ReSPARK YOUR BUSINESS™

Better Questions for the Business You Have and the One You Want

AMY CALFEE



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Today is

Right now, I want something

☐ more ☐ less ☐ different

from my business so I can

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Contents

Forward.

Dedication

1. Courage
2. Purpose
3. Grok
4. Disruption
5. Play
6. Innovation
7. Clarity
8. Authenticity
9. Connection
10. Yes, And
11. Creativity
12. Preparation
13. Relationships
14. Ask
15. Taking Action

You're Here for a Reason. Let's Find Out Why.

Hello, Friend

Forward.

Not a foreword, because the only way out is through.

During the aftermath of a storm some years ago, my social feed filled up with similar comments, over and over: “I have no power.” “Still no power.” “They haven’t turned the power back on yet.” I finally chimed in: “You have plenty of power. What you don’t have right now is electricity.”

It got some laughs, as we all shared the same sweaty, dark experience waiting for our “power” to return. The moment wasn’t easy and it was temporary, not terminal. And so it can be in the lives of entrepreneurs, founders and business owners: a series of wins and losses, some you plan for and some you can only withstand.

You didn’t start your business because you thought it was going to be easy. You started it because you saw something — a product or service, knowledge, a skill, a location, a gap you could fill like no other. A solution you just knew you could deliver and make more than a living. And you’ve spent every day since proving it: showing up, delivering, adjusting, surviving the grind.

That’s capability. It’s real. You earned it. Yet somewhere along the way, capability starts to feel like the whole job. The driving thing you saw at the very beginning, the bigger version of this that’s still out there, can get a little blurry.

That bigger version has a name: potential. It’s the power you already have, and working harder doesn’t turn it on. Wanting something does. So, here’s a question for you: What do you want from your business?

This isn’t a book about the next platform or the latest marketing tactic. Tools, tech and platforms keep changing, and there’s always more to learn. This book is a pause, a moment to refresh your mind, your gut and your heart. Each chapter talks about a power you already have, paired with better questions. A better question can help you focus on what matters, so when you experience the spark, you know what to do with it. A spark is temporary unless you act on it. It all goes back to what you want and making better decisions to achieve it.

Are you an entrepreneur, founder or business owner ready for what’s next, whether that’s more, less or something different? If you’re curious, willing and ready to cut through the noise, you’re in the right place. You don’t need every tool and every tactic. The ones that matter get you to your next goal, and a system lets you keep building the next time you get that big idea!

That clarity starts in one place: knowing your actual position in the market. It’s likely not the same one you started with. Simply put: When you know what you want from your business, the next step is knowing where you stand.

I’m glad you’re here and grateful to start this conversation with you. For now, take a moment to tap into your powers, ask better questions about each one and ponder the answers. Along the way, you may find the spark to rethink, refuel, reignite – to respark your business.

Dedication

This book is for you — the entrepreneur about to make your next hire, the founder who wants more from your marketing budget, the contractor whose phone used to ring on its own, the business owner whose growth has stalled somewhere past “good enough.”

You have experience. You've marketed before. You've put money behind it.

You're ready for what's next, even if getting there takes some courage.

Courage

Courage is the most important of all the virtues, because without courage you can't practice any other virtue consistently.

— Maya Angelou
Author, Poet, Civil Rights Activist

Courage shows up everywhere in small business. You are the person who took the risk, assumed the responsibility, and began to reap the rewards. Most people call this brave.

You may not see yourself that way.

That may be why, to you, courage doesn't feel like courage. It feels like discomfort — the moment right before you say the honest thing, try the different thing, or stop doing the thing that used to work.

The family-owned shop where the next generation sees what needs to change, and the founder isn't ready to hear it. Partners who started with the same vision, now quietly (or loudly) pulling in different directions. The owner who knows a new system could help and won't touch it — not because it's wrong, it's that the learning curve is more expensive than staying stuck. None of these are really strategy problems. They're risk/reward problems, dressed up as timing, budget or personality.

