



# One Question

By Ken Coleman

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**The motivating host of one of the nation's largest leadership conferences offers a collection of inspirational and applicable life lessons through conversations with various high profile people.**

*Albert Einstein once said, “To raise new questions, new possibilities, to regard old problems from a new angle, requires creative imagination and marks real advance in science.” What is true of science, I’m convinced, is true in all of life. Great questions are often the keys that unlock possibilities for human advancement. That truth has been proven again and again throughout human history, as great interviewers from Bob Costas to Barbara Walters have captivated audiences and ignited imaginations. In a world where the messages of public figures and politicians are carefully crafted by publicists and media consultants, we often receive only partial pictures and manipulated facts. The right questions uncover truths we might not otherwise know. They pull back the curtain on the wizard and give us a more accurate view of reality. —Excerpt from the Introduction*

If you could sit down with the people you most admire and ask just one question, what would you ask?

*One Question* invites you to peer over the shoulder of a master interviewer with access to today’s best and brightest as he delivers carefully crafted questions and collects answers guaranteed to surprise, challenge, and inspire.

- What is Coach Tony Dungy’s advice for achieving success while maintaining integrity?
- What advice does Malcolm Gladwell give parents about instilling a work ethic in our children?
- How does President Jimmy Carter suggest we continue forward and reinvent ourselves in new seasons?
- What does Robin McGraw have to say to women about reaching their full potential both inside and outside their homes?

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## Editorial Review

### Review

"Ken Coleman has a gift of asking the questions we should all be asking. *One Question* gets to the heart of the most important issues in our lives and taps into the wisdom of some today's most admired achievers." (Mark Burnett, Creator of *The Voice*, *Survivor*, and *The Apprentice*)

"The simplicity of a singular question can hold great power to inform and inspire. Ken Coleman has asked great questions throughout his career. He is as good an interviewer as there is in this country. In *One Question* he gives us invaluable answers to the questions we all ask." (Mike Krzyzewski, Head Coach, Duke Men's Basketball)

"Ken Coleman asks the questions that need asking. His questions elicit simple and powerful truths that everyone can apply to his or her own life. Ken strips away the veneer and uncovers the truth with simple, direct questions that cause us to stop, think, and examine what is truly important. *One Question* is a book that everyone will connect with—the questions and answers are illuminating and inspiring!" (Zach McLeroy, CEO and co-founder of Zaxby's)

"Ken Coleman has delivered a game-changing challenge with *One Question*. The answers to our biggest questions are readily available if we have the courage to ask them. This book will help you get the answers you need." (Grant Teaff, Exec. Director of the American Football Coaches Association)

"Ken Coleman allows us to eavesdrop on his insightful questions with many of the brightest and most respected minds in our world. *One Question* is a delightful, inspiring mandate to never stop asking." (Ed Bastian, President, Delta Airlines)

### About the Author

**Ken Coleman** is the talk radio host of *The Ken Coleman Show*. Ken's show has been seen on *The O'Reilly Factor*, *Hannity*, *The Daily Show*, *Colbert Report*, *NBC Nightly News*, *Fox News*, *CNN*, *Good Morning America*, *CBS This Morning*, *Fox & Friends*, and in *The Washington Post*, *Los Angeles Times*, and London's *Daily Mail*. Ken has published articles with *The Huffington Post* and *Success Magazine*. Ken has been called a "young Charlie Rose" by legendary Duke basketball coach Mike Krzyzewski, and talk radio superstar Dave Ramsey has labeled him "one of the best interviewers in the country." Ken's invigorating and insightful commentary combine with acclaimed interview skills to make him one of broadcasting's rising stars. Most importantly, Ken is blessed to be Stacy's husband and Daddy to Ty, Chase, and Josie. Follow Ken on Twitter @kencoleman.

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One Question

## introduction

### WHY ASK QUESTIONS?

Sweat beaded on my brow as I flipped through a stack of index cards, each scribbled with a single question. I was preparing to interview Duke University's head coach, Mike Krzyzewski. "Coach K," as fans

affectionately call him, is a legend. He'd led the Blue Devils to four national championships and was elected to the Basketball Hall of Fame. There I was, a twenty-nine-year-old kid sitting on the home team's bench in Cameron Indoor Stadium, Duke University's storied basketball arena. For a Blue Devils fan like me, I was in Shangri-La.

I'd first encountered Duke basketball in 1986 while watching the team play the University of Louisville in the national championship. Sitting next to my dad, I was mesmerized by Duke's guards, Johnny Dawkins and Tommy Amaker. I could feel Coach K's intensity through the television as he worked the sideline. Duke lost 72 to 69 that night, but it won me over as a fan for life.

Two decades later, I sat on Coach K Court in a fit of nervousness—not just because I was about to interview my hero and one of the most successful coaches in the history of sport but also because it was my very first interview. Ever.

Originally, the seasoned Fox Sports commentator Bob Rathbun had been scheduled to do the interview, but he'd had to cancel at the last minute. I was the copy editor tasked with doing Bob's prep work for the segment, and that made me the only other person who knew enough to conduct the interview. The producer called my number.

