

“Greg Stock reminds us that what really matters are the questions.”

—SETH GODIN

#1
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THE
BOOK OF
QUESTIONS

Gregory Stock, Ph.D.

*REVISED AND UPDATED

THE BOOK OF QUESTIONS

Gregory Stock, Ph.D.

WORKMAN PUBLISHING • NEW YORK

TO MOM AND DAD,

who gave me the security to question and the independence to seek my own answers

AND TO SADIE,

whose questions and answers have helped me see the world with young eyes again

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INTRODUCTION AND REFLECTIONS ON THE NEW EDITION

I still recall my first experiences with some of these questions 25 years ago: passing interactions in cafés that turned into delightful tête-à-têtes; conversations with old friends that brought me unexpected insights; tepid evenings that came alive and lasted into the wee hours.

When *The Book of Questions* was first released, it was 1987: Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev were in office. The Berlin Wall was standing. Whites ruled South Africa. Prozac had just been released. Bruce Springsteen's *Tunnel of Love* topped the charts. *The Bill Cosby Show* was heading the TV ratings. Digital cameras, the Web, and the Human Genome Project didn't exist. The World Trade Center still thrust 107 stories into the New York skyline. And a good mobile phone cost \$2,500, weighed 2 pounds, and had to be charged after an hour of talking at fifty cents a minute.

Everything was different. And nothing was different. People struggled then as they do now with money and family, love and loss, hope and fear. They grappled with illness, death, failure, and frustration. They sought meaning and fulfillment. They knew temptation and betrayal. They struggled, as we still do, to carve a place in the world and to understand themselves and others.

The time was ripe for questions not about trivia, but about values and beliefs, and *The Book of Questions* provided them through simple, original, concrete, accessible dilemmas to tickle our minds and probe our thinking about core issues: life, love, money, sex, integrity, generosity, pride, death.

The book struck a chord, and the first edition was translated into 18 languages, sold more than two and a half million copies, gave rise to a whole genre of question books, and earned a special place in many people's hearts.

Today, the central challenges of life have not changed, but culture has. Context has. Language and focus have. This new edition is more than a cosmetic scrubbing of dated phrasings and references; it's a fresh new book with over a hundred new questions that infuse current technology and society into age-old dilemmas.

The questions still jump from subject to subject, so even if you read them in order, you'll face unexpected issues and topics. Pay attention to which ones you're drawn to and which you shy away from. We react to questions that touch issues that are unresolved for us, so a question you want to avoid might be the very one you should focus on. Are you fascinated by questions about health and mortality? Do you skip questions with a sexual slant? Why?

Too often we exchange small talk without really engaging one another. Try the questions here with some friends or strangers, and see what happens. You may be pleasantly surprised. And when you go off on tangents, allow yourself to voice some of those dangerous questions that you usually hold back—those flitting, provocative thoughts whispered by an inner voice. Sure they may be a bit awkward or intrusive, but often they're the very ones that open new paths to intimacy and understanding. Life can be juicy and engaging when we're grappling with issues we really care about.

Remember, though, that these questions have no correct or incorrect answers, only honest or dishonest ones. Can you truly know what you would do with some magical power or in a strange hypothetical situation? Of course not. But why let that stop you? Here you can learn and gain insights without actually living through the predicaments described. So let yourself be swept up in these situations. Try to care about the choices you make. Resist the temptation to escape dilemmas by denying their reality or by finding complications that obscure them.

Suspend your disbelief if you can. Ignore the paradoxes of time travel, the limits of our knowledge, the impossibility of magical powers. Accept that conditions are as the questions describe, that odds are accurate, that promises will be fulfilled, and that you know all of this when you make your decisions.

Push beyond a simple “yes” or “no.” Probe and explain your responses. Look into your heart, be honest and brave, and let your mind really play with the difficult choices you find. If you do, these questions will lead you into some intriguing, unexpected, rewarding, even life-changing discussions and explorations. And please pursue any interesting tangents that come to mind: These questions are meant as a point of departure, not a destination.

The more you engage with them, the more they will bring you. So give your imagination free rein and take an active role in toying with the conditions: Expand, adjust, and shift them to make your choices richer and even harder. And who knows? As you explore and challenge your values and those of your friends, you may find (as I have) that questioning can be more than an entertaining pastime: It can become a way of life.

001

Technology has become a part of us. Would you rather lose the use of all motorized vehicles, all telecommunication devices and computers, or one of your hands?

002

What would you do if your 6-year-old daughter's favorite toy, a talking doll, started trying to convince her that she needed a new friend—the next doll in the company's line?

003

If you had to be obsessed with money, sex, sports, religion, or food, which one would you choose?

Ignoring all financial considerations, would you rather spend the next 5 years confined to an urban mecca like New York City, or a beautiful, isolated town on the California coast?