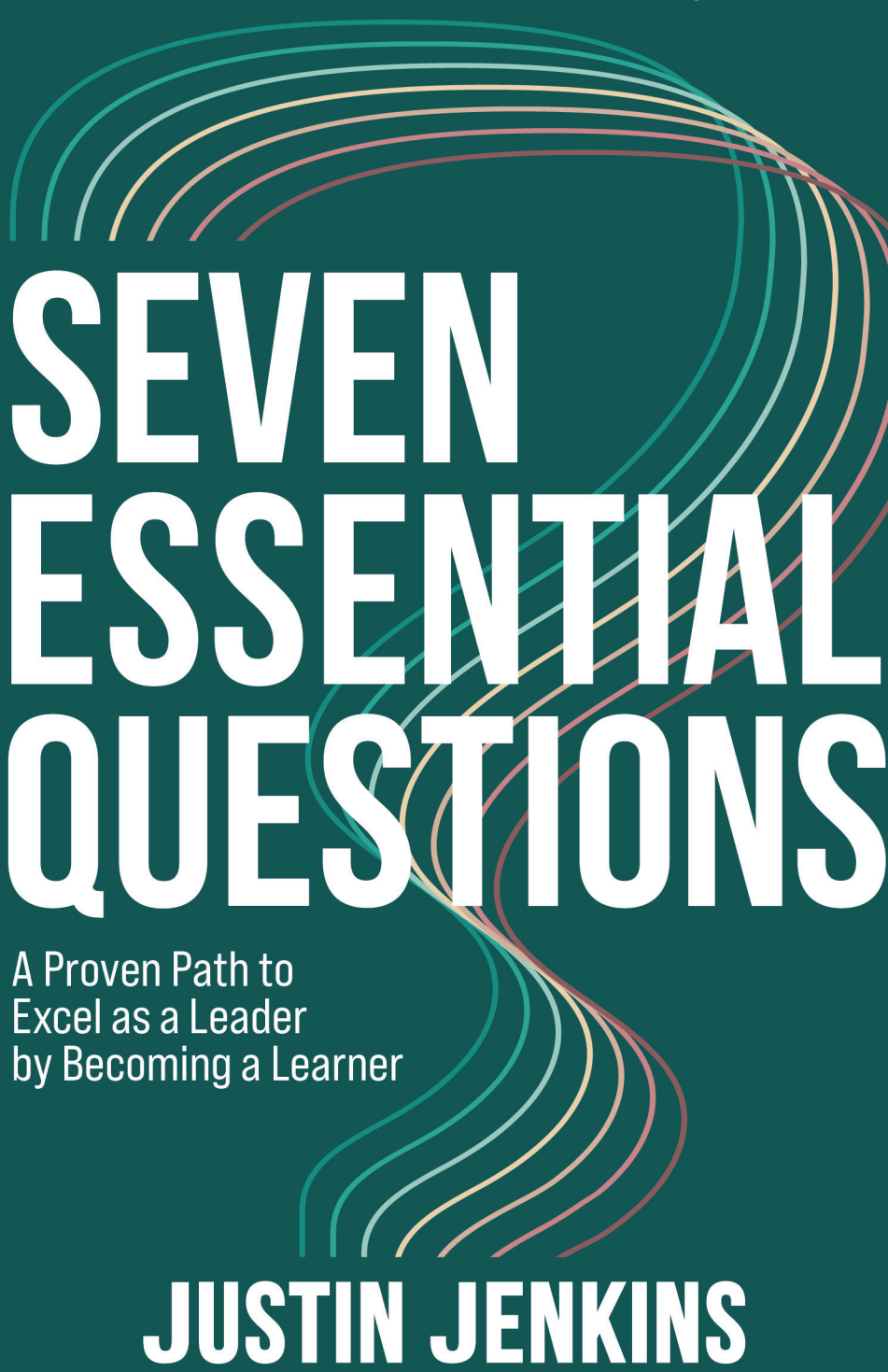


"Justin Jenkins is a thought leader whose ideas will change the way you approach every conversation."

—JOHN C. MAXWELL, *New York Times* bestselling author



SEVEN ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

A Proven Path to
Excel as a Leader
by Becoming a Learner

JUSTIN JENKINS

PROLOGUE

If you could rewind the world a few thousand years, back before we had YouTube, podcasts, and started outsourcing our wisdom to AI algorithms, you would find that the Greeks had a completely different approach to discovering knowledge and accelerating personal growth. The Seven Sages. I'm not sure what images appear in your mind when you hear the word *sage*, but these weren't robe-wearing mystics or desert-dwelling hermits. They were statesmen, generals, and artists. They worked in government. They were entrepreneurs. They were scientists, thinkers, and investors. Though their backgrounds and professions varied greatly, these seven men from seven different cities had one thing in common. They had paid attention to life long enough to have something useful to say about it.

One was Thales of Miletus. He predicted an eclipse and accidentally became the first celebrity scientist. Another was Solon from Athens. His legal reforms were so radical for their time that historians argue he saved democracy before it even existed. Then there was Bias who lived in Priene. He didn't just espouse morals, he modeled them. He once paid for a group of enslaved girls to be freed out of his own pocket. Pittacus was a sage known for his humility

as much as his leadership. After stabilizing the city, he stepped down from ruling Mytilene because he knew that power was dangerous in large doses. And that's to say nothing of the others: Cleobulus, Chilon, and Periander (or Myson — depending on which ancient writer you trust).

