

AN INTERVIEW WITH HAL GREGERSEN: THE ART OF QUESTIONING IN GLOBAL LEADERSHIP

Author: Mark E. Mendenhall

This paper was published in *Advances in Global Leadership*, Volume 13. Citation is:

Mendenhall, M.E. (2020). An interview with Hal Gregersen: The art of questioning in global leadership. In J.S. Osland, B. Szkudlarek, M.E. Mendenhall, & B.S. Reiche, (Eds). *Advances in global leadership* (Volume 13). Emerald Publishing Limited: 205-218.

Copyright © 2024, Emerald Publishing Limited. *This Author Accepted Manuscript (AAM) is provided for your own personal use only. It may not be used for resale, reprinting, systematic distribution, emailing, or for any other commercial purpose without the permission of the publisher (Emerald Publishing).*

ABSTRACT

Hal Gregersen is one of the pioneers of the field of global leadership. Along with J. Stewart Black and Allen Morrison he created one of the early foundational competency models in the field that was published in their book, *Global Explorers: The Next Generation of Leaders* (1999). Since that time, Hal has studied the skills associated with innovative leadership with Clayton Christensen and Jeff Dyer. A good introduction to this research is their award-winning book, *The Innovator's DNA: Mastering the Five Skills of Disruptive Innovators* (2011). His most recent book, *Questions are the Answer: A Breakthrough Approach to Your Most Vexing Problems at Work and in Life* (2018), explores the art of questioning – a skill he argues is critical to leadership productivity. We were curious about Hal's research journey from the study of global leaders to his current research focus – the power of questions – and he graciously agreed to be interviewed for this volume of *Advances in Global Leadership*. Hal is a Senior Lecturer in Leadership and Innovation at the MIT Sloan School of Management. Before joining MIT, he taught at INSEAD, London Business School, Tuck School of Business at Dartmouth College, Brigham Young University, and in Finland as a Fulbright Fellow.

Keywords: Global leadership, questions, questioning, problem-solving, global leaders, curiosity.

Mark: Hal, you are one of the pioneers of the field of global leadership. I'm interested in learning more about your intellectual journey in moving from global leadership to studying the competencies of innovators with Clayton Christiansen and Jeff Dyer and your more recent research on the power of asking questions to help people live, lead, and work in more powerful ways. I think people would find your journey interesting.

Hal: Sure. The initial focus of my research was around global leaders and globalization. After that, it focused on leading change and transformation and then it turned to leading innovation, and now is increasingly centered on leading digital transformation and digitization. If I go back and look at the leaders that others and I have had the chance to interview as part of either paper or book projects – going global, transforming, innovating, digitizing –every one of those leaders were operating on the edge of uncertainty where they face an enormous number of “unknown unknowns.” At that edge of uncertainty, questions really are the answer because the answers aren't there to be found.

The model that Stewart, Allen, and I built had as its foundation the skill of inquisitiveness – it was the core of six or seven skills that we found necessary for global leadership based on interviews and research work. Then, in the initial version of the book, *Leading Strategic Change* (co-authored with Stewart Black),

we had a section focused on inquisitiveness as the fuel that drives change. Then, with Clay and Jeff we studied the world's most innovative leaders, folks like Jeff Bezos, Pierre Omidyar, and Diane Greene, guiding firms that investors believed were the world's most innovative companies. We found five primary skills of innovative leaders and one of them was the ability to ask questions that challenge the status quo. Indeed, questioning was at the core of the ability to innovate. So, in retrospect, it started out with inquisitiveness being critical for global leadership and it stayed that way as I studied leading change and transformation.

I think the cognitive aspect that applied to all three of those research streams, at that point, leading up to our work that we published in the *Innovators DNA* book was Openness to Experience, one of the Big Five personality factors. Openness to Experience was also an assessment element as global leaders and it was part of how Stewart and I approached our research on leading change. Later, Clay, Jeff, and I wound up splitting Openness to Experience down into more specific elements, which was questioning and observing, networking for new ideas, and experimenting based on our research interviews with over 100 innovative leaders and our self and 360 survey assessment database that now includes over 20,000 respondents.