Meanwhile, everyone has an opinion about marketing and what you should be doing. Post more. Post less. Automate this. Personalize that. Be everywhere, be authentic, be strategic — all at once.

Chase enough of it and your marketing stops sounding like your business and starts sounding like every "should" stitched together.

Real change — the kind that moves your business — starts with the courage to stop, to say something true, and to live your purpose out loud, even when it's not what's trending.

Source: Angelou, Maya. "Courage is the Most Important Virtue." Quotes. Goodreads.com. Goodreads, n.d.

Your Turn

What if your marketing sounded exactly like you? What would be different?

What would you say about your business if you weren't worried about how it might land?

What could you stop doing in your marketing and what do you think would happen if you did?

Purpose

It's OK to think about what you want to do until it's time to start doing what you were meant to do.

— Brian Cox as
Jim Morris Sr.,The Rookie (2002)
Based on the true story of Jim Morris, who made his major league debut with the Tampa Bay Devil Rays in 1999 at age 35.

It takes courage to start a business and even more to admit your original purpose may have changed.

Maybe you started to make a living doing what you loved. Maybe it was circumstance, an opportunity, a cause, or a family legacy you were determined to carry forward. It may have even been by accident! Whatever the reason, you believed enough to take the risk.

That was then.

Running a business today means managing right now and building toward next, often at the same time; wanting more opportunity and fewer threats, more stability and fewer surprises, all at once. It's tempting to just work harder at what you already know. Will doing more of the same get you some place new? Where is "there," exactly?

Purpose is easy to lose in the pace of the day-to-day. Deadlines replace direction. Invoices, inventory and inboxes fill the hours you meant to spend on the bigger question. Look up months later and the business is running you instead of the other way around. It's a quiet kind of isolation. The people around you may not fully understand what it takes to keep this going, so eventually you stop trying to explain it.

If you believe your business still has the potential to take you where you want to go, that's worth naming again. You may find you're not in it for the same reasons.

Peter Drucker, often referred to as the father of modern management, put it like this: Because the purpose of a business is to create a customer, it has two, and only two, basic functions: marketing and innovation.

Both start in the same place: by understanding the people your business is for.

Sources:
Drucker, Peter F. The Essential Drucker: The Best of Sixty Years of Peter Drucker's Essential Writings on Management. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2001.
The Rookie. Directed by John Lee Hancock, screenplay by Mike Rich, performances by Dennis Quaid and Brian Cox, Walt Disney Pictures, 2002.

Your Turn

What do you picture when you look ahead to where this business could take you?

What about running your business makes you feel most energized?

How do you measure whether your business is taking you where you want to go?

Grok

Seek first to understand,
then to be understood.

— Stephen R. Covey
from his book, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*

There's a word for understanding people so deeply it changes how you serve them. Grok is a verb, introduced by Robert A. Heinlein for his 1961 science-fiction novel, *Stranger in a Strange Land*. It literally means 'to drink' and has come to mean to understand profoundly. These days, a machine answers to the same name. Fine. Let it fetch, sort and calculate. Grokking your audience is still a human job.

When you really understand what people want, you can reenergize your business to give it to them. Reaching that level of understanding calls on your intuitive, emotional and logical muscles together. Where do you start? How do you know when you know enough?

More importantly, what do you do with what you learn?

That's where marketing asks for two things at once: understand deeply and express it clearly. Covey put them in order, and the second half of his line is where the understanding pays off. Insight that stays in your head helps no one. A message with no insight behind it fades fast. Held together, they become the message that makes someone feel, "That's about me."

Start where you are. With the right set of tools and best practices, you can follow a structured process to cast a wide net over your business to assess it both structurally and comparatively. This dual perspective helps you understand competitive realities and what the marketplace is talking about.

What you'll discover are the advantages, capabilities, resources and assets you already have and what your audience really cares about. Keep an open mind. Grokking can stretch you, and most worthwhile transitions do.

Sources:
Covey, Stephen R. The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People. New York: Free Press, 1989 (Habit 5: "Seek First to Understand, Then to Be Understood").
Heinlein, Robert A. Stranger in a Strange Land. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1961.