The interview was scheduled for 10 A.M., and at 9:59 a door swung open. The arena's lights had been turned off for the interview, so I could barely make out the silhouette of a figure and hear the clip-clop of approaching shoes. Standing up, I reached out, shook Coach K's hand, and thanked him for giving us some of his time. He sat down, clipped on his mic, and it was go time.

I can't remember asking the first question. It was an icebreaker, and I must have been in an anxiety-induced trance. But I remember that, a few questions in, I finally settled down and the blood began to flow freely again. I transitioned naturally from question to question, surprising myself with a quick follow-up question every now and again when I wanted to know more.

I'd read his book, *Leading with the Heart*, prior to the interview, and many of the questions addressed the themes covered within. One idea from the book that intrigued me was when Coach K commented that he treats all his players "fair but not equal." He hadn't said much about it in the book, and I assumed he wanted it that way. I felt there was more to learn from that statement, so I asked him to paint a picture of what this meant.

He said he creates certain rules for the team and administers them fairly. But he doesn't treat everyone the same way. He began looking into the darkness of the arena, searching for the right example.

If a freshman was late for a bus departure, he said, he'd probably leave without him. But if a senior who had built up trust and rapport with the team was late, he'd probably wait on him. Then he brought up two of Duke's greatest point guards, Tommy Amaker and Bobby Hurley. Coach K said he would often draw up plays during a time-out for Tommy, and Tommy would run the play exactly as he'd been instructed. But Bobby was different. Bobby often changed the coach's play on the court. And Coach K gave Hurley that freedom because, he said, Bobby was built differently from Tommy. He was more instinctive, and even though he'd end up running a different play, it was always the right play.

"I treated both of them fairly," Coach K said, "but I didn't treat them equally."

Like a camera flash in a dark room, I suddenly realized the power of a single question. What had been a

fairly mundane passage in this man's book had now taken on new life. When it came to Coach K, I was a walking Wikipedia page, but I now understood the power of his instincts, the scale of his leadership, and one of the keys to his legendary success.

Albert Einstein once said, "To raise new questions, new possibilities, to regard old problems from a new angle, requires creative imagination and marks real advance in science." What is true of science, I'm convinced, is true in all of life. Great questions are often the keys that unlock possibilities for human advancement. That truth has been proven again and again throughout human history, as great interviewers from Bob Costas to Barbara Walters have captivated audiences and ignited imaginations.

## QUESTIONS REVEAL IMPORTANT THINGS

In a world where the messages of public figures and politicians are carefully crafted by publicists and media consultants, we often receive only partial pictures and manipulated facts. The right questions uncover truths we might not otherwise know. They pull back the curtain on the wizard and give us a more accurate view of reality.

Who can forget Katie Couric's interviews with vice presidential candidate Sarah Palin during the 2008 election? Until those interviews aired, Palin was trending positively among the American public. Though new to the national stage, many Americans found her to be likable. Then she sat down with Couric on the CBS Evening News:

COURIC: And when it comes to establishing your worldview, I was curious, what newspapers and magazines did you regularly read before you were tapped for this—to stay informed and to understand the world?

PALIN: I've read most of them again with a great appreciation for the press, for the media—

COURIC: But which ones specifically? I'm curious.

PALIN: Um, all of them, any of them that have been in front of me over all these years.

COURIC: Can you name any of them?

PALIN: I have a vast variety of sources where we get our news. Alaska isn't a foreign country, where, it's kind of suggested and it seems like, "Wow, how could you keep in touch with what the rest of Washington, D.C., may be thinking and doing when you live up there in Alaska?" Believe me, Alaska is like a microcosm of America.<sup>1</sup>

The mainstream media attacked the interview with ferocity. They criticized Palin's inability to offer an example of John McCain pushing for greater regulation, and they attacked her failure to name any Supreme Court decisions with which she disagreed. Many conservatives responded with criticisms of Couric and what was labeled "Gotcha journalism," but the media continued to chip away at Palin.

Regardless, that question in particular proved damaging, revealing what some perceived to be a lack of preparedness. Palin's answer spawned all the wrong sorts of headlines and marred her public image. Many political experts now cite that series of interviews as the turning point of the election.

## QUESTIONS GET TO THE HEART OF A MATTER

Other people often tell us only what they want us to know or perhaps what they think we want to know, but not what we really need to know. Great leaders, in their memoirs, often share the stories they want to offer rather than the ones you'd like to hear. When you hear speeches by political candidates, they might disclose their answers to the problems they want to address but not the ones you care about. A great question is a surgeon's scalpel that cuts deep below the surface to tap into the issues behind the issues.

By 1974, former President Richard Nixon had spent more than two years away from public life. The public had been betrayed by the Watergate scandal, and most people felt that the way Nixon had addressed the subject had failed to deliver what Americans wanted to hear: either an admission of guilt or a public apology. But in 1977, Sir David Frost requested a series of interviews and Nixon accepted.

