your next project, idea, or business? Give your most brilliant ideas a fighting chance with the free ebook and audioguide, **Unlock Your Creative Genius: 5 ways to quiet your critic & unleash your best ideas.**



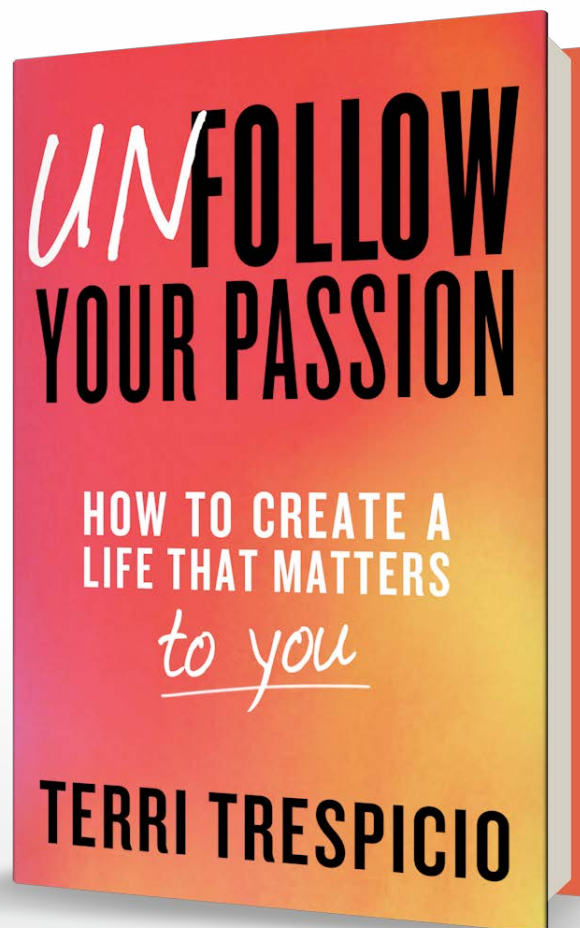
ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Terri Trespicio helps people who want to work with meaning and live with purpose to stop searching for their passion and start making things happen. Her courses, workshops and retreats help you unlock your creative genius to fuel your stand out ideas. Terri's TEDx talk, "Stop Searching for Your Passion," has been viewed more than seven million times, and she's the author of the new book, *Unfollow Your Passion: How to Create a Life that Matters to You*. An award-winning writer and keynote speaker, she's also former magazine editor at Martha Stewart, and her writing has been featured in Marie Claire, Jezebel, Business Insider, Oprah magazine, and others. She earned her MFA in creative writing from Emerson College, and won first place for creative nonfiction in the Baltimore Review's 2016 literary contest. She lives in Manhattan. More at TerriTrespicio.com.

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