Your Turn

What do you suspect your customers want that they haven't told you?

How do you want your customers to feel after doing business with you?

What do you know about your audience for certain, and how did you learn it?

Disruption

If you are really looking to move the world forward, begin by innovating on the inside, and disrupt yourself.

— Whitney Johnson
Investor, Speaker, Author

Disruptive innovation, a term of art coined by Harvard Business School professor Clayton Christensen, describes how a product or service takes root. First through simple applications at the bottom of a market and then by relentlessly moving up the market, eventually displacing established competitors. Think GM vs. Toyota, Amazon vs. Barnes & Noble, Netflix vs. the cable bundle.

Enter Whitney Johnson, who in her book Disrupt Yourself explains how the principles of disruption apply to individuals facing change. The journey of learning, marked by time delays and the squiggly line of progress, threatens our ability to predict. The mystery of how long it takes to reach a new level of mastery can push us backwards; to opt for 'what is' because that's what we know.

There's little mystery to traditional business planning methods, most often focused on calculations of things we can see and count. Of course, we must know the numbers intimately. Yet numbers don't illustrate how the business interacts with people. Change the interaction and the numbers change.

Yes, doing what we know is comfortable. And yes, change is uncomfortable. And yet, we can get ahead of change instead of letting it crash over us.

Riding the wave can be fun and exhilarating, especially when you created it and know it’s coming.

Sources:
Christensen, Clayton. "Disruptive Innovation." Business Blog. ClaytonChristensen.com. Clayton Christensen, 2015.Johnson, Whitney. Disrupt Yourself™: Putting the Power of Disruptive Innovation to Work. Brookline, MA: Bibliomotion, Inc., 2015.

Your Turn

What change do you see coming in your market, and what might it make possible?

What change is in front of you right now, and how does it feel?

Which parts of that change do you think you can control, and which can't you?

Play

Infinite players play with boundaries;
finite players play within boundaries.

— James Carse
Finite and Infinite Games

Are you a shark, a carp or a dolphin? In their book, Strategy of the Dolphin: Scoring a Win in a Chaotic World, Dudley Lynch and Paul Kordis write about the challenges managers face in a changing world. They use the dolphin to represent the attitudes needed to shift from survive to thrive.

In human terms, carps and sharks believe in scarcity and rely on "hard-wired" behaviors (fight, flight or freeze) in response to external events. Dolphins, operating in a world of abundance, have the natural ability to think constructively and creatively. They play, adjusting their behavior in pursuit of what they want. How they deploy their powers against sharks is legendary.

Dolphin personalities are flexible, responsive and accepting; dolphins will wait to ride the wave of their choice because not every wave serves their “porpoise.”

How you lead leaks. The way you play, what you treat as a game, what you treat as a threat all become how the business feels to everyone else. That feeling is culture. You do not have to write it on the wall. People already learned it by watching you.

We all possess innate attributes and personality traits we use to navigate in the world. When we know what they are, we can use this awareness to leverage our advantages in innovative ways.

Sources:
Lynch, Dudley, and Kordis, Paul L. Strategy of the Dolphin: Scoring A Win In A Chaotic World. New York: Ballantine Books, 1988.
Carse, James P. Finite and Infinite Games: A Vision of Life as Play and Possibility. New York: Free Press, 1986.

Your Turn

What pattern do you notice in how you approach problem solving?

When do you feel most like yourself?

What would your team or customers point to as proof of how you lead?

Innovation

Prototype like you're right.
Listen like you're wrong.

— Diego Rodriguez, Partner at IDEO,
a founding professor at the Hasso Plattner Institute of Design
at Stanford University, Entrepreneur-in-Residence at Harvard Business School

We tend to think of innovation as something big, brought to market by heroic, brave people. Most of the time it starts small and grows in pieces, propelled by moments of realization. You think of something, you try a little of it, you see.

If you look at it that way, innovation is just a better way to meet someone else's need. The gap isn't a lack of imagination, it's what happens after the idea. In a living business, useful innovation is usually one change that serves the customer a little better, then another. Imagine climbing a staircase one step at a time.