Mark: That's fascinating. If you could go back in time to the late 1990s, but bring with you your framework of questioning, how would that change the model you developed with Stewart Black and Allen Morrison? How would the model look different? Or would there even be a model? Knowing what you know now, and if you were to transport yourself back in time ...

Hal: No doubt, there are probably lots of criticisms of my work and how I have approached things over the years. Whether it's the global leadership model or the leading change model or the *Innovators DNA* model, or my current model on questioning, all of which were driven by reasonably legitimate academic work, either interview or survey-based data collection. I have always had a deep desire to translate research findings in ways that are useful and practical for managers. Thus, I always had a drive to simplify – simplify to the point that leaders could actually get their arms around the constructs and do something practical with them.

If I could go back in time knowing what I know now, where might the models have been radically different? Maybe they would have differed in terms of causality and been a bit more circular, a little less linear. I think a lot of the key constructs would have stayed the same. Would I change the design a whole lot? In terms of the inquiry-centered focus of the research over the years, no. I remember interviewing AG Lafley, who was not the CEO of Proctor & Gamble when we interviewed him for our *Global Explorers* book. He was, I think, a regional president. I think he was running the Asia region at that point. AG asked me more questions than I asked him in that research interview. It's no surprise that a decade or so later, Proctor & Gamble tapped AG to take over leading change and

innovation. I think it was an 11% innovation premium boost over his decade long tenure as CEO, which is a huge financial impact on the positive side that others and he created. AG was an exceptional global leader. He was just absolutely off the chart. His ability to ask questions and then shut up and listen really well to other people helped him figure out “what-he-didn't-know-that-he-didn't-know” before it was too late. This was a skill he possessed way before he ever became a CEO.

Mark: That leads into my next question. As I was reading *Questions are the Answer* (2018), I found myself thinking about curiosity. It struck me that curiosity might be a foundational pre-requisite to be able to ask the right type of questions as a leader. Could you reflect on the role curiosity plays inherently in people's ability to ask powerful questions or if they're low in curiosity, does that hinder their ability to do that?

Hal: An enormous amount of research has been done over the years on curiosity, as you well know. Before my current work on questioning, Spencer Harrison, now faculty at INSEAD, worked with me as a research assistant on *The Innovators DNA* (2011). We spent an enormous amount of energy diving into the curiosity literature. One of the intriguing things we discovered was the varied components of curiosity. One variation is a very specific kind of curiosity where someone is trying to figure something out here and now – for example, “why is that bird flying out the window at this moment?” Another variation of curiosity is manifested in a more generic, generalized way. For example, some people seem to be simply interested in everything.

I do think curiosity in all of its manifestations makes a deep difference our human ability to articulate questions. In thinking about the people I interviewed for these last couple of research projects and books – I didn't collect data on this, so I'm just going off on a limb here – my instinctual response is that the best leaders at questioning excelled at both dimensions of curiosity – the specific and the general. They had a wide-ranging sense of curiosity about all sorts of things. When they were latched onto a challenge, opportunity, or problem. they were trying to figure out, you know, they couldn't be pried away from the challenge no matter how hard you tried.

Mark: If what you have said about curiosity is true, which I think it is, both from your model and from your research, then it may be that that's one of the most fundamental competencies, traits, or orientations global leaders would need in the global context.

Hal: Yes. I agree with you fully. In conversations a few years back I had with Clay Christensen, we were trying to figure out how one goes about learning “what you don't know you don't know” – the “unknown unknowns.” Clay raised the phrase, “you must actively seek passive data.” That's what curious people do, and it's a great way of to frame a global leader's work –actively seeking the passive data

that's not actively coming at you. If you fail to do that, it's at your own peril because it's the undiscovered passive data that ends up — at some point— becoming your or your team's, or your organization's, or even your country's demise. Every blind spot is an “unknown unknown,” and the only way we can figure that out that crucial blind spot is by actively seeking passive data. For me, asking a question and engaging in the conversation around whatever that question provokes is the essence of actively seeking passive data. That's the magical means by which global leaders, I think, figure things out.

