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# WHY?

While on a research trip to the Gulf of Mexico, I had a strange dream that continues to jolt my consciousness, not hauntingly but as a subtle reminder.

As the dream unfolded, I am riding an ATV on a strange, oil slick, dark road with mud-like, but glassy texture. All structure and life were totally absent until I approached two racially mixed boys, sitting on this strange substance, dressed in patched but spotlessly clean clothes. The oldest, about four, was repairing a nondescript device while the smaller boy, quiet throughout the encounter, played with a broken toy truck.

I asked the older boy, "Where is everyone?"

He looked up with the sweetest face, his eyes clear and tearless, answering almost in a whisper, "Gone, they are all gone. There's just me and my brother."

"Where did they go?"

"I don't know."

He returned his attention to the device, than looking up, the serene, inquisitive look still etched in his young face, asked, "Why"?

Desperately searching for an answer, I quietly explained, "Well, hurricane Katina may have washed everything away."



"No, not that", he replied quietly.

I woke up, struggling for answers, aware the child's question was more profound and inclusive than the response. Unfolding like a sequel, the dream reemerged and focused on the children. Before I could speak, the boy, with face calm and beatific, asked again with infinite patience,

"Why?"

The dream, strange and confused, had two simultaneous endings. First, it faded, and then I simply rode away. The latter ending raised a question - if there was no one to care for them, why had I not taken the boys to safety. Eventually the answer materialized. Imagined into existence, they are home, locked solidly into my heart and conscience, catalysts for inquiry and antidotes for apathy.

As systems analysts, the words, what, why, when, where, and how, are essential fact-finding and problem solving questions. Our mobile technological society is obsessed with "what," searching Google and instantly equating the finding as facts.

The Five Why's is an improvement concept, introduced by Taiichi Ohno, the master behind the Toyota Production system. The Five Whys are a tool for systematic problem identification and resolution, and inclusive in Lean, Lean Six/Sigma, and Value Management Programs (VMP).

Wikipedia has done a great job of defining the concept.

The 5 Whys is an iterative question-asking technique used to explore the cause-and-effect relationships underlying a particular problem. The primary goal of the technique is to determine the root cause of a defect or problem. (The "5" in the name derives from an empirical observation on the number of iterations typically required to resolve the problem.) [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/5\\_Whys](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/5_Whys) - cite note-1

The significant question is why, foundational to curiosity. While obscured, there is always a cause and effect. Questions range from the macro to the minuscule. The answer to a question, such as "why do some individuals find it easy to forfeit their freedoms?" is both complicated and controversial. Some people have reservations about posing contentious questions, while others ask why, seeking clarity, facts, and truth. Without knowledge of the causes for an action/inaction, the effects lack clarity and rationality. Refusing to ask relevant questions measures our fear, not intellectual relevancy, and perpetuates the situation.

Given the challenge from the little boy, what remains is the application of the tools and defining solutions. First, we will state an unequivocal fact and provide the data. The United States is by far the richest, most successful county in the world. We passionately want to perpetuate this success for our children - all of the children.



The following chart shows the richest countries in the world, starting with the USA, greater than 16 trillion dollars, nearly twice that of China. This chart puts the narrative into perspective.

Country	2012 GDP
<u>United States</u>	16,244,600,000,000
<u>China</u>	8,227,102,629,831
<u>Japan</u>	5,959,718,262,199
<u>Germany</u>	3,428,130,624,839
<u>France</u>	2,612,878,387,760
<u>United Kingdom</u>	2,471,783,570,300
<u>Brazil</u>	2,252,664,120,777
<u>Russian Federation</u>	2,014,774,938,342
<u>Italy</u>	2,014,669,579,720
<u>India</u>	1,841,709,755,679
<u>Canada</u>	1,821,424,139,311

<http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.CD>

Following is a partial list of whys, and each reader will expand it with his or her own questions.