What stops us is the self-imposed expectation to get it right the first time. You have taste and preferences. You can see where the thing is still rough. So, the email stays in drafts, the offer stays in your head, and the thing you should stop doing keeps pulling you back in. Perfect is the enemy of progress. It looks like standards. It behaves like a trap.

Language can stall us, too. Prototype, pilot, beta, MVP, A/B — good words, and they can sound like a department you do not have. Another reason not to move, it feels like a job you never hired for. Those words are complicated labels for a simple act. Change one thing you can reverse, or stop one thing, and watch. You can call it a pilot if you want. You don't have to.

Think about what needs changing with the intention to improve something you can name. And if you make the change and nothing moves, you may have fixed a symptom. That is useful too. It can point you to the actual problem. A week of watching often teaches more than another month of perfecting an idea your customers have not experienced yet.

You do not have to get it right the first time.

What happens after the change is where clarity starts.

Source: Rodriguez, Diego. "20 Principles for Innovating." Business Blog. Metacool: thoughts on the art & science of bringing cool stuff to life. Diego Rodriguez, 2011.

Your Turn

Where could one small change lead?

What makes it hard to try something before it feels perfect?

If you made one change you could reverse, what would you watch to see whether it worked?

Clarity

Your business growth depends on what others believe.
So, give 'em a reason to believe.

— Amy L. Calfee
Entrepreneur, Purposeful Creative

Once used solely as a unique mark of ownership, brands have come to represent the factors that influence perception. Your brand is your reputation; it's what people say when you're not in the room. You don't own your brand and you can't control it.

Let that sink in for a minute.

Giving your brand arms and legs starts with a recognizable identity and a voice people can relate to — the name, the language, the look, the sentence you are willing to repeat. Branding is how your brand is found and how it shows up. That is how "make the logo bigger" gets treated like strategy. Bigger rarely changes what people already believe.

Building your business as a brand means understanding where those perceptions came from and how you compare in the market. While the iron (the name, the mark, the icon) symbolizes what you do, shifting perceptions happens when you keep the promise, the first time and every time. If that part is shaky, a new look is just a new look.

How do you want to be perceived? There's a way to test it through three things at once before you pull the marketing trigger. What you are ready to deliver, what the competition is already claiming, and what would make your ideal customer look up. Miss one and the promise wobbles.

Thinking like a customer is easy to say, hard to do when you are standing inside the business. You can get to a place where there's more confidence than doubt: you know your one thing, what it means to others, how to show it and how to deliver it.

The clearest brands are transparent.

What people see is what's really there.

Your Turn

If you could listen in, what story would you hear people telling about your business?

What part of your reputation makes you feel proudest?

What evidence do you have of what customers actually believe about you?

Authenticity

All marketers are storytellers.
Only the losers are liars.

— Seth Godin,
American Author, Entrepreneur, Marketer, Public Speaker

Clarity earns belief. Authenticity is what you do with it. People already expect a brand to be real: transparent, consistent, no tricks. That's the baseline now, not the differentiator. Standing out still matters, and the way to do it is to be you, not a louder version of everyone else.

Start by telling your story the way you'd tell it to a friend. It doesn't have to be overly produced or polished by AI. Short, sweet and real may be the way to go. One plain sentence that sounds like you can do more than a perfect paragraph that could belong to anyone.

Then let your personality in. Earnest, sincere, funny or even outrageous can all capture attention, as long as you can carry it through. The style matters less than the match. The person who meets your marketing and the person who meets you should recognize the same business.

That's where consistency pays off. Sound like yourself in every room your business shows up in, including the ones you don't control. Hand the real story to the people who speak for you (a sales team, a partner, a happy customer) and tell them who it's for. When they tell it your way, your story travels farther than you could carry it alone.

Original is usually the version people remember. Borrowed language and the safe version of your story may feel easier, but they belong to everyone. Yours belongs to you.