Mark: In the acknowledgement section of *Questions are the Answer* (2018), you observed that it takes a community to build a questioning capacity in leaders. Would you reflect on how global leaders, and really any leader for that matter, can go about cultivating a questioning community around themselves? Have you seen that happen with some of the CEOs and others who you have interviewed? Or do most of them tend to drive questioning themselves?

Hal: I think it's both. When working with C-suite leaders who care about trying to become more innovative – and often on a big global scale – my first direct question to them is, “How do you find and solve problems? Just describe what you do behaviorally.” If their problem finding and solving approach is largely reactive in nature, meaning it's a status quo analysis based on secondary data that's discussed and debated at headquarters, you know that they're pretty ripe for getting blindsided and setting themselves up for some sort of disaster.

Contrast that with that leader or team of leaders who take a very systematic, intentional and purposeful mode of actively seeking out passive data, day in and day out. In my most recent research project interviewing over 200 creative leaders like Elon Musk and Orit Gadiesh, these folks created conditions or situations for themselves and for their people to be uncomfortable instead of comfortable and reflectively quiet instead of constantly filling the room with noise. Those behaviors are not the kinds of things that we normally do when performance pressures are on. Innovative leaders and global leaders are masters at going out of their way, being in many places and talking to a variety of people that force them – in one sense, cause them – to realize that, “Oh no, part of my mental model is dead wrong!” And further, “Ouch! That data point just cut to the core of an assumption I thought was true but isn't. This hurts, but I am not going to run from it – I'm going to slow down, reflect a bit, and see where it goes.”

When we put ourselves and others in situations where we're wrong, uncomfortable and reflectively quiet, that's when catalytic questions emerge that otherwise wouldn't. They may emerge in our own mind, or because we have created a safe enough space for others to ask us fearless questions.

Mark: So, in addition to possessing inherent curiosity or the desire to ask questions, additionally leaders have to possess both the desire and the ability to form a team

around them and create a questioning culture within the team. That seems like it would be a very difficult thing to pull off.

Hal: It's super difficult to pull off, and it takes a very deep commitment from a founder or from senior leaders to be willing to put themselves in such situations over and over and over again. Jeff Wilke, who is the CEO of consumer products worldwide for Amazon which covers a huge swath of that organization, operates this way. He knows that his mental model has errors in it, that it's flawed. When he wakes up in the morning, he tries to figure out what is he wrong about not what he is right about. He actively puts himself in situations with people or in places where his model gets provoked and challenged. If he realizes something is off kilter with his model, he relishes the chance to change it. In the Amazon world, they have built in practices and approaches where the people know, in particular settings, that they are obligated to ask the toughest questions, and everyone needs to be ready to engage with them, because that's what the particular meeting is all about. They call it a "working backwards process" and everyone from the top to the bottom is expected to engage with it.

So, for example, "I've got an idea. I write up a six-page document. Here's what the idea would look like if we did it in five years. Here's the press release when we deliver on the idea. Here are six pages of questions and answers that are important to address if we actually try to make this idea happen in five years." Then, people sit down in a room and read that document for 15 to 20 minutes, knowing that at the end of that 20 minutes, they're obligated to ask tough questions of the person and their team who created that working backwards document. The creators are obligated to engage with the questions, and it's a very intense, truth seeking, back and forth experience. But people know that's the space where it happens – that's where, in a very specific way, they are expected to ask and answer the toughest questions they could ever imagine about the issue.

Pixar is totally different. You've got a whole range ranging from brain trusts to dailies to Notes Day to peer pirates, to reverse mentoring, to fill in the blank. But so much of that creative work is Ed Catmull's construction because of his deep, undeviating commitment to building an organization that's full of candor and truth seeking. The prime directive there is to define and solve problems that make great movies. For example, if you're a director and you're unwilling to sit in a three hour meeting multiple times during the course of the creation of a movie where 15 other directors and senior people literally rip apart your ideas at whatever stage they are in with questions and responses in a brain trust process that absolutely takes all of the emotional energy out of you – if you're not willing to go into that kind of space and live in that kind of world, it's not going to work. If you don't buy into that truth-seeking logic behind making something great, then you don't belong there.

