Good Questions Catalyze Great Conversations
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Have you noticed how good questions spark the best conversations? Furthermore, meaningful conversations tend to effortlessly generate new questions.

Such meaningful conversations are the basis of a collaborative community.

So, how do we elicit good questions and facilitate timely discussions?

Let me share some of the tools and techniques with which we're experimenting.

First, let's examine the cycle of conversation.

The cycle starts when somebody asks a question.

In order to engage in a substantive conversation, you need to bring the right people together. That will be easier to the extent that the question is deemed to be relevant and timely.

If a provocative question is tackled by an engaged group, the discussion will inevitably generate additional questions.

The recording and recollection of such questions are the basis of future conversations.

So, how do we elicit good questions and facilitate timely discussions?

Well, let's start with how we might make it easier to identify and remember good questions for future discussion.

In practice, it's not as easy as it sounds. After all, how many times have you agreed to "put a pin" in something that was subsequently forgotten?

Obviously, you can take notes during a discussion. However, notes reflect the selection biases of the note taker, and the act of notetaking can distract from the conversation.

We're using meeting intelligence software such as Fireflies to capture the questions raised in conversations.

Fireflies can transcribe the audio from a Zoom meeting, for example, and then use machine learning techniques to parse the questions from the transcription.

Not all questions are created equal, and humans are more discerning than machines. Machines, on the other hand, are better at remembering and sharing information.

Airtable is what we're using to archive and share interesting questions.

Airtable combines a relational database back-end with front-end views that can be shared. In this example, we've embedded an Airtable view in a Mighty Networks page.

We use Mighty Networks to allow our community members to connect and share information.

Furthermore, we can use Mighty Networks polls to solicit input from members regarding curated lists of prospective discussion questions. That helps ensure that we focus on questions that are relevant and timely.

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Once we have identified a good and timely question, how can we bring together the right people for a conversation?

To help us find out, we created a custom web application we call On-demand Conversations.

The concept is straightforward. You can learn more by navigating to the URL on the screen. However, here's the gist.

First, we identify an interesting question.

Second, we engage a subject matter expert in a mini-interview. The purpose of the interview is not to provide a definitive answer. Rather, it is intended to provide context and kick-start the conversation.

Third, we publish the interview and the event information on the website and invite people to RSVP.

Fourth, we engage in a focused, 30 to 45-minute Zoom conversation. The conversations are typically limited to 5 to 7 participants.

Lastly, we publish a summary of what we learned together.

In addition to an Airtable back-end and Zapier workflow automation, we built On-demand Conversations using Softr—a no-code tool for building a user-friendly front-end.

What do you use to solicit stimulating discussion questions? Do you have any questions about the tools and techniques I've presented? Let's have a conversation!