

Kiss My Aster

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Can I Ask You a Question?

Amanda Thomsen



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In owning this shop, I dive deeper into studying human behavior than I ever wanted to every day. The newest thing I've taken a magnifying glass to is when people ask questions without curiosity. Examples of this:

Any question in which the asker already knows the answer or does not care about the answer.

A question asked out of "easing in" or perceived politeness (AKA small talk).

Questions asked in bad faith (to control, disarm, manipulate or take up space).

When we were kids, some of these questions were "What were you thinking?" or "How many times do I have to tell you?" These questions were disarming then, even

our little brains and bodies understood, non-verbally, that there were no answers that would be accepted. These questions were more about barking at us rather than understanding us. There was no curiosity there. As adults we get "Are you busy?" or "Can I ask you a question?" and I don't know about you, but my brain goes into absolute Code Red when I get these. It's a preamble for something awful or, the flipside, something that takes less time to answer than the "Hey, do you have a sec?" and it was all just a weird seesaw of emotions.

I see now how we're raised with these questions with no curiosity behind them and how they've found their way into polite society, but I would like some of them to die a grisly death! Like if I get asked, "Working hard? Or hardly working?" when I'm unloading a truck by myself on a sultry August afternoon or when someone comes into the shop, has decided it isn't for them and yet they ask me, "How long have you been here?" and I can tell they've already turned off their listening ears. What they REALLY said to me was, "I do not understand your business model as it was not aimed at appeasing me personally and I want you to almost know that." Other recent hits are, "So what is this, a plant shop?" from within the aforementioned, very obvious plant shop and, also, my new favorite: "What do you sell? A little this and that? A little something for everyone? Gotta little this and a little that? Some different kinds of things? For everyone?"

I think that as kids we're very literal creatures and think in black and white and as we grow up we understand that not everything has hidden or multiple meanings, but, man, I'm just now putting it together that some people mean to cut you with their non-curious questions.

So when someone asks me pretty much anything, I have one second to think, "What is their real question and intent?" And I'm great at reading between the lines, but I'm not always great at knowing how to handle that data.

When someone asks me how long we've been here, I have a split second to assess if this is someone that wants to know our shop lore/history so they can make a time machine and go back to enjoy the last three years or if they think I'm an idiot. If they already think I'm an idiot, I say, "we opened at 11:00 a.m.!" as cheerfully as anyone has ever been. This makes them SO mad, but they don't know why. I do. I caught them with their lack of curiosity.

Back to us as kids ... we were genuinely curious then. All of us. Not all of us had that curiosity treated like the gift it was. Some of us were told to shut it, go away or were otherwise misdirected or mistreated. Now there's a shortage of pure curiosity in the world and I think it shows. I want my business to be a place to be curious, I want people to come and be curious with me. I usually remember to ask open-ended questions—this is Retail 101 and I'm grateful it's been drummed into me since the '90s. Just ask questions that can't be answered with "yes" or "no." And see where it goes!

The thing is, curiosity takes effort and vulnerability, but, DANG—SO DO GOOD ANSWERS! And if we're going to be serving great answers for great customers for eight hours a day (multiplied by 10, 20 years or more!), we can't be trying to appease those who never even cared enough to be curious in the first place. It'll drain you. It's almost like someone walking up and asking, "Hey, can I drain you for five to seven minutes?" **GP**

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