Mark: Is it your finding or your conclusion from your research that the ability to ask robust profound questions that can lead to amazing outcomes is transcultural?

Does it manifest itself in CEOs or other leaders all around the world? Or are there situations where either national or traditional organizational cultural norms dampen it more so than other regions?

- Hal: I'm old enough, Mark, and distant enough from the current literature on culture that using Hofstede might date me as an ancient. But I'm going to because I think it's relevant. The point is: questions flourish where power distance is low. If you've got high power distance and people pay attention to hierarchy, you're not going to have the kind of inquiry that you would otherwise. So you take some of those dimensions and yes, there are undoubtedly cultural differences about adults asking catalytic questions that challenge false assumptions and give energy to change the system, absolutely.
- Mark: I noticed there were examples of leaders with questioning skills from Asia and all around the world in your book.
- Hal: And that's where, again, it's a distribution thing for me. In the Innovators DNA work, we collaborated Credit Suisse to create an innovation premium index that evaluates companies on investors' beliefs about whether or not the companies were going to do something different in the future. The simple way of putting it is to start with "what's the net present value of the income stream of your existing businesses?" For some companies that's the entire share price and for others, there is a "premium" above and beyond that income stream from the existing businesses because investors believe the company will do things differently in the future. Well, you look at the companies with the highest innovation premiums, they hail from all over the world. They're the top 10 to 15% of the best of the best. So whether it's Rose Marcario at Patagonia or Pony Ma at Tencent, it's the same story as Richard Branson at Virgin or fill in the blank.
- Mark: It's similar to what Kenichi Ohmae found back in the 1980s that the best strategists are all over the world, that excellent strategizing is not related to nationality but to the mindset they're operating from.
- Hal: For me, the more dominant factor on the question of a leader's ability to ask better questions is related to the home and educational environment of the leader than it is culture. In the Innovators DNA work, we realized that close to half of the people we interviewed had very nontraditional educational experiences. Many of them were in Montessori or international baccalaureate schools when growing up. Those places are project centered – you show up in the morning and they ask, "What are you interested in? Okay, let's use all your knowledge to figure it out." Even if they weren't in that kind of school setting, innovative leaders often had parents or neighbors or grandparents who created projects for them to do in the summers or on the weekends or evenings to teach them that the world revolves around finding something you care deeply enough about to do something about it, to create a project about it. That's the absolute opposite of a lock step educational system where most teachers are teaching to subject content in order for students to

get moved from one grade to the next. In such settings it's all about answers and it's all about getting them right and getting them fast. It kills kid's capacity to ask questions.

Mark: So given that most people probably aren't raised in those kinds of environments, what kinds of things have you seen that act as catalysts for people to wake up to the power of asking questions when it wasn't natural to them before? I'm curious if you spent much time looking at people who were not initially oriented that way but became that way.

Hal: People can and do change in their ability to ask increasingly better questions. Some of that can be fueled by working with somebody who demands that kind of inquisitive, truth seeking, candor-driven, problem-focused approach to the work they're doing. A leader who has the orientation of, "This is not about you. This is not about your advancement. This is about finding and solving something here and now that matters. If that's not why you're working on this team, then you don't belong here."

Mark: It's kind of a crucible experience where they either leave or-

Hal: Or step up.

Hal: Those are pretty unusual leaders to work with and for. I'd say at best they're two out of 10. Wherever I am in the world, and I've taught at a lot of universities because I'm incapable of keeping a job, it's the same story. Whether it's in an EMBA or an MBA class people trying to become better leaders, more than half of those people – even in the best B-Schools – work for organizations that excel at crushing questions. In the seminars they look a little bit like deer in the headlights, and they feel like "I agree, questions are important, but I can't do that at my company. I'd get my head get cut off or fired or demoted!" So my response to them is to ask them a question: "Fast forward 15 or 20 years from where you are now in your career. What kind of leader do you want to be?" If they want to be the kind of leader that currently leads them, I suggest they stay in the organization they're in since that's how they will turn out. If they envision themselves being a different type of leader than the type their organizational culture sustains, my suggestion to them is frankly to start asking fearless, focused questions in super small, super local, and super stealthy ways. You personally figure out some opportunity or challenge that you care about, that you don't have an answer to, and then the invitation is to use to a variety of questioning tools and other innovation skills to solve that problem in a way you normally wouldn't.

