



**Encourage the Whys – by Danyelle Williams Ackall, instructor for the Neeley School of Business at Texas Christian University**

As a child, I knew better than to ask my father, “Why?” when told to complete a task. You simply did as you were told. To question was disrespectful. Fast forward 30- plus years, and now I get questioned on a regular basis.

The first time my pre-teen son questioned me with a roll of the eyes, it pushed a button. It was not respectful and I made sure he knew there was a difference. In the classroom these questions of “Why?” are welcomed and expected in an educational environment.

Why should the same question get two different reactions? Well, they are really two different questions. The “Why?” from the pre-teen is one of pushing boundaries and attempting to be an adult before his time. The “Why?” from a student to the teacher is one of curiosity. It shows a need to go beyond surface-level learning and dig into the critical thinking our schools want to promote. We encourage the deeper thought and should help cultivate this higher-level learning.

Sounds simple enough: encourage curiosity in students, but demand respect from children. Now translate this to our work environments.

A supervisor may believe the subordinates hired with only two years’ experience are very much like the child. They may not know enough yet, but they want to be bigger than they are now. The supervisor’s job is to protect them from themselves and give them time to mature and gain experience. While doing so, the supervisor expects to be treated respectfully.

However, the supervisor is not the parent; the supervisor is the teacher. The less experienced subordinates know the supervisor has a lot of knowledge to share. They are hungry for knowledge; they are curious and want to understand; they want to learn. So they ask, “Why?”

You know where this is leading ...

I received a phone call from a manager very frustrated with his young employee. Just a couple of years out of college and the employee wanted to move up the corporate ladder quickly. The manager who called was seeking advice on how to approach the employee about his disrespectful behavior. Was a formal disciplinary document necessary? Could he simply fire the employee for being insubordinate?

We talked at length regarding the examples he gave me. I asked some pointed questions and led him to the conclusion that he may be not communicating effectively with this employee: a child/parent and student/teacher mix-up. I was confident the subordinate in this case wasn’t being disrespectful on purpose.

When told to call a customer and decline a request for a discount, he asked, “Why?” The manager felt it was disrespectful and believed the subordinate was questioning his decision. I asked the same question and the manager gave an explanation about expense and contribution margin. That is what the subordinate wanted – the knowledge behind the decision.

As managers and supervisors, we are challenged to be teachers. It is not an easy job. If you’ve ever had to hire and train a new employee, you know it takes time and effort to get him or her to full productivity.

However, in today’s business environment, the timeline for an employee has shrunk considerably. No longer do we see employees hired in at an entry level job who expect to be at the same company for decades. They no longer anticipate spending 10 years in a role before they qualify for a promotion.

Today’s employees expect to be in a job for about two years, not 30. The knowledge they would glean from overhearing conversations, working through problems and dealing with the same situation once every four years is not afforded to them in a mere two years. Instead, the employees look to the supervisor to teach them as they go. They expect to have situations, decisions and policies explained to them. Therefore, they ask, “Why?”

Answering this question is professional development for employees. It is what our employees crave -- an environment where they can learn. The supervisor should want to have more knowledgeable employees; they are more productive and make better decisions.

# FORT WORTH BUSINESS

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**Highlights from the FWBP Entrepreneur Summit** – by Samantha Calimbahin

Starting a business – and keeping it alive – is tough, so local entrepreneurs, investors, business leaders and others came together July 29 at the Fort Worth Business Press’s inaugural Entrepreneur Summit to talk about strategies to make a business successful. [Event partners were IdeaWorks Fort Worth and the TCU Neeley School of Business.](#)

“The definition of an entrepreneur, for me, is somebody that jumps off a cliff and builds an airplane on the way down,” panelist and Cowtown Angels member Les Kreis said.

[The event took place July 29 at Texas Christian University. Speakers and panelists covered a range of topics related to entrepreneurship, from customer development to local resources available to entrepreneurs.](#)

Daniel Castaneda, a senior TCU student who runs watch retailer Monaco Watch Co., said he’s looking forward to applying what he’s learned to his business.

“I sat through these panels with the inclination of wanting to learn and grow myself to hopefully get to the levels of some of these people one day, learning from their mistakes and their experiences in order to help my own,” he said.

Check out some of the highlights from the event.

### **On preparing for the future...**

Anticipating the future of a product or market is a key part of being an entrepreneur. Keynote speaker Jim Stikeleather, chief innovation officer at Dell, said the best way to prepare for the future is to understand what is happening in the present – things like the economy, politics and demographics – and also understand your company’s internal strengths. That way a company can come up with future scenarios and plan how to handle them.

### **On the entrepreneurial mindset...**

There’s a difference between being an employee and being an entrepreneur, said panelist Robert Pollock of consulting company Culture Index.

“There’s just a big difference between being a founder or a technology person or an owner versus an entrepreneur,” he said. “They’re not the same. You can have the great idea, but that doesn’t necessarily make you the one who’s hard-wired to see that idea scale.”

Another panelist, Michael Fletcher of Ride TV, said that running a successful business takes more than smarts and a good personality.

“You have to be willing to take risk but you have to be a free thinker and be willing to do a lot of analysis and react quickly,” said panelist Michael Fletcher of Ride TV.

### **On customer development...**

Analyzing customer data, such as demographics and behaviors, are helpful in understanding what customers want, said panelist Peter Bacigalupo of Buxton.

“Data’s great, but it’s what you do with it that actually matters,” he said. “It’s applying it and leveraging it in ways that can impact strategy moving forward.”

Social media is another way to connect with customers. Panelist Jonathan Morris of Fort Worth Barber Shop said Snapchat has allowed customers to interact with his business on a daily basis.

### **On working with investors...**

Local investors from organizations like the Cowtown Angels and Satori Capital talked about what makes them interested in a company and what doesn’t.

Having clear financial information, paying taxes and maintaining good credit are some of the things investors look for in a company, said panelist Brooke Lively of Cathedral Capital. Companies that don't have those things, she said, are red flags.

Keeping presentations short and simple is also attractive to investors, said panelist Rugger Burke of Satori Capital. After an investor chooses to put money on a business, giving the investor regular updates on the business also helps build a relationship and encourages the investor to help the business again, he said.

“You won't be looking for money – the money will be looking for you if you have a great business,” he said.  
“What you're looking for is choosing the right partner for you.”