Informed buyers can talk back now more easily than ever, which works in your favor when the story is true. A business that oversells gets noticed once, then remembered for the gap between the pitch and the reality. A business that tells the truth plainly gets noticed by the right people, the ones who were looking for what you offer.

Talk your walk and walk your talk. People don't believe what you say about your business. They believe what you consistently show them.

Source: Godin, Seth. All Marketers Are Liars: The Underground Classic That Explains How Marketing Really Works — and Why Authenticity Is the Best Marketing of All. New York: Portfolio, 2005 (foreword, new edition).

Your Turn

How might your customers tell your story differently from how you tell it?

What part of your story feels hardest to tell plainly?

What do your customers value most, and what shows you that?

Connection

It is not your customer's job to remember you. It is your obligation and responsibility to make sure they don't have the chance to forget you.

— Patricia Fripp,
Speaker, Sales Trainer, Author

One of the ironies of a hyper-connected world is that more people are choosing to disconnect so they can reconnect. Not because the tools failed — because of how they were used.

It's tempting to blame the format. A newsletter that bounces feels like proof email doesn't work anymore. A social post that gets three likes feels like proof nobody's paying attention. The problem usually isn't the channel, it's what's moving through it. An automated sequence with nothing real to say gets ignored the same way a form letter used to. One post that says something true can travel further than a month of scheduled content.

Start with what you want someone to feel, know or do. Then choose how to say it — a story worth sharing, a question worth asking, an offer worth noticing. Automation can get your message to more people, faster. It can't decide what that message is. Marketing used with intention builds toward real connection. Marketing used only to fill a calendar becomes noise nobody opens.

You can't always make the connection happen the moment you want it. What you can do is stay present, so when the problem you solve shows up for them, you're already who they think of.

You can reach more people faster than you ever could. That is not the same as a conversation. The tool can deliver the note. Presence gets you remembered.

What you do with the reply is how the connection turns into something.

Source: Morgan, Blake. "101 of the Best Customer Experience Quotes." Forbes, April 2019 (quoting Patricia Fripp).

Your Turn

What common thread runs through the messages and conversations that landed best?

How do you want people to feel when they hear from you?

What do you want people to do next, and how will you know whether they did?

Yes, And

Shooting down the initial idea squashes creativity.

— Kelly Leonard,
Yes, And

"Yes, and" is a rule borrowed from improv comedy. When a scene partner hands you an idea, you don't block it with "no" or redirect it with "but" — you accept what's there and build on it. Say "yes, and" enough times and a scene creates itself, one honest addition stacking on the last.

Business conversations can follow this rule. At a networking event, "yes, but" cuts a promising conversation short before you find out if there's a real fit; "yes, and" keeps asking until you do. In a brainstorm, "yes, but that won't work because..." is the fastest way to kill a room; "yes, and what if we also..." is how the idea gets built. In sales, "yes, but" turns an objection into a rebuttal; "yes, and that's exactly why..." turns it into the reason to buy. Even a collaboration between two businesses can stall on an unspoken "but" neither side says out loud — "yes, and here's what we'd need to make it work" gets the real terms on the table instead.

The same habit shows up in how you think, not just how you talk. Somewhere along the way, most of us absorbed the idea that a good decision means picking a side: quantitative or qualitative, structure or instinct, the tried-and-true or the new thing everyone's talking about. Rarely is that true. The businesses that hold up over time aren't the ones that picked correctly between two options — they're the ones that noticed both were saying something worth hearing.

Weaving "yes, and" into daily conversations may feel fake at first. People will likely notice. Stick with it, and something else starts to happen: your own creative thinking sharpens, and before long, the people around you start echoing "yes, and" back to you without being asked. Conversations get a little more creative, on both sides.

Source: Leonard, Kelly, and Tom Yorton. *Yes, And: How Improvisation Reverses "No, But" Thinking and Improves Creativity and Collaboration — Lessons from The Second City.* New York: Harper Business, 2015.

Your Turn

What idea keeps coming back to you?

How does it feel when someone pushes back on one of your ideas?