Mark: I'd just like to say in your book you have some great practical ways that anybody can use to do that. We won't go over them now. We'll just put the plug in to read it the book. That's one of the things I took away from the book, that there really are practical ways and tools that people can use to engage in more powerful questioning, if they desire to go down that path.

Hal: There absolutely are. So part of that path is, yes, you can find lists of questions, more in others' books than mine, but to me it's a sequential logic of relying on a series of recursive questions to figure out what is going on, like "what's working, what's not, and why?" Sometimes we forget those simple foundational kinds of questions and potential sequencing. The other part though is to consider ramping up the sheer frequency of questions asked, because doing that can help people build questioning skills. One surprisingly powerful way to do this is the question burst method that you noticed in *Questions are the Answer* (2018). Based on several thousand data points collected on this method, I've discovered that it consistently helps people make progress in whatever challenge they're stuck on.

For example, I had 50 CEOs yesterday in a seminar at the Porsche Experience Center in Atlanta and after running them through the question burst process, they saw first-hand how well it worked. Eighty-five percent at least slightly reframed their challenge and generated at least one valuable new idea to help move the challenge forward. They instantly moved beyond an intellectual comprehension of question burst dynamics described in Chapter Three of *Questions are the Answer* (2018) to experience them real-time. However, I know from past experience that at least half of these senior leaders will be scared to death to use the question burst method one more time with another set of people back at their firms.

Mark: What strikes me as I'm listening to you is that one of Kenichi Ohmae's competencies he found in excellent strategists was the courage to challenge constraints. What I'm hearing from you is that people can easily learn to be better questioners, but do they have the courage to take it back to their companies? It's a scary thing for them to, I guess, take it back.

Hal: Yes, and for someone who works in an organization that does not value innovation and inquiry, taking it back to the company is just utterly daunting, and that's where once again, my advice to them is to start small, start on a specific challenge, consider the question burst method as one way of asking some different questions about it and make some progress. The core challenge for more than most CEOs is that they are isolated – people tell them things that they think the CEOs want to hear and stop telling them things that they think the CEOs don't want to hear, and that's the classic global leader/expat challenge when global leaders land in a new country as well. So the issue once again becomes, "Am I actively seeking passive data in my everyday work to discover what I don't know I don't know before it's too late?"

For me the classic counter example is Travis Kalanick, co-founder of Uber and former CEO, getting in the back of an UBER car, being recorded, having a driver complain about Uber's policies and practices for drivers, and Kalanick just chewing him up like "you're the problem, not us!" This viral video led in part to Kalanick getting fired because I suspect that's how he behaved in general and this incident was not an anomaly. Fadi Ghandour, founder and former CEO of Aramex, is exactly the opposite, inviting Aramex delivery truck drivers to take

him from airports to hotels when traveling from logistics hub to logistics hub around the world so he could actively seek passive data to learn the subtle but significant nuances of the delivery process at his own company.

Mark: In your book you talked about a variety of conditions that can suppress or enhance the potential for people to tend to ask questions. If we consider working in a global context as a condition, would you reflect on the degree the global context is a facilitator or inhibitor to the generation of powerful questioning for global leaders?

Hal: If I'm a leader who is regularly operating in a multicultural environment, then every moment holds the potential for me to get surprised. Surprise is a key condition for asking powerful questions. So, when people are coming into our space with starkly different world views, there's a good possibility that if we let them enter our space fully, we're going to get surprised with something that causes us to be wrong, instead of right, and to be uncomfortable, instead of comfortable. And, if we're quiet enough and reflective enough to let the surprise sink in, we will ask or be asked questions we wouldn't otherwise ask. So for me, global leaders – of all people on planet Earth – are most likely to ask the better question. Global leaders are regularly primed with the right conditions for fearless questions to flourish. They travel into spaces and live in places that are physically and culturally different and engage with people day in and day out who often have highly divergent worldviews. In fact, everyday routines hold a huge probability that global leaders are going to engage with folks who on one or more dimensions will differ wildly from them. The whole issue distills down to, “Am I behaving in ways that would invite those differences to become a part of my life?” The same dynamic is true for someone who shows up in a non-global work environment, but global work uniquely holds the potential to develop especially strong questioning skills.