- ✚ Given the United States is the richest country, why should any citizen be hungry or without healthcare?
- ✚ Given the vast resources and state of our nation, why do we not have a collective mission statement?
- ✚ Why continue to ignore waste in government and why not hold elected officials accountable?
- ✚ Why are we the people fighting with each other instead of against non-responsive, corrupted government officials?
- ✚ Americans value honesty and justice, so why not hold our government accountable for its deception and lies? Why does it matter unless we are complicit through apathy or political affiliation?
- ✚ Why has fear stilled our voices, and sapped the courage to speak for our children?
- ✚ Why, given that Americans spend more for education than any other country, do we rank 17th among the industrialized nations. Only 75% of our students graduate from high school. Source: <http://thelearningcurve.pearson.com/the-report/towards-an-index-of-education-outputs>
- ✚ Why, given the amount of money spent on public education, do students at Catholic schools, receiving zero governmental funding, score consistently 10-20 points higher? Source: The Nations Report Card, Department of Education
- ✚ Why do children go to school hungry? Source: <http://feedingamerica.org/>



- ✦ Why must Title 1 teachers beg for school supplies from their family members? Source: [www.wkrn.com/story/21858334/study-finds-teachers...pocket-on-supplies](http://www.wkrn.com/story/21858334/study-finds-teachers...pocket-on-supplies)  
[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/08/23/survey-many-teachers-repo\\_n\\_1822777.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/08/23/survey-many-teachers-repo_n_1822777.html)
- ✦ Given that pollution is global, why do Americans look the other way as China builds coal power plants, and we dismantle coal production in the United States? Why are their cheap products more important than our environmental values?
- ✦ Why, given the resources available, do disaster areas such as Plaquemine Parish and New Jersey still need rebuilding funds?

The little boys in my dream are an incarnation of our children and grandchildren, who always ask why. They are a manifestation of our responsibility to future generations. It must be a colorblind future with opportunities for all. Dr. Corina Norrbom, a guest presenter on CompetitiveAmerica.us, posted a paper titled "Is It Good for the Children?" Her presentation neatly summarizes society's obligation to future generations.

Based on Dr. Norrbom's criteria, some evaluative questions are required, about how well we, as a people, are achieving this objective.

- ✦ Why have we burdened future generations with an ultra expensive healthcare system?
- ✦ Why are we allowing our government to erode the very rights our children deserve?
- ✦ Why perpetuate an education system teaching our students what, instead of how to think?
- ✦ Why does our education system leave graduates thousands of dollars in debt?
- ✦ Why not re-engineer the education system, matching degrees to employer's requirements?
- ✦ Why are future generations burdened with a national debt (17 trillion dollars, greater than one year of national GDP) requiring them to pay higher interest and taxes for a lifetime?
- ✦ Why have we not fixed the social security system, making it available for future generations, instead of subsidizing seniors on the backs of the young?
- ✦ Why have we created a business environment where job development is discouraged through governmental regulations, resulting in high unemployment among the young?
- ✦ Why are we not creating a society where children can vision big, and then work to make those passions a reality?
- ✦ Why have we created a society where, for the first time in American history, the future prospects for our children and grandchildren are less than prior generations?

The dream children permeated my conscience, dramatically escalating the challenge to take action. Society is failing our children, facing futures with reduced opportunities, a remarkable broken continuum. Ask if you are responsible for their future because if not, their fate is sealed. If yes, take the time to honestly answer these questions, and ask why five times to each answer to find the root cause.



The American people will disagree on questions and answers (solutions), and this disagreement is reflected in our divided government. While all are required to fix the problems, there must first be honest, civil dialog. Currently, many carefully avoid controversial issues, even among family members. Perhaps all need more courage to ask important questions, hopefully in a non-confrontational way. Nothing positive will result until we bury the conflict between liberals, conservatives, etc. confronting common issues as one people.

Once defined, ask what actions will fix the problems, than take positive steps to implement solutions. If we care enough, then positive changes will occur, enabling future generations to blossom like flowers on the new tree of opportunity, entrepreneurialism, and prosperity.

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