What decision in front of you looks like an either/or, and what would a both look like?

Creativity

Creativity can solve almost any problem.
The creative act, the defeat of habit by originality,
overcomes everything.

— George Lois,
American Art Director, Designer, Author
Clio Award Winner for Lifetime Achievement

Creativity serves both practical and inspirational purposes. When it comes to solving problems, entrepreneurs are some of the most creative people I know. If you struggle with artistic forms of expression – writing, design, imagery, video – facing a blank page can feel like a wall. AI can help you get past that wall.

Ask AI for a first draft, a rough layout, a starting point, and the pressure to create from nothing disappears. Because a first draft isn't a finished idea, you can enlist a human creative to bring the judgment, taste and human instinct AI doesn't have. You need the sense of what's right for your business, not just what's technically correct. Together, they get you further, faster: AI clears the block, a creative makes it original to your brand.

You can lean on creativity for inspiration. We all struggle with worry and doubt when facing urgent issues or chronic problems that can't be ignored any longer. These emotions only block our ability to recognize an opportunity or real solution when it shows up. Like looking for milk in the refrigerator, it's hiding in plain sight, right there on the shelf.

If you don’t think of yourself as creative, remember, creativity is a power already inside all of us, free and abundant. When you learn to flex and apply your creative muscle, you'll begin to regenerate momentum.

One creative solution leads to the next, builds confidence, and prepares you and your team for the next step. You can bank on it.

Source: Lois, George. Damn Good Advice (For People with Talent!): How to Unleash Your Creative Potential by America's Master Communicator. London: Phaidon Press, 2012.

Your Turn

When do your best ideas show up, and where are you when they do?

What part of creating marketing feels hardest, and why do you feel that way?

Where would a quick first draft help most, and where would a human creative's judgment matter most?

Preparation

One important key to success is self-confidence.
An important key to self-confidence is preparation.

— Arthur Ashe,
Tennis Player, Author, Advocate
3-Time Grand Slam Champion

GTM strategy. ICP segmentation. ABM and demand gen, tracked through the martech stack with KPIs, attribution and ROI. *Got it?* If not, you're not alone. Marketing lingo can feel like alphabet soup.

Military strategists have their own version of this problem, just with different letters. They call the optimal state of preparedness "mission ready": assemble the team, gather the materiel, plan backwards from the objective, and stay nimble enough to react when the plan meets reality. It is a highly structured system that accounts for every detail in support of the warfighter.

Marketing borrows the same instinct, and sometimes the same habit of hiding behind jargon. More than a purely logistical exercise, it touches nearly every part of a business: sales, product, finance, legal, data, customer success, even the people who hire and train your team. Getting ready to compete means translating all of that into language the people carrying it out can use.

Real readiness is knowing more than the acronyms. It's making sure your team understands the plan well enough to question it before you launch, not after. That plan translates into resources like scripts, sales sheets, tracked conversations in the CRM (yes, more alphabet soup), policies around offers and delivery timelines — the details that turn a strategy into something someone can execute.

Competing can feel like a series of battles, something you already know.

You just want everyone on your side, ready to win it together — inside and out.

Your Turn

What would it look like for your team to carry out your next marketing move without you in the room?

What would help you feel confident about reaching your next goal?

What tools would your team want in hand to carry out the plan, and which of those exist today?

Relationships

The new form of networking is… about collaboration, co-creation, partnerships, and long-term values-based relationships.

— Porter Gale,
Author, Your Network is Your Net Worth

Preparation gets your team ready inside your business. Outside it, a different kind of team matters just as much: the contractors, agencies, referral partners and colleagues who represent you when you're not in the room.

Not every partnership is the right fit, and that's not a knock on anyone's skill. A gifted agency that only speaks its own specialized language isn't wrong. It's just not yours. The right partner translates as naturally as your best employee does, with words you and your customers use in real life.

The best relationships can lead to collaboration. Open collaboration turns a contact list into something more reliable: a network of people who show up when it matters, not just when it's convenient.

Association memberships and local groups can put you in the same room again and again, and that repetition builds trust. Be selective and choose a few where your customers, or the people who send them your way, already spend time. The person you meet could be your next customer or know a guy who needs you. You can't always tell which, so it helps to be curious about everyone.

You've been there. A meeting with fellow business owners morphs into a discussion about the most recent issue, and someone chimes in without missing a beat: "I know a guy." Pretty soon, one person's openness encourages others to speak up and ask, "Do you know a guy?" These are the kinds of relationships that can pay off when you least expect it.

Listening does most of the work: what someone is building, what they're stuck on, who they'd like to meet. People remember who listened.

People also need to know what to say about you. If someone can't say in one sentence who you help, they can't pass your name along. That's one more reason to know your market position first.

None of it happens without asking. Asking for help. Asking the better questions. Asking the right person at the right time. Strong businesses aren't built by people who know everything. They're built by people who know who to ask.

Source: Gale, Porter. Your Network Is Your Net Worth: Unlock the Hidden Power of Connections for Wealth, Success, and Happiness. New York: Atria Books, 2013.

Your Turn

In one sentence, how might someone describe who you help?

How does it feel to ask someone for an introduction?

Where do your customers, or the people who send them to you, already spend time?

Ask

Asking for help with gratitude says:
We have the power to help each other.

— Amanda Palmer,
Musician, Author

You probably use your power to ask all the time. To drive revenue, ask for the sale, or ask online customers to buy. You can't close the deal or complete the transaction without the "call to action" or the "ask."

There's another kind of ask, easy to confuse with the first: asking your audience about their experience. Your audience's approval matters in a very practical way: it's the difference between guessing and knowing. Complaints identify opportunities for improvement. Compliments validate what's working.

Ideally, you have a built-in way to capture feedback. Think of it as installing a “listening loop” at each step of the customer journey so you can measure the wins, the fails, and the ‘meh’ over time and, in some cases, save the deal just in time.

Then there's the ask that is one step away from your customers: asking the people in your life — a mentor, a trusted advisor, a peer who's been where you are — for help when you're stuck. That's a different kind of vulnerable, and it doesn't come with a call-to-action button or from a public social page.

Maybe you've asked before and been disappointed. Maybe you don't ask because you’re avoiding the answer. Maybe you're not sure what to do with the answer. Maybe you just haven't asked a really good question yet.

Better questions allow you to know what you need to know when you need to know it. You don't have to know everything right now.

Learning is a process that prepares you to take action.

Source: Palmer, Amanda. The Art of Asking; or, How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Let People Help. New York: Grand Central Publishing, 2014.

Your Turn

What are you curious about that you haven't asked anyone yet?

How does it feel to ask for feedback?

What ways do you collect feedback today, and what do you do with what comes back?

Taking Action

I can only show you the door.
You're the one that has to walk through it.

— Laurence Fishburne as Morpheus
The Matrix (1999)

You're used to taking action. That's how you got here — a decision that worked, a launch that landed, a year that outperformed the one before it. That's worth remembering now, when the last marketing decision didn't play out the way you planned, and everyone around you has an opinion about why.

Maybe you thought you had arrived, and all that was needed was to rinse and repeat. Keep the business humming. Then something changed. Maybe what you thought was true isn't.

The obvious answer may look like more leads. Fair. Yet more of the wrong people can turn into costly noise. More of the right ones is a different conversation.

Here's what can stall your next decision: too much information — some of it outdated, some of it just wrong. It can distract from the one thing that matters: your real position, in your market, today. Not the one you assumed when you started. Not the one from last year's webinar. And not the big idea you've been saving until now.

- What do you bring to this business that you've stopped noticing?
- What needs improving so you can make a better marketing promise?
- Who actually cares about what you do, and why?
- How do you actually compare to your competition?
- What could you borrow from a business that's already solved the problem you're stuck on?

Find the place where the answers to these questions converge.

It becomes a door. You can walk right through it.

Source: The Matrix. Directed by Lana Wachowski and Lilly Wachowski, performances by Keanu Reeves and Laurence Fishburne, Warner Bros., 1999.

Your Turn

What next move keeps pulling at you, even if you can't yet explain why?

What feels like it's holding you back, and what feels like it's pulling you forward?

Of the five questions on the opposite page, which has the least evidence behind your answer, and how could you find more?

You're Here for a Reason

Whether you started one year ago or 20, where is your business right now?
Do you want more, less, or something else from your business?
Where do you want your business to take you?

Let's Find Out Why

Schedule a conversation.

START HERE

With Gratitude

Framily · Children · Colleagues · Clients · Students · Big Dogs · Campers · Master Minds · Biscotti Buddies

"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord,
"plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."
— Jeremiah 29:11 NIV

Hello, Friend

At heart, I'm an entrepreneur. I grew up in an entrepreneurial household where dirty fingernails happened daily — work wasn't something you talked about, it was something you wore.

I found photography early on as my creative outlet. From portraits, to advertising, to landscapes, to event coverage. You'd be surprised what you can learn from a room full of business leaders in casual conversation while weaving through a crowd.

Looking critically through the lens, I learned to see what's actually there, notice the patterns, avoid the distractions in the background, then shift my perspective until the composition and lighting captured the moment and the result showed a story. Getting it right and getting the win. I'm sure you've experienced plenty of wins in your business.

Over 30 years I've applied that same eye to marketing for small businesses, nonprofits, campuses, software companies, associations, and the occasional big room full of people. Events, campaigns, new neighborhoods, startups just getting off the ground.

The focus shifted to becoming a better listener through teaching. Chief Listening Officer isn't a title built on getting it right. I adopted it because when the ideas start firing, staying in listening mode is tough. So, the title is an aspirational reminder: to use two eyes, two ears, and one mouth in proportion.

For me, the simplicity of listening, noticing, and observing connects the dots to better questions on the way to meeting people where they are. That's how I build marketing strategy. It's not just about the tech. Tools change constantly. It's not just about the tactics, although we can always improve. It's about you, innovating and marketing to create and keep customers so you can get what you want from your business.

What do you want? Let's have a conversation. I'd love to hear your story and where you're headed next.

Best,



Amy Calfee
The Entrepreneur's Chief Listening Officer

BOOK A CALL HERE

ReSPARK YOUR BUSINESS™

Better Questions for the Business You Have and the One You Want

What do you want from your business?

You've been at it for a while. You've marketed before and put money behind it, yet you're not a marketer and may not want to be. Marketing strategy is tough because it requires two things at once: art and business, emotion and reason, standing out and fitting in. It balances classic principles (the stuff that doesn't change) with contemporary tools and tactics (the stuff that changes all the time). This journal is the pause to look inside, then prepare to act on the outside. A place to tap into your powers, ask better questions about each one and ponder the answers on your way to finding the spark to rethink, refuel and reignite — *to respark your business*.

Take Action

Engage in a one-to-one experience to know where you stand before making your next marketing move. I do the heavy lifting to show you the evidence impacting the success of your business. You gain the brand clarity and marketing strategy you need to reach your next goal. The approach is different because it is

- Based on you and how you lead
- Simplified, focused and collaborative
- Limited to relevant facts
- Translated into more usable information
- Lingo-free
- Delivered in weeks, not months

Walk away with a clear vision and marketing playbook anyone can carry through!

Amy Calfee

The Entrepreneur's Chief Listening Officer



With 30 years behind the lens, in creative direction, content development and event production, I revel in helping leaders express their value to the people who matter most. A decade of teaching owners taught me to speak their language. Another decade inside tech taught me to build repeatable systems.

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For you or the business owner in your life

Her ability to absorb complex ideas and boil them down to their simplest terms that are easy to convey has proven invaluable.

Carl S.

She has become a sounding board and the voice of reason. She sees and communicates the big picture as it relates to your business.

Paul M.

Amy possesses the spark of creativity every organization needs. She balances her deep understanding of the customer journey with the mastery of digital tools and platforms to develop solutions that truly resonate.

Richard C.

Let's have a conversation

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