Mark: And yet we see people in a global context trying to shut down, so maybe it gets back possibly to the issue of degree of inherent curiosity. If people find themselves working globally, do they have enough inherent curiosity to respond with questions as opposed to erecting barriers and retreating to comfort zones?

Hal: I think part of it relates to inherent curiosity. I'm a deep, long term fan of Carolyn Dweck's work around performance versus growth mindsets. The quickest way to shut down inquiry is to wake up with a performance mindset. “I've got to keep proving to the world that I'm worth something by performing at a certain level” and when I'm in that mindset, if that's all that matters to me, there's a very high probability that I'm not going to be an inquisitive questioning leader. Or, they may well ask a lot of questions, but in the end, they're all the wrong ones.

Mark: A final question: In your book you talk about keystone questions. As I understand it, they are core questions that are often mostly unconscious, but that guide us through life. It would seem that it might be possible that until a person understands their keystone questions, and assesses them, and maybe formulates more edifying keystone questions after assessment, that it might be difficult to engage in powerful questioning about all other kinds of things.

Hal: The idea of keystone questions was sparked years ago when exploring the intersection of Edward Deci's work in, *Why We Do What We Do*, and Raina Maria Rilke's famous quote from *Letters to a Young Poet*: "Be patient toward all that is unresolved in your heart. Try to love the questions themselves. Do not now seek the answers, which cannot be given because you would not be able to live them." And then we get his crucial conclusion: "And the point is to live everything. Live the question now. Perhaps you will then gradually without noticing it, live along some distant day into the answers." Somehow, I sensed back then that certain questions held more power over our everyday habits than others. More recently, I interviewed Tony Robbins who observed that when people run into problems, it's usually because they're asking the wrong question and by default, living the wrong question. That's the core dimension of a keystone question; it's one that we live productively by choice. I've come to also grasp the idea of a shadow question and am now exploring with a friend and colleague, Roger Lehman, the yin-yang dynamic between keystone and shadow questions at work and in life. We're seeing shadow questions as quite related to Kegan's work on hidden competing commitments. Kegan's written several books, but I will summarize his process.

First you ask, "How do I want to be a radically different or better leader?" After thinking about it, you might decide that "I want to say 'no' more often." Then, the question becomes, "What do you do and not do every day that keeps you from saying 'no' more often?" The next question is a powerful follow-up to the previous one: "What are you fundamentally committed to that's causing you to do those things that keep you from doing what you want to do differently?" Your answer reflects the hidden commitments that hinder you from doing what you really want to do differently. And hidden even deeper behind those competing commitments are usually big, bad ugly assumptions, such as, "If I stop saying yes, people are going to hate me, and I'll be ostracized." Or, "if I stop saying yes, I'm going to lose my job and end up on the streets homeless." We're trying to take Kegan's work a little bit further by translating these big assumptions into shadow questions. So, one question that might flow out of these big, bad assumptions is, "How can I be nice to people? That's the shadow question.

What I love about Kegan's path-breaking work is that it can help people in literally one hour surface a shadow question that is influencing their thoughts and behaviors. It's one practical and systematic to surface shadow questions. Another way, at least for me, was having a heart attack five years ago and two weeks later

having a marriage counselor tell me, "Hal if you don't stop being nice to people, you are going to gift yourself another heart attack and probably die."