Both the public and the former president assumed that the interviews were nothing more than checkbook journalism. Nixon's slick responses rebuffed every attempt to get to the heart of the matter, but Frost continued to push with a sampling of great questions. Finally, Nixon cracked: "I let down my friends. I let down the country. I let down our system of government, and the dreams of all those young people that ought to get into government but now think it too corrupt. . . . I let the American people down, and I have to carry that burden with me the rest of my life."<sup>2</sup>

David Frost got the answer he'd been looking for, and the American people got exactly what they needed. Today, this interview is largely considered to be one of the greatest of the twentieth century.

## QUESTIONS TRANSFORM

Occasionally, someone asks the right person the right question at the right time in the right way and magic happens: the person being interviewed moves beyond the mere facts to something deeper, something that flips a switch inside. The question produces an answer that inspires the interviewee, encourages him or makes him want to be a better person. It is in such moments that we discover a powerful maxim: good questions inform, but great questions transform.

Perhaps the greatest model we have for questions that transform is not a modern journalist but an ancient rabbi. Jesus Christ was obsessed with asking questions, and, like many ancient rabbis, he would often answer questions with questions. But what set Jesus apart from other Jewish teachers is that he was able to do more than instruct; he was able to induce change. His questions didn't just reveal hidden truths or get to the heart of a matter; they also transformed all those who witnessed these encounters.

When religious leaders asked Jesus if they should pay taxes to the Roman government, he didn't respond with a simple yes or no. He held up a coin and asked, "Whose portrait is on this?" (Matt. 22:17–20). When he reportedly broke religious laws and healed a man on the Jewish holy day, he was asked, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?" He responded with a single question: "If any of you has a sheep and it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will you not take hold of it and lift it out?" (Matt. 12:9–12).

At first blush, contemporary observers may think that Jesus wasn't taking their questions seriously. But the opposite is true. He was validating the questions themselves, illustrating how probing rather than proving, and asking rather than arguing, often cuts a better path forward. With each query, he brought his audience's assumptions to the surface and forced them to wrestle with them. He challenged those around him to consider their thinking, presuppositions, and behaviors. The effect was so profound that people of faith have continued to wrestle with his questions for the last millennia, and many have walked away different from where they came.



Revealing, transformative answers to life's most important questions surge with power. Their wisdom can shape us, improve us, and carry us through every stage of life. When we are beginning our journey to success, they will help us discover who we are and unearth the calling that only we can fulfill. When the storms of life rage, they will sustain us like a levee. And once we find success—in our professional lives, home lives, and spiritual voyages—those answers will ensure that we hang on tight and finish well.

• • •

Back in Cameron Indoor Stadium, I sat knee to knee with Coach K as the camera crew took a break to change tapes. I began to realize that his profound answer to my singular question about being fair but not equal had done all three things every great question can do: It revealed what a great and thoughtful leader he was, even off the basketball court. It moved beyond the shallowness of his impressive win-loss record to get to the heart of why he's been so successful. And, perhaps most important, it changed me. I couldn't shake his words from my consciousness. In the years since, I've even incorporated his wisdom into the way I parent my children.

We sat in silence for a moment until he finally spoke. "I'm really enjoying this interview. This is one of the most enjoyable interviews I've ever done," he said. "You know, you really remind me of one of my best friends, Charlie Rose."

He went on to say that, like Charlie, I had an "uncanny ability to shoot the bull." But, he said, he meant that in a good way: we were both able to ask insightful questions in the natural flow of conversation.

I was slack-jawed at Coach K's comment—not just that he would make such a generous comparison but because he was validating a part of me I was just beginning to awaken to. Only minutes into the interview, I began realizing how much the experience was energizing me. "Maybe this is what I should be doing with my life," I thought.

After the interview concluded, he shook my hand and disappeared much as he'd entered. Standing in the arena that so many champions had called home, and having just spent time with one of my heroes, I was elated. Just before the crew had finished packing up our equipment, his assistant entered to tell us how much the coach had enjoyed his time with us. We responded that the pleasure was all ours.

Then she revealed a basketball and bounced it into my hands. "Before you go," she said, "why don't you take a shot?"

I was like a kid on Christmas morning! All smiles, I dribbled to the three-point line, eyed the rim, and released my shot into the air. As my feet touched back down, I knew the ball was on line and then heard the glorious swish as I watched the ball fall through the rim. I didn't even attempt to hold in my shout of joy. With my arms lifted high in triumph as I acknowledged the crew's applause and turned to walk off the court, I knew I'd found my life's calling.

Since that day, I've had the privilege of conducting hundreds of interviews with business leaders, celebrities, religious figures, bestselling authors, and music icons. I've been constantly astounded at how the right question—just one solitary question—can yield an unforgettable answer cram-packed with insight, wisdom, and encouragement for every stage of life. Many of those questions can be found in the pages that follow. A few are best kept in my heart for now. My hope is that they'll inspire you as much as they've inspired me, and perhaps they'll encourage you to answer your own nagging questions. After all, the secret of a killer interview is not just in the asking; it's also in the answer.

## **Users Review**

### **From reader reviews:**

#### **Harriet Blum:**

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