

QBQ!

The Question Behind the Question[®]

Practising Personal Accountability
at Work and in Life

JOHN G. MILLER

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Author's Note



The book you hold in your hands is not the original version of *QBQ! The Question Behind the Question*[®].

It's better.

The original was created twenty years ago when my friend and writing partner, David Levin, and I downsized my first book, *Personal Accountability*, from its 299 pages to the more readable *QBQ!*[®]—and that's when the fun began.

Much to our delight, the market responded enthusiastically—and we're honored that more than one million books have landed in readers' hands. Meanwhile, after countless keynotes and

training sessions, we are still thrilled to hear how *QBQ!* makes a difference in people's lives. It's truly a blessing to receive comments like "*QBQ!* has changed my life!" and "I wish I'd found *QBQ!* years ago!"

It's been gratifying, too, to see how consistent *QBQ!* has been in its impact through the years. Many books are launched with great fanfare but fade from the market, soon to be forgotten. Yet *QBQ!* has shown itself to be as relevant to people and organizations today as it ever was, which proves what we've always believed: The powerful principle of personal accountability is not timely, but is forever timeless.

Of course, none of this success meant *QBQ!* couldn't be improved. So after years of feedback from readers and clients, we identified a few areas in the book where the text could be clarified and sharpened. Additionally, we included FAQs at the end of the book to answer readers' most commonly asked questions. We were excited to also make

available our learning tool—*The QBQ! Workbook*. As a companion piece to the *QBQ!* book, *The QBQ! Workbook* shows our readers how to practice even greater personal accountability at work and at home!

As you begin your journey through *QBQ! The Question Behind the Question*, please know we're excited that you are joining us. We've made many friends around the world and now consider you to be one as well. Thank you for believing in our message of personal accountability because—in the end—that's what *QBQ!* is all about.

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Whatever Happened To . . .



From a billboard towering over the Houston freeway loomed this question:

“Whatever happened to personal responsibility?”

I don’t know who put it up there, but it sure jumped out at me. For one thing, it seemed so clearly true. What *has* happened to personal responsibility? Why does it seem the only thing people know how to do anymore is point the finger elsewhere, blaming something or someone else for their problems, their feelings, their actions? Some examples:

I was looking for some coffee in a gas station convenience store, but the carafe was empty, so

I said to the person behind the counter, "Pardon me, there's no coffee in the pot." He pointed at a coworker not fifteen feet away and said, "Coffee is *her* department!"

Department? In a roadside gas station the size of my living room?

Another: On a cross-country flight, the flight attendant got on the intercom and said, "Sorry, everyone, but the movie we promised you will not be shown today. *Catering* put the wrong one on board."

And this: The carryout pizza place had apparently lost our order, so I was pacing back and forth waiting for our pizzas while my hungry family waited in the car. Suddenly, out of the blue, the young man behind the counter said, "Hey, don't blame *me*, my shift just started!"

In one form or another, we often hear, "It's not my fault," "It's not my job," or "It's not my problem." The billboard jumped out at me partly

because I agreed with it so much. But the other thing that struck me was that someone would feel strongly enough about personal responsibility to put it up on a billboard in the first place.

I felt strongly about it, too, and that's why I wrote this book.

Who is this book for? Anyone who's ever heard or asked questions like these:

"When will that department do its job right?"

"Why don't they communicate better?"

"Who dropped the ball?"

"Why do we have to go through all this change?"

"When is someone going to train me?"

"Why can't we find better people?"

"Who's going to give us a clear vision?"

These questions seem innocent enough, but

they indicate a lack of personal responsibility—I prefer the term “personal accountability”—and go right to the heart of many of the problems we face today.

Conversely, turning our thinking around and asking more personally accountable questions is one of the most powerful and effective things we can do to improve our organizations and our lives.

The Question Behind the Question® (QBQ!®) is a tool that’s been developed and refined over the years that helps individuals—including me—practice personal accountability by asking better questions of ourselves.

I’ve been writing and speaking about this concept since 1995, and the topic resonates as deeply today as it ever has. Nearly every day I hear new success stories of improved productivity, greater teamwork, reduced stress, healthier relationships, and better customer service because of QBQ.

The benefit people enjoy the most about the QBQ, though, is a personal one: Once they start practicing QBQ thinking, things just seem to go better. People have more fun. Life is simply more satisfying and enjoyable for those who choose the way of personal accountability.

So if you've heard questions like those listed earlier, if you're frustrated by what you see as a lack of responsibility in others—or if you recognize some of that thinking in yourself—this book is for you. Enjoy!