You know, that caused me to think twice about why am I being nice to people. It goes back to all kinds of family role theory, in my situation, where a father was emotionally abusive and at times physically. When you're a little kid growing up in that kind of unpredictable world, all you care about is protecting yourself, and when you get old enough there's maybe some spillover protection going on toward your siblings and mother. All you're trying to do in that fearful space is avoid the big blow up, which caused my siblings and me to ask, "What can I do that is nice right now that will keep this authority figure in my life from being mean or whacking me on the side of the head?" So, beginning about 15 to 20 years ago, through a variety of experiences, I started to get the sense that I may well be living the wrong question. Then, a heart attack five years ago made the shadow question so crystal clear. Now I wonder "What's the positive catalytic, keystone productive question that could take its place, or better yet, complement it?" Truth be told, trying to construct a more positive keystone question is still a work-in-progress. I have some good alternatives, for example, "How can I honor and magnify your light here and now?" and I try to live them better now. I've found that keystone questions anchor the way in which we move and operate through the world of this thing we call leadership –as well as in life.

Mark: One of the things I took away from reading your most recent work is that the competencies that cause good global leadership also cause a person to be a good parent, a good friend, a good spouse, a good human being. It may be that when we carve up competencies and categorize them it is an artificial process. In other words, if we have the foundational competencies set, all the others may flow from them more naturally, and then there is a higher probability we will get a lot of things right, whether we're working in a global context or trying to be a parent or trying to lead a company.

Hal: I would agree. There were exceptions, but often the leaders whom I've interviewed in the last 15 to 20 years had significant adults in their lives when they were growing up who modeled the power of inquiry, the power of questioning, the power of curiosity, the power of caring about challenges and opportunities in the world, the strength of ruthless truth seeking, and the courage to engage with the world in ways that you truly figure out what really is going on before trying to do something about it.

So you've got Sara Blakely who founded Spanx, whose father asked her every week, "What did you fail at this week?" If by the end of the week she hadn't made a good big mistake, he told her that she wasn't trying hard enough. Similarly, Tiffany Shlain, who founded the Webby Awards and now does amazing work trying to change the world with technology use and nonuse, had a father who told her one day, "You know, Tiffany, if you're not living on the edge, you're taking up too much space." And – and this is a crucial "and" – he gave her the tools to

live on the edge, and to do it exceptionally well. These are some of the huge gifts that we can give to people around us, especially younger people.

Last year I had the chance to visit Pixar and be a fly on the wall when Ed Catmull gave two of his almost 30 speeches when retiring from Pixar and Disney Animation Studios. He spoke to small groups of people at Pixar and Disney where he shared with them the key things about leadership that mattered most to him and more importantly, he framed a few key questions that he thought folks should wrestle with to create the future of Pixar and Disney Animation Studios.

Ed, at the core, is a truth seeker. At the core, he's a problem solver. To him, creativity and innovation are problem finding and problem solving, period. It is just a way of life for him, but he worked very hard at Pixar to try to create and sustain a culture where candor rules and where people really are given license to find and solve the big problems, to make really brilliant Pixar movies. As I watched people interact with Ed in his final farewell talks, I sensed love in the room. There was affection. It was genuine, and I think it comes from somebody who created a psychologically safe enough space in a wisely chosen web of systems, processes, and personal leadership approaches, that signaled to everyone around him, "We are here to make the world better, and we're going to do that by making great movies that push the edge of technology and engage the viewer in profound ways. To do that, we're going to do things in our everyday work that we've never done before, which means you're going to be living on the edge all the time if you work here. We are going to go out of our way to make sure over time that somehow we don't become a big ossified bureaucracy that's going to shut down your fearless questions and your problem-solving capabilities." It was utterly inspiring.

Mark: Hal, on behalf of the editors and readership of *Advances in Global Leadership* I cannot thank you enough for sharing your journey from the early period of the global leadership field to the present. Thank you for sharing with authenticity your passion for asking powerful questions as a way to help us all become better global and domestic leaders and better human beings.

References

- Black, J.S., & Gregersen, H. (2002) *Leading strategic change: Breaking through the brain barrier*. Financial Times/Prentice Hall.
- Dyer, J., Gregersen, H., Christensen, C.M. (2011). *The innovator's DNA: Mastering the five skills of disruptive innovators*. Boston: Harvard Business Review Press.
- Gregersen, H. (2018). *Questions are the answer: A breakthrough approach to your most vexing problems at work and in life*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers.