

**QBQ! (The Question Behind the Question) QuickNote #14**

**"Why can't others do their job right?"**

Author's special note:

As we each work to eliminate lousy questions like the one above, we invite you to tell us how QBQ! has made a difference in *your* world - whether at work or at home. One such story is below ... all the way from New Zealand. Enjoy! JGM

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*John, a friend sent me QBQ! I am an anesthesiologist at a maternity unit. I consult with mothers, perform epidurals, and am available for emergency deliveries. I also have a leadership role in the hospital and I try to model in my everyday clinical practice the values we espouse as a leadership team.*

*Early this morning I was called in from home to the hospital to perform an epidural on a very distressed mother in the middle of a long and painful labor. The midwife had tried and failed to insert an intravenous line so I had an additional procedure to perform before I could do the epidural. And I had some trouble, too. Suddenly, just after I had secured the IV line, the mother said, "I want to push!!" The midwife did a quick examination and said the mother was about to deliver. "I'm sorry," she said to me slightly embarrassed, "We don't need the epidural after all."*

*"That's wonderful!" I responded. The midwife stared at me. Her eyes said, "What's the catch?"*

*I think what she really wanted to say was, "Who are you? And what have you done with our real anesthesiologist?!?!"*

*I used to get angry in these situations, being called all the way into the hospital to do an epidural, then being turned away because someone else had "misjudged" the progress of labor, thus calling me in needlessly. Stupid midwives! I'd want to shout.*

*Now when these things happen - since reading about QBQ! - I find joy by focusing on the positives: The labor is going better than expected, a medical intervention isn't needed after all, and I can get back to bed that much sooner. The midwife was doing her very best and these surprises happen to all of us in medicine. And, my coming into the hospital had helped the mother because she knew support and help was on the way. Therefore, she had the courage to bear the pain herself just a little longer.*

*But, John, here is the true reward of using QBQ!*

*Later that day the same midwife came and asked me, "Can I talk to you, please? There is a hospital issue I want to discuss." We thoroughly talked through a problem that had persisted for some time which involves differing perspectives, beliefs, and attitudes of the midwives and the hospital doctors. The conflict of expectations is causing problems for mothers - our customers! I explained to her all the things we are doing and empathized with her for the difficulties she experienced and the devastating impact on the mothers and their families.*

*I then recruited her into the effort to solve the problem. It wasn't hard. She quickly volunteered to do a whole pile of things that added nicely to the strategies we as a leadership team had already decided to implement.*

*And now we have her onboard. That's teamwork. And around here, that's everything!*

*By choosing to be personally accountable, I have clearly gained something precious in my life. Thank you for letting me share this with you. If you pass it on, maybe it'll help others.*

Clinical Leader, Auckland, New Zealand

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What a terrific story! And it all began with *personal* accountability by avoiding the lousy question "*Why can't others do their job right?*" and asking accountable questions - QBQ!s - such as:

*"How can I better appreciate people?" and "What can I do to find the good in every situation?"*

These are the questions that work. And when we choose the *accountable* path, really good things happen ... all around the world!

**John G. Miller**  
author of the *QBQ!* book.