What's strange is how little the lives of these sages overlapped. They never formed an institution. They didn't draft a manifesto. There's no evidence that they even sat in the same room. Yet by the early sixth century BC, every Greek who cared about living well knew their names.

Their ideas were etched into stone at Delphi, one of ancient Greece's great cultural centers, tucked into the slopes of Mount Parnassus. It was the place the Greeks believed truth was revealed. And it was there that you'd see the sayings of the sages engraved into the walls and pillars. Maxims you're probably still familiar with today: "Know thyself," "Nothing in excess," and "Surety brings ruin." These weren't slogans; they were catalysts that shaped how an entire civilization thought and lived. But the real secret of the sages wasn't in the maxims themselves. It was in the mechanism that produced them.

People from every corner of the ancient world sought them out: business owners, teenagers, kings, and widows. Their wisdom wasn't off limits to anyone. Travelers boarded creaking boats, crossed the Aegean Sea, and trudged up dusty roads to knock on the doors of these men. Access to their insight wasn't purchased by credentials or pedigrees.

It was opened with something far rarer — humility.

Even kings had to come that way. King Croesus of Lydia, the richest man in the known world, once asked Solon whether a wealthy life was a happy life. Solon's answer was blunt: "Count no man happy until he is dead." It sounds morbid, but the truth behind it still echoes today: happiness is a lifelong pursuit, not a possession. That insight was central to Solon's vision of justice.

Whenever a question was sincere, the sages answered. Not with a lecture, but with something closer to a fingerprint: a short, memorable maxim tailored to the moment. They gave a truth that was portable yet powerful. Small enough to carry, but big enough to change a life. Because the Greeks understood something we've nearly forgotten. Wisdom is not a download. It's a dialogue. It doesn't drift into your mind by osmosis from information repositories. It moves hand-to-hand, person-to-person, activated by the one humble enough to ask.

That's still the shortest distance between an ordinary life and an extraordinary one. It's the difference between growing old and growing wiser. And it's the secret that turns a learner into a leader. Because some things never change. That's why this book is built around seven questions. Think of them as the new pathways to the wisdom of those seven sages of old. I'm no sage, far from it. But I have spent decades sitting with people who functioned like them in my life. I've collected these

seven essential questions that I wish someone would have handed me when I was younger. Ask them well, and they'll open the same door the Greek travelers found two and a half millennia ago. Because the door is still there. The sages just look a little different now.

WHY I WROTE THIS BOOK

The turning points in my life didn't come from talent, timing, or luck. They came from conversations, real conversations, with people who had lived more than I had, seen more than I had, and were willing to share what they learned if someone would simply ask. That "someone" became me. Mostly because I was young, untested, and desperate to avoid mistakes I didn't need to make. What surprised me was how willingly people opened up when I asked the right question. I discovered that good answers come from curiosity, but great answers come from intentionality: questions that mine for meaning.

Over the years, I realized something else. The difference between people who grow and people who plateau is not intelligence. It's inquiry. Not the number of questions, but the quality of questions. This book was born from that discovery. I've spent much of my life learning from people who ask great questions. And the more I

watched them, the more I realized why their questions carried so much influence.

Questions are keys. They reveal what we value, expose what we don't yet understand, and create the space for growth that statements never can. The right question asked at the right time can unlock the potential of a life, a relationship, or even a calling. Growth doesn't find us. We must pursue it through conversations that stretch us, mentors who challenge us, and the humility to admit that we don't know everything. When you carry a posture of a learner, you turn every interaction into an opportunity.

That's why I wrote this book. I wanted to give you a simple, practical framework for what to ask when you sit down with the kind of people who can expand your thinking, sharpen your character, and alter your future. I didn't write this book to create a clever list. I wrote it because these are the questions I wish I had started asking sooner. These questions helped me:

- learn from leaders I admired
- draw out buried wisdom from ordinary people
- escape my bubble
- understand hardship instead of resenting it
- stay experimental
- rediscover drive when seasons shifted
- move past transactional relationships.

They work because they're human. They speak to how people

actually grow. I've learned that knowledge can inform you, but only relationships can transform you. You can read a shelf full of books and learn something. Or you can sit with the right person for ten minutes and learn something you'll never forget. That is the heartbeat of this book.

Growth always travels through people. The right ones won't just encourage you, they will disrupt your thinking in ways that force you forward. Every chapter in this book is designed to help you make the most of those moments. Each of the seven questions activates a different dimension of learning:

- reflection
- expansion
- adaptation
- connection
- attention
- application
- contribution

Together, they create a rhythm — a conversation cycle that doesn't just expand what you know, but who you're becoming.

THE LEARNER'S MINDSET

The most influential people I know have one thing in

common: they carry an attitude of openness. They ask questions before offering opinions. They stay curious even after they become competent. They treat every person as someone who can teach them something. Because the world doesn't reward know-it-alls; it rewards those willing to remain learners. These seven questions help you live that way. They won't turn you into an expert. They'll do something better. They'll turn you into a person who grows everywhere you go.

The questions are simple, but the conversations they create are powerful. They'll change how you see yourself, how you see others, and expand what you believe is possible. By the end, you'll have more clarity and more confidence as you keep moving forward. My hope for you is this: that you become the kind of person whose questions open doors, both for yourself and for others.

Each chapter will give you:

- the purpose of the question
- when it works best
- how to ask it wisely
- what to listen for
- how to turn the insight into action

As you read, I'm trusting you'll come to see learning not as a phase, but as a way of life. So let us begin — with the question